



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

Uganda Episcopal Conference

THEMES FROM THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

UGANDA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

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Background

The Synod on synodality is a systematic approach to listen, understand and put in practice the thoughts of all the faithful across the world, in order to make the Catholic Church a more responsive and caring Church, hence drawing Christians closer to Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Uganda Episcopal Conference presents a synopsis of the responses to the Synod on synodality from the Christian faithful in Uganda, and what they see as the best route to enhance growth in the synodal life of the Church. Members of the Conference gave synodal pastoral themes in their respective dioceses. The Synthesis Report is a summary of all the reflections on the notion of synodality across the 10 themes in the context of Uganda.

1. The Relationship Between the Eastern and Latin Catholic Churches (SR.6)

In Uganda, the Eastern rite churches are not widely spread as entities, but small groups of faithful from these churches exist and have been welcomed in the Church without any form of segregation. In some instances, and upon their request, these communities have been given space to celebrate the Eucharist within the existing infrastructure of the Catholic Church, in the spirit of synodality especially the increasing community of Eritreans and Ethiopians. Their active participation in the local Church enriches the local community as they witness Christ through their particular rite.

The Ugandan Catholic community therefore proposes as a way of strengthening synodality, that the Church considers creating awareness of the existence of these different rites and the people still in formation centres be exposed fully to the differences between these churches that are in communion with the Roman Catholic Church.

In order to preserve identity, the churches should provide jointly agreed pastoral guidance to the faithful and where need be form forums for open dialogue and consultation on matters of mutual interest; and harmonize our liturgy (*unity of the rites*). This will enhance cooperation and understanding for the greater synodality of the Universal Church.

2. Listening to The Cry of the Poor (SR 4 & 16)

The Church in Uganda applies a broad definition of the poor to cover economic, spiritual, moral, social and physically impoverished individuals. Basing on the biblical teachings about love and compassion for the needy, the Catholic Church in Uganda has a system for listening and response system to their needs is weak. This is exasperated by the challenges of globalisation, and climate change. The systems are structured along the integral human development tenets of economic, social, health, spiritual and environmental support.

The Church in Uganda has formal departments at national and diocesan levels to listen and respond to the cries and needs of the poor. The departments of Caritas, Health, Justice and Peace, and pastoral care have been well established for this cause and so is the implementation of *Laudato si'* across Uganda. Despite the existence of various interventions targeting those at the margins, the gap still exists and needs to be closed. Some of the key suggestions for consideration to close the gap include the following:

- a) Minimise patronizing the vulnerable people, identify and continuously protect those who are excluded,
- b) Encourage the government to embrace justice and fairness while dealing with the marginalised.
- c) Explore more the concept of fostering appropriate catechesis (imparting Faith) within the parish community especially among the less privileged.

- d) Treat the poor with dignity; defend and offer opportunities to the poor; share what we have: integrate them in all Church activities promoting inclusive Evangelization, integrate sign language in liturgy for the deaf and dumb; create listening spaces for people in non-canonical marriages; special liturgical interventions for the elderly and the sick who are often invisible in society. Additionally, Church teachings, liturgy, and practices must explicitly and carefully integrate the biblical and theological foundations of integral ecology. Publicly denouncing the injustices through engagement in civil society organizations, trade unions, popular movements, grassroots associations, increase listening within the Church tribunals and other spaces of justice. The clergy worldwide should be exemplary exercising love for all the poor people of different colours and races and we should be the voice for the voiceless; and Small Christian Communities should be strengthened to identify, reach out and journey together with the poor.
- e) There new challenging emerging where the Church is called to be prophetic and a leader, here are some of them: The growing gap between the extreme rich and the poor. The grabbing of land by the powerful at the expenses of the poor and institutions serving the common good. The erosion of the democratic participation because of political disillusion, mismanagement of institutions at the service of the public and high corruption. Within the Church next to heroic Christians, priests and religious people, there is still the mentality of carrier making, status and comfort seeking.

3. The Mission in the Digital Environment (SR.17)

Globalisation has come with technology and the Church cannot evangelise without embracing technology. In Uganda, the COVID-19 experience made the importance of technology in evangelisation more compelling. Currently the Catholic Church in Uganda has embraced technology to varying degrees having recognised its critical role in helping the work of proclamation of the Gospel to reach the peripheries but with limited access in the rural communities.

