

CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER, PART TWO
FEEDBACK FROM CATHOLICS AROUND THE WORLD
Father Gerry Hefferan's Reflection – 25 June 2023



Culture of Encounter, Part Two Feedback from Catholics throughout the world

LAST WEEKEND

Last weekend we listened to our local St Vincent De Paul members as they shared their insights, challenges and work within the local area.

Last weekend in the parish newsletter, I had prepared a two page insert with quotes from Pope Francis on the Culture of Encounter in the major Catholic Social Justice Teaching document - *'Fratelli Tutti' – On Fraternity and Social Friendship' (Siblings All)*

<https://bit.ly/FratelliTutti03102020>

The parish annual SVDP report supported in action, the papal quotes mentioned in the insert.

THIS WEEKEND

Today we move from our local St Vincent de Paul Conference to an international church report - the [Synod Working Document \(IL\)](https://bit.ly/SynodWorkingDocument2023). <https://bit.ly/SynodWorkingDocument2023>

It was compiled after feedback from Catholics and others around the world, during the Synod process. Delegates now prepare for the October Synod in Rome, with this recently released Synod Working Document (IL).

The process gathered feedback

- from parishes and groupings and individuals to dioceses,
- and then nationally,
- and more recently at intercontinental meetings,

I have selected paragraphs #4, #6, #23, #25 and #26 from the working document to add further understanding and examples of the culture of encounter.

SYNOD WORKING DOCUMENT

"4. The journey so far, especially the continental stage, has made it possible to identify and share the particular situations experienced by the Church in different regions of the world. These include the reality of too many wars that stain our world with blood leading to a call for

a renewed commitment to building a just peace, the threat represented by climate change that implies a necessary priority of caring for the common home, the cry to oppose an economic system that produces exploitation, inequality and a throwaway culture, and the desire to resist the homogenising pressure of cultural colonialism that crushes minorities. Situations of persecution to the point of martyrdom and emigration that progressively hollow out communities, threatening their very survival are deeply lamented. The local Churches have spoken of their concern to be equipped to address urgent social realities, from the growing cultural pluralism that now marks the entire planet, to the experience of Christian communities that represent scattered minorities within the country in which they live, to the experience of coming to terms with an ever more advanced, and at times aggressive, secularisation that seems to consider religious experience irrelevant, but where there remains a thirst for the Good News of the Gospel. In many regions, the Churches are deeply affected by the crisis caused by various forms of abuse, including sexual abuse and the abuse of power, conscience and money. These are open wounds, the consequences of which have yet to be fully addressed. To the penitence it owes to victims and survivors for the suffering it has caused, the Church must add a growing and intensified commitment to conversion and reform in order to prevent similar situations from happening again in the future.

6. To the Synodal Assembly we bring the fruits gathered during the listening phase. First of all, we have experienced the joy expressed in the sincere and respectful encounter between brothers and sisters in the faith: to meet each other is to encounter the Lord who is in our midst! Thus, we were able to touch with our own hands the catholicity of the Church, which, in the variety of ages, sexes and social conditions, manifests an extraordinary wealth of charisms and ecclesial vocations, and is the custodian of a treasure trove of differences in languages, cultures, liturgical expressions and theological traditions. In effect, this rich diversity is the gift of each local Church to all the others (cf. LG 13), and the synodal dynamic is a way to appreciate and enhance this rich diversity without flattening it into uniformity. Similarly, we have discovered that there are shared questions, even if synodality is experienced and understood in a variety of ways in different parts of the world on the basis of a common inheritance of the apostolic Tradition. Part of the challenge of synodality is to discern the level at which it is most appropriate to address each question. Equally shared are certain tensions. We should not be frightened by them, nor attempt at any cost to resolve them, but rather engage in ongoing synodal discernment. Only in this way can these tensions become sources of energy and not lapse into destructive polarisations.

23. As a Church committed to listening, a synodal Church desires to be humble, and knows that it must ask forgiveness and has much to learn. Some reports noted that the synodal path is necessarily a penitential one, recognising that we have not always lived the constitutive synodal dimension of the ecclesial community. The face of the Church today bears the signs of serious crises of mistrust and lack of credibility. In many contexts, crises related to sexual abuse, and abuse of power, money and conscience have pushed the Church to a demanding examination of conscience so that “moved by the Holy Spirit” the Church “may never cease to renew herself” (LG 9), in a journey of repentance and conversion that opens paths of reconciliation, healing and justice.

