

CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER, PART THREE
RECOGNITION & PROMOTION OF THE BAPTISMAL DIGNITY OF WOMEN
Father Gerry Hefferan's Reflection – 2 July 2023



Culture of Encounter, Part Three Recognition & Promotion of the Baptismal Dignity of Women

COMMUNION, MISSION & PARTICIPATION

*There are three core points in the 2023 October Synod Working Document – **Communion, Mission and Participation.***

With the October Synod Working Document in Rome are Working Sheets, which offer offers reflections under these three headings

- *A Communion that radiates*
- *Co-responsibility in Mission*
- *Participation, governance and authority*

Parish members have asked about the response of Catholics around the world to vital questions.

One such critical issue has been the [promotion of the ministry of women in the church](#). This was a core issue in the lively discussions at the Australian Plenary Council in 2022. As world delegates prepare for the Synod in Rome, let us look at the reflections that they have received on the ministry of women in the Worksheets.

In Worksheet B 2.3, the key question is:

[“How can the Church of our time better fulfil its mission through greater recognition and promotion of the baptismal dignity of women?”](#)

The reflection grounds the discussion in baptism, with baptised members given to each other

[“as members of a single body enjoying equal dignity \(cf. Gal 3:26-28\). The listening phase reaffirmed the awareness of this reality, indicating that it must find ever more concrete realisation in the life of the Church, including through relationships of mutuality, reciprocity and complementarity between men and women.”](#)

Several particular points are offered, including:

- *[“attention to the experience, status and role of women”](#)*

- *“women who celebrate the faith, “often present as evangelists and first teachers in the ways of faith, ministering in remote places and challenging contexts, and at the “prophetic margins”*
- *“deeper reflection on the ecclesial relational failures, which are also structural failures affecting the lives of women in the Church, inviting us into a process of ongoing conversion”*
- *“women’s participation and recognition, of mutually supportive relationships between men and women and the desire for a greater presence of women in positions of responsibility and governance”*
- *“a clear desire that society and the Church be places of growth, active participation healthy belonging for all women. They ask the Church to be at their side to accompany and promote the realisation of this”*
- *“greater recognition of women’s baptismal dignity and rejection of all forms of discrimination and exclusion faced by women in the Church and society”*
- *“highlight the plurality of women’s experiences, points of view and perspectives and ask that this diversity be recognised in the Synodal Assembly’s work, avoiding treating women as a homogeneous group or an abstract or ideological subject of debate.”*

The central question for discernment is then stated.

“What concrete steps can the Church take to renew and reform its procedures, institutional arrangements and structures to enable greater recognition and participation of women, including in governance, decision-making processes and in the taking of decisions, in a spirit of communion and with a view to mission?”

The last section contains suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection.

“Women play a major role in transmitting the faith in families, Parishes, consecrated life, associations and movements and lay institutions, and as teachers and catechists. How can we better recognise, support, and accompany their already considerable contribution? How can we enhance it in order to learn to be an increasingly synodal Church?”

“The charisms of women are already present and at work in the Church today. What can we do to discern and support them and to learn what the Spirit wants to teach us through them?”

“... the issue of women’s participation in governance, decision-making, mission and ministries at all levels of the Church, to be addressed, and for this participation to be given the support of

appropriate structures so that this does not remain just a general aspiration. How can women be included in these areas in greater numbers and new ways?"

"How, in consecrated life, can women be better represented in the Church's governance and decision-making processes, better protected from abuse in all ecclesial contexts, and, where relevant, more fairly remunerated for their work?"

"How can women contribute to governance, helping to promote greater accountability and transparency and strengthen trust in the Church?"

"How can we deepen reflection on women's contribution to theological reflection and the accompaniment of communities? How can we give space and recognition to this contribution in the formal processes of discernment at every level of the Church? "What new ministries could be created to provide the means and opportunities for women's effective participation in discernment and decision-making bodies?"

"How can co-responsibility in decision-making processes be increased between lay and consecrated women and clergy in remote places and in challenging social contexts where women are frequently the main agents of pastoral care and evangelisation? The contributions received during the first phase note that tensions with the ordained Ministers arise where the dynamics of co-responsibility and shared decision-making processes are absent."

"... the question of women's inclusion in the diaconate to be considered. Is it possible to envisage this, and in what way?"

"How can men and women better cooperate in pastoral ministry and exercising related responsibilities?"

The Working Document and WorkSheets are available at the [Synod Working Document \(II\)](https://bit.ly/SynodWorkingDocument2023).
<https://bit.ly/SynodWorkingDocument2023>

We pray and reflect upon and discuss the important questions raised above.

How will the Synod enable, in concrete action, the three declared Synodal overall intentions of

- A Communion that radiates
- Co-responsibility in Mission
- Participation, governance and authority?

Father Gerry Hefferan

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