Many priests use radios, TVs, social media to spread the Gospel while various dioceses have dedicated online channels for the Gospel. Partnerships with technology companies is also growing for instance, the Uganda Catholics Online, Webinars on the Catholic Church and Media, Online streaming in and the Uganda Catholic Television (UCTV) a great Church initiative with several benefits as far as evangelization and communication are concerned. Nevertheless, there is still much room for improvement of the social media networks and updated websites and information channels that give authentic information to the people of God without creating confusion among them.

There is however a need to foster mass media; build a network of positive digital influencers of faith to counter destructive information against the Church; develop safeguards against digital moral harms like cyberbullying, ransoms; uncontrolled character assassination; sexual exploitation; avoid abuse of "Holy Things" (*Sacris*) in what goes out through digital media; digital media should not replace interpersonal communication and interaction.

The people consulted suggest that the Church create authentic digital media platforms for the faithful to access correct information; train Church leaders in the use of digital platforms; and build a digital culture that fosters dialogue within the Church; recognizing that digital environment enriches people's religious life and creates new bonds between the faithful especially the grandparents and elderly.

The result of the consultation suggests that the Church encourage the use technology to carry the message of the Gospel to the far flung frontier; reach more young people, build a proper moral outlook on the use of digital spaces, without negating the importance of physical participation in the Liturgy, communion, interpersonal relations and bonding.

In this area the Church, as Institution, seek to be present where Catholic entrepreneurs and the class of highly educated people should be present and committed.

4. The Revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in The Missionary Synodal Perspective (SR. 11)

By the Vatican II Decree *Optatam Totius* on Priestly Training, and the fact that priests are the principal collaborators of the bishops, there is great need for the integral formation of future priests considering both the anthropological, positive cultural values and ecclesiastical formation in the context of co-responsibility communion and service of the whole people of God.

In Uganda, the general perception on diaconate is that it is *a mere transition stage to priesthood!* The role of deacons needs to be explained to the people and well understood so that they are helped to play their duties of serving the people of God in the *diakonia* of the Word, in the Liturgy and exercise of charity.

Permanent deacons: Perhaps the time has come for the Church in Uganda to study the possibility to have permanent deacon. There are well educated people, once given a proper training, could offer their service part-time service as deacon to the Church. They would be welcomed by faithful who at present attend locally born and Pentecostal Churches.

In general, the Church in Uganda has recognised the need to improve the philosophical and theological formation for priests, and other ministers of the Word of God to make them more holistic and integrate synodality in their formation.

The people suggest that the Church promote on-going formation, spiritual retreats to all categories of people on various ecclesial-pastoral issues, empowerment and growth in the faith, improve their skills and re-ignite their charism to baptismal vocation. It should also take into consideration vulnerable members with various life difficulties and offer rehabilitation and renewal programs.

However, the teaching and pastoral ministries still need more trained and experienced personnel for efficient services. There has also been tremendous growth in avenues for women to participate in teaching ministry by offering philosophical and theological courses to women religious and training of women catechists.

The Church in Uganda therefore proposes that the seminary formation program addresses the problem of clericalism that make clerics claim unwarranted sense of entitlement and superiority of service in the church. Consequently, the laity now perceive the clerics to hold higher ranks than them in church service.

In the context of the emerging pastoral realities, the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* must enrich the curriculum of the seminary formation by adapting some secular sciences like psychology, sociology, management and administration to all agents of evangelization and ensure that ample time is given for practical pastoral experience and immersion among the Christian communities. To the extent possible, the result suggests that the Church adopt *Lay formators* and an organized approach to monitoring genuine vocational growth. Model families should be identified to model seminarians with family life deficiencies in their earlier stages of life to become more holistic human persons.

The priests must remain connected to the people of God (pastoral insertion); and the Church may create online platforms for sharing information and getting feedback on formation of priests and promote formation by witness. The Church could increase the number of trained formators in overcrowded seminaries, and the use of modern technologies in formation.

Efforts need to be made to adopt tested cultural values, like servant leadership, oath and confidentiality in the training of future priests.

There is need to strengthen avenues for periodic renewal of priestly formation in Uganda (On Going Formation); reinforce the discipline of celibacy as a stimulus for pastoral charity and a special source of spiritual fecundity; set spaces for better catechesis and evangelisation; and pastoral agents must avoid losing the sense of humility in service and unity or walking together.

The Church in Uganda recognize the vital role ordained ministers play in linking the people to the creator through the administration of the various sacraments and concur with the current structure that ordination to the Holy orders is validly for men and does not see the need for permanent diaconate ministry considering the value already gained from catechists in assisting priests.

