

# IN AFRICA, THE SYNOD IS ON!

## AFRICA SYNODAL CONTINENTAL ASSEMBLY

### - Final Communiqué

1-6 March 2023 – Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



## Introduction

In union with the universal Church, the Church in Africa celebrated the Synodal Continental Assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2023. This Synodal Continental Assembly was organised by the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) as a continuation of the Two Working Sessions held in Accra, Ghana and Nairobi, Kenya, in December 2022 and January 2023, respectively.

1. Our gathering was an Ecclesial Assembly. From all parts of the continent of Africa and Madagascar and the Islands, 206 participants gathered to walk, pray and celebrate together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Among them were 9 cardinals, 29 bishops and 41 priests. The majority of participants were lay women and men, consecrated people, including young people, and representatives of the other Christian traditions and faith traditions.
2. With courage and joy, confidence and humility, we listened to one another and to the Holy Spirit. In a spirit of discernment, we listened to what the People of God from around the world said in the first year of the Synod. In prayer and silence, we discerned the intuitions, discussed the questions and themes and identified the calls of our synodal journey in order to prepare an African Synodal Document that represents the authentic voice of Africa. The time we have spent together has been an experience of lived synodality – a moment of profound dialogue, listening and discernment among local churches and with the Universal Church.
3. At the end of this Continental Synodal Assembly, SECAM finalised the contribution of the Church in Africa to the General Secretariat of the Synod in Rome for the purposes of drafting a working document.

## Gratitude

- We give sincere and profound thanks to: Cardinal Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Ethiopia, and the priests, religious and the faithful of Ethiopia, for their gracious hospitality and warm welcome to the city of Addis Ababa.
- The delegation from Rome, led by Cardinal Mario Grech and Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, for their fraternal solidarity, support and accompaniment during the Synodal Continental Assembly.
- All our partners, benefactors and donors through whose generosity the Church in Africa was able to successfully celebrate this Continental Synodal Assembly.
- All the technical personnel, the African Synodality Initiative (ASI) and journalists from African and international Catholic media and communications agencies.

## The Synodal Church in Africa

5. The Synodal Continental Assembly has confirmed the Church's way of doing things in Africa. The Family of God in Africa is firmly rooted in the synodal dynamic. Synodality is no longer a remote desire, a faint hope or a distant future objective. We have tasted the nourishing fruits of synodality by encountering, dialoguing with and listening to one another, and all together

listening to the Holy Spirit. We are the Church in synod: the Family of God is our Tent in Africa.

- The African Synodal Family is an open-ended space of gathering. The African Synodal Family is a Church that:
  - stretches out, and includes all our differences, diversity, tensions and forces;
  - welcomes others and makes room for their diversity;
  - empties herself, but without losing the foundations and fundamentals of our faith; and
  - a Church that can move.
- 7. During the Continental Synodal Assembly, we have discovered new seeds of growth: Africa is a synodal continent. Synodality is part of who we are and how we live as the Family of God in Africa. Our continent is blessed with rich principles and values of our cultures and traditions. Indeed, rooted in African anthropological principles and cultural values, especially Palaver, Ubuntu and Ujamaa, which emphasise community spirit, sense of family, teamwork, solidarity, inclusivity, hospitality and conviviality, the Catholic Church in Africa has grown as a Family of God. These principles and values are good and healthy seeds for the birth and growth of a truly synodal Church in Africa and in the world.
- 8. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, through our discernment in common and spiritual conversation, we are committed to building a synodal Church in Africa as a Family where all belong and feel at home. As the Synodal Family of God in Africa, we affirm and celebrate our common baptismal dignity which makes us really feel fully at home in a Synodal Church, where all vocations are valued.
- 9. As the Synodal Family of God, we are a listening church. We listen without judging, especially those who do not feel sufficiently recognised in the Church. We accept the invitation of synodality to listen to those who feel exiled, neglected and excluded from the Church. We recognise that when we do this, others feel welcomed, and are free to share their own spiritual journey.
- 10. As the Synodal Family of God, we seek genuine conversion and reform. We commit ourselves to overcoming rigid hierarchical structures, unhealthy autocratic tendencies, harmful clericalism and isolating individualism that undermine and weaken relationships between bishops, priests and laity. These weeds confront us with a challenge to deepen our experience of synodality, to reflect on what it means to walk together in times of tension.

### **A Synodal Family of God in Mission**

11. As the Synodal Family of God in Africa, we do not flee from the lived realities of our continent: the wounds of Africans are also the wounds of the Synodal Family of God. During our Continental Synodal Assembly, we have felt the pain and suffering of our sisters and brothers in Africa. The Synodal Family of God walks with those who are affected by war, ethnic strife, religious intolerance, terrorism, and all forms of conflict, tension and violence. With solidarity, compassion and charity, the Synodal Church in Africa journeys with our sisters and brothers in distress.
12. During our Continental Synodal Assembly, we have heard the voice of the young people. The Church in Africa is vibrant because of the energy, passion and creativity of the youth. Their contribution to the mission and ministry of the Church is a gift for the edification of a truly synodal church in Africa. Young people have an important place and a pivotal role in the Synodal Family of God in Africa.
13. During our Continental Synodal Assembly, we journeyed with the women who were active participants in the process of listening, dialogue and discernment. We have learned from them how to be a Synodal Church. African women hold the Church together; they are the majority.

African women are the backbone of the Church. To journey together as a Synodal Church means recognising their giftedness, talents, charisms and contributions. For women in Africa and across the world, synodality is an opportunity for “full and equal participation” in the life of the Church. Women are a gift to the Church. There is no way true synodality can happen in the Church if women are not considered as equal partners.

## A Synodal Church of Conversion and Reform

14. To overcome and root out the weeds of clericalism, authoritarianism and indifference, we desire to engender new forms of leadership – be they priestly, episcopal, religious and lay. We desire to form the Synodal Family of God in the practice of integral and life-giving leadership that is relational and collaborative, and capable of generating solidarity and co-responsibility. To achieve this, the Synodal Family of God in Africa pledges to create spaces and enlarge our tent for the possible exercise of various forms of lay ministry.
15. The Synodal Family of God desires to grow in a spirituality that will sustain the practice of synodality, a spirituality that enables the Synodal Church to grow in interiority and conscience and in encountering and listening to the Holy Spirit. We desire to encourage and establish synodal practices at all levels of the Church in Africa. We desire to birth a culture of synodality as a habitual way of proceeding in the Church.
16. As the Synodal Family of God in Africa, we are a learning church. We do not walk alone: we have things that we can learn from others. Enlivened by the spirit of inter-culturality, ecumenism and interfaith encounter, we walk together with others, appreciating cultural differences, understanding those particularities as elements which help us to grow. We listen to the spirituality and wisdom of indigenous peoples and local cultures.

## Conclusion

These days in Addis Ababa have been days of abundant graces and blessings from God. As the Synodal Family of God in Africa, we have found immense joy in walking together and we desire to continue doing so. Our journey is a journey of conversion, reform and growth at personal, communal and institutional levels of the Church.

As the Synodal Family of God in Africa, we want to walk together joyfully. We thank God who has brought us together and guided us by the Spirit of the Risen Christ. This is a time to rejoice: let us not allow the weeds to hinder us; let us allow the Holy Spirit to lead us forward to continue to sow new seeds and harvest abundant fruits of synodality.

God bless Africa!  
 Sunday, 5 March, 2023  
 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



Pictures: website

<https://addisababa.synod2023.org/allnews>