25. A synodal Church is called to practice the culture of encounter and dialogue with the believers of other religions and with the cultures and societies in which it is embedded, but above all among the many differences that run through the Church itself. This Church is not afraid of the variety it bears, but values it without forcing it into uniformity. The synodal process has been an opportunity to begin to learn what it means to live unity in diversity, a fundamental point to continue exploring, trusting that the path will become clearer as we

move forward. Therefore, a synodal Church promotes the passage from “I” to “we”. It is a space within which a call resonates to be members of a body that values diversity but is made one by the Spirit. It is the Spirit that impels us to listen to the Lord and respond to him as a people at the service of the one mission of proclaiming to all the nations the salvation offered by God in Christ Jesus. This happens in a great diversity of contexts: no one is asked to leave their own context, but rather to understand it and enter into it more deeply. Returning to this vision after the experience of the first phase, synodality appears first and foremost as a dynamism animating concrete local communities. Moving to the more universal level, this momentum embraces all the dimensions and realities of the Church, in a movement of authentic catholicity.

26. Lived in a diversity of contexts and cultures, synodality proves to be a constitutive dimension of the Church since its origin, even if it is still in the process of being realised. Indeed, it presses to be implemented ever more fully, expressing a radical call to conversion, change, prayer and action that is for all. In this sense, a synodal Church is open, welcoming and embraces all. There is no border that this movement of the Spirit does not feel compelled to cross, to draw all into its dynamism. The radical nature of Christianity is not the prerogative of a few specific vocations, but the call to build a community that lives and bears witness to a different way of understanding the relationship between the daughters and sons of God, one that embodies the truth of love, one that is based on gift and gratuitousness. The radical call is, therefore, to build together, synodally, an attractive and concrete Church: an outgoing Church, in which all feel welcome.”

SYNOD WORKSHEETS

The presentation of the Working Document has a different format than usual.

There are in addition, Worksheets that are

“not chapters of a book to be read in succession,

nor are they short and more or less complete essays on a topic.

They are “to be done” and not “to be read” in the sense that they offer an outline for prayer and personal reflection in preparation for group and plenary discussion.

Similarly, they can be used for in-depth thematic meetings in a synodal style at all levels of Church life.”

NEXT WEEKEND

Next week we will focus on the reflections and questions in the Worksheets.

For example, one of the questions says

“B 1.1 How does the service of charity and commitment to justice and care for our common home nourish communion in a synodal Church?”

2024 BRISBANE SYNOD

Next year a Brisbane Archdiocesan Synod is scheduled. More details to come.

It follows on from the presentations at the recent Summit.

Decisions and processes from the October Synod in Rome will influence our 2024 Archdiocesan Synod.

Some of you might remember years ago, the preparation that went into 2003 Brisbane Synod.

WE PRAY

We continue to pray for justice, ecology and peace within all aspects of our culture of encounter.

We pray for openness, transparency, accountability and justice in our culture of encounter.

We pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

[This reflection is not a homily]

Thank you to Minje who preached the homily this weekend on the Gospel of Matthew 10:26-33. We pray for Minje as he prepares for priestly ordination this Thursday.

JESUS TELLS US NOT TO BE AFRAID

Jesus tells us three times in today's Gospel passage not to be afraid.

"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops."

Matthew 10:26-27

Let us not be afraid.

Let us pray.

Father Gerry Hefferan

Synod website: <https://www.synod.va/en.html>

Description and meaning of the Synod Logo

A large, majestic tree, full of wisdom and light, reaches for the sky. A sign of deep vitality and hope which expresses the cross of Christ. It carries the Eucharist, which shines like the sun.

The horizontal branches, opened like hands or wings, suggest, at the same time, the Holy Spirit.

The people of God are not static: they are on the move, in direct reference to the etymology of the word synod, which means "walking together". The people are united by the same common dynamic that this Tree of Life breathes into them, from which they begin their walk.

These 15 silhouettes sum up our entire humanity in its diversity of life situations of generations and origins.

This aspect is reinforced by the multiplicity of bright colours which are themselves signs of joy. There is no hierarchy between these people who are all on the same footing: young, old, men, women, teenagers, children, lay people, religious, parents, couples, singles; the bishop and the nun are not in front of them, but among them. Quite naturally, children and then adolescents open their walk, in reference to these words of Jesus in the Gospel: "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children". (Mt 11:25)

The horizontal baseline: "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission" runs from left to right in the direction of this march, underlining and strengthening it, to end with the title "Synod 2021 - 2024", the high point that synthesizes the whole.