As a way to promote transparency and a culture of accountability, annual evaluation should be done on the life of the clergy in their transparency to the people of God as regards to the care of the temporal goods of the Church.

The Church needs to move cautiously on issues of re-insertion of suspended priests in ministry, to minimise possible dilution of integrity, obedience, cooperation values in the Church while remaining open to reintegration. The Church may consider training lay assistants who can help reach out to vulnerable priests and religious as a remedy for reformation.

5. Some Theological and Canonical Matters Regarding Specific Ministerial Forms (SR. 8 & 9)

In the light of the transformation of the Church envisaged in *Evangelii Gaudium* and grappling with theological and canonical matters pertaining to specific ministerial forms, the Church in Uganda has ensured that all ministers (ordained or lay) are rooted in the Gospel and aligned with the mission of the Church to foster greater clarity, coherence, and integrity in our ecclesial practices. In order to implement the *Predicate Evangelium*, the Church in Uganda opened doors to all Christ's faithful to access formation programs and theological studies.

Members of the Lay apostolate participate in the decision-making process, various ecclesiastical offices are conferred to both the laity and members of religious institutes and Lay faithful participate in faith formation programs such as catechetical instructions, oratorio programs, and assist in the preparation of the sacraments. Parents and grandparents are the first missionaries as a community of life and love, contribute to witness to Jesus Christ in daily life and to explicitly share the faith with others.

Women in particular, are the majority leaders of the Small Christian Communities; they serve as religious educators, formators, spiritual animators and have assumed leadership positions that place them in the new frontiers of mission.

The Church however, recognizes that all faithful have an obligation to transmit the faith and to participate in mission and recommend a cautious approach guided by in-depth studies on the access of women to the diaconate, bearing in mind the existing canonical injunction on the matter.

The Church in Uganda also considers the vast opportunities that exist in the field of Catechists including working as extra-ordinary Eucharistic ministers as adequate avenues for women to play their pastoral responsibility to dispense sacramental needs of the people of God without ordination.

The Church recognizes the need to affirmatively address the many forms of injustice against women within the Church especially chauvinistic mentality; labour injustice; sexual abuse; unfair remuneration and bring to book the perpetrators of these crimes within the Church

structure for reconciliation, justice and peace. The Church also recognizes the apostolic capacities of persons with disabilities although integration hasn't been done.

The report suggest that the Church strengthen biblical apostolate for the laity; pay more attention to young people, married couples and promote lay participation in devotions in order to discover and develop their charisms. All canonical processes need to be measured carefully through dialogue and discernment to foster clarity, coherence, and integrity in our ecclesial practices.

6. The Revision, in a Synodal Missionary Perspective of the Documents Teaching on the Relationship Between Bishops, Consecrated Life and Ecclesial Association (SR. 10)

Synodality goes hand in hand with the recognition and enhancement of different charisms of all people of God and this promotes active participation, inclusion and encounters, co-responsibility, reciprocity and mutual collaboration. The synodal journey kindles a walk together of all members of the Church clergy, religious and laity; each in their own manner, participate in the sacramental nature of the Church.

In Uganda, there are several institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life carrying out different works of apostolate and enrich the Church with their diverse charisms, spirituality, giftedness in various aspects of pastoral and social work. The Religious are involved in pastoral ministries such as administration of institutions, teaching, health care, social services, youth and children's apostolate and the refugee ministry. The Government of Uganda has recognised the work of the Religious and extend edits collaboration through the Association of the Religious in Uganda (ARU).

The Ordinaries address their concerns directly through the Association and the superiors of the various associations of the Religious. This has enhanced mutual collaboration, dialogue, growth in the spirit of unity, mutual understanding and pastoral cooperation (synodality). In order to sustain the gains, it is necessary, at various levels of ecclesial life to build a fitting system of research and action on various pastoral concerns of the Religious, clergy, Bishops and laity so that the mission of evangelizing may be carried out in mutual cooperation. The Bishops should foster the well-being and charism development of religious associations, jointly and formally consent on operating guidelines for institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life based on *Nomine Ecclesiae* and *Mutuae Relationes*.

The issue of self-reliance for many religious Institutes and Communities causes a lot of concern and dedication to income generating activities at the expenses of their charismatic mission. How to balance the living of the charism and becoming self-supporting?

7. Some aspects of the person and ministry of the bishop; criteria for selecting candidate to episcopacy, judicial function of the bishop's nature and course *ad limina apostolorum* visits from a missionary synodal perspective (SR. 12 & 13)

In Uganda the Church recognises that the ultimate decision in appointing Diocesan Bishops rests with the Pope, with a confidential consultative process within the diocesan structures. The manner and procedure for the election of Bishops should be maintained. However, the people suggest that the Church review the criteria for selecting candidates for the Episcopate, balancing the authority of the Apostolic Nuncio with participation of Episcopal Conferences and expanding consultations with the faithful without compromising confidentiality and unpredictability of the process and outcomes.

It was also suggested that the Church also review the process of transferring a Bishop from a Diocese without immediate replacement because it affects the growth of faith and development of a diocese.

In order to preserve and promote the unity of all Christians, a reform of the Roman Curia is an important aspect of the Catholic Church's synodal journey.

The Diocesan Bishops express the unity, holiness, apostolicity and catholicity of the Church in the *ad limina Apostolorum*. Therefore, the manner in which they are carried out should be made more open to allow mutual exchange that fosters communion and a true exercise of collegiality and synodality. The Dicasteries of the Roman Curia should pay more attention to the diversity of situations, cultures and a more attentive listening to the voices of local churches.

Not all good priests, chosen to be bishops, have enough experience, and they may end up undoing what their predecessors have achieved. The Church should envisage a way of helping the newly appointed bishop to be introduced to their new ministry.

8. The role of Pope's representative in a missionary synodality perspective (SR. 13)

The Apostolic Nuncio as the pastoral and diplomatic representative of the Holy Father makes firm and effective the bonds of unity between the Pope, the local church and mutual understanding between Church and State, for the peace and progress of each nation.

In order for a Pope's representative to be more effective, he needs to adapt to new cultures in order to enhance unity in diversity and build bridges. He should widen his consultations on various concerns of the local church extending to the Small Christian Communities, provide interpretation of church magisterium and clearly extend the communications of the Pontiff to the local church.

9. There are a lot of doctrinal, pastoral and important issues that the church addresses in the present day which are important in the society. However, in the present changing times many of these issues almost seem unclear or irrelevant to our society

The Church in Uganda faces some doctrinal, moral, and pastoral controversial issues. Some of them are related to truth telling, corruption, lack of respect for human life, irresponsible sexuality, the sacredness of marriage, and family discipline in line with Catholic practices and traditions. In addition, some priests have taken on the tendencies popular in social media, and focusing on trending topics instead of the Gospel. These challenges can be attributed to the importation of the negative aspects of globalisation and poverty. The prophetic voice of the Church is drowned in cacophony, while individual tastes impede the ability of individuals to listen to the voice of the spirit.

The report suggests that the Church exercise prudential-pastoral approach in addressing public trending issues and should as well always be conscious of the kind of audience, level of understanding of people and be mindful of the faith of the local people before they think of the fame and being celebrities. During the delivery of homilies and any public address in any place including media, priests are reminded to base their teaching on the Word of God and the social teachings of the Church especially when addressing the moral issues. There is a great need to return to the ecclesiology of Vatican Council II on the family as the domestic church and first school of theology. Parents should practice the teaching ministry as baptised and parents educate their children in both faith and morals right from the families.

On the subject of morality, the Church ought to remain firm in emphasizing intrinsic sinfulness of some human acts e.g. homo-sexuality. The Church must uphold the moral teachings as enlightened by Scripture and Tradition and should let her light shine in matters of morality and truth and in protecting the splendour of truth. Pastorally, the salvation of souls (can.1752) and fulfilling the mandate of Scripture and Tradition should be the basis of all pastoral activities. Even development work should serve a pastoral dimension in the life of the Church. Through

respectful dialogue, attentive listening, and prayerful discernment, we seek truth and unity in the midst of diversity, guided by the promptings of the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the Magisterium. The Church must take as her model the spirit of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-31) in handling contentious issues; promote discussions between experts and encourage synodality where the clergy should endeavour to do constant research about such issues so as to guide the flock well.

The year of mercy helped the Church in Uganda to develop a merciful attitude towards all and to become more welcoming. Mercy goes beyond tolerance, that often is just a form of closing our eyes to the un-Christian situations, and causes us to be closed to prisoners. More should be done to oppose the death penalty that offends the intrinsic dignity of the human person.

10. The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices (SR. 7)

Ecumenism in Uganda is existent and thriving especially among the main Christian Churches (Catholics, Anglican and Orthodox). There is little ecumenical engagement with the Pentecostal movements because of their anti-Catholic approach in their evangelism. The Church has recognized the importance of education and formation. The Church provides programmes and resources to deepen awareness and appreciation of ecumenical principles among clergy, pastoral workers, and the lay faithful. These initiatives have equipped individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in constructive dialogue and collaboration with other Christian traditions. Despite the efforts, there remains a need to deepen understanding and commitment to ecumenism to overcome some prejudices and misunderstandings. Moments of uncharitable acts, historical political divisions continue to present challenges to ecumenical dialogue and collaboration.

The Church is, however, committed to breaking down barriers and building trust requires patience, humility, and a willingness to engage in difficult conversations with openness and respect. This can be identified as synodal space where important topics affecting ecumenism can be discussed. Recently progress in ecumenism has been registered in the joint communal national prayers, the joint Way of the Cross Prayer with the Anglicans and Orthodox on good Fridays, prayer for world peace, Bible Society of Uganda among others and Interreligious dialogue. However, opportunities for focused dialogue on (1) Life (2) moral and social engagements; (3) religious experience, if well sustained, will promote ecumenism.

Marriages between Christians who belong to different Churches or ecclesial communities (inter-church marriages) may constitute realities in which the wisdom of communion can mature, and it is possible to evangelize each other. The Church's canonical legislation in allowing mixed marriages is a big step in promoting ecumenism despite diverse challenges of raising children baptized in the Catholic Church and giving freedom for the Catholic parties to practice their faith. Particular events in the Church's life like funerals, weddings, disasters, hospitalization, community development and government programmes e.g. education and health require ecumenical sensitivity. Individuals who prefer mixed marriages should be supported and instructed on the respective roles and not be put under undue stress or coercion in their spiritual lives.

Catholics should not shy away from electing non-Catholics to political, social and economic leadership if these individuals are morally sound, competent and developmental. We recommend an ecumenical Synod on the common mission in the contemporary world. It was suggested that the Church be keen on the tricks that the state may present through the guise of ecumenism and serious caution should always be taken in handling matters of ecumenism.

11. Inclusion of women and youth in ministry in the spirit of Synodality

In Uganda, women participate actively in liturgy and other pastoral activities. They contribute greatly to the economy of the family and the Church. Taking this into consideration the following steps can be taken towards greater inclusiveness of women (as well as youth) in our pastoral ministry:

- a) Recognize and appoint the ministry of Lector and Eucharistic Ministers among women and particularly young women.
- b) Eucharistic ministers can be actively involved in prison ministry, hospital ministry, ministry of the home bound and school ministry.
- c) Women catechists and other trained pastoral agents can be very suitable for family ministry, even more appropriate than men.
- d) Give pastoral and doctrinal training for more women catechists and encourage them in the ministry of evangelization.
- e) Giving women financial training can even make our church and institutions more viable and self-sustaining.

Recommendations

In considering the fundamental question of the Synod, what is the Spirit saying to our local Church?

1. Continue to talk to one another. Synod insights from listening sessions again revealed how Catholics value coming together to talk about their faith and their Church.
2. Utilize the "Conversations in the Spirit" method and the kinds of questions raised by the Synod, which sought to move people beyond personal agendas, as well as training in dialogue and discernment skills, could enhance this journeying together. Significant efforts in these areas, including dialogue among clergy and laity, could begin to address consistent concerns about clericalism.
3. The Church be a vital force in the lives of individuals and communities, and care deeply about the disconnect with some members of the community.
4. Promote the full scope of the Church's social teaching to confront racism, materialism, individualism.
5. Pay attention on discipline and doctrine of the Church in the areas of moral teachings and practical issues.
6. Improve leadership skills and accountability at all levels, parish and diocesan.

General conclusion deduced

Basing on the responses, synodality is an integral constitutional element of the Church and an expression of its communal nature which strengthens the cooperation in all areas of Church's mission. Synodality invites the whole church to return to the ecclesial roots of evangelisation, a concept that will help to rebuild faith and morals among the young generation. The Church in Uganda is a multicultural ecclesiastical community; there is more need for inculturation and inclusion, diversity in unity so that members from different cultures and realities can fully participate in the ecclesial journey of communion. Synodality has increased the active participation of all the faithful in the life and mission of the Church. It can therefore be affirmed that synodality is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, dialogue in various assemblies and meetings, mutually collaborate and take active part in her evangelizing mission.