

Colm Holmes (IRELAND) Chair of *We Are Church International*. He has been involved in church reform groups for over 30 years.

Synodality has to include women

My name is Colm Holmes and I have been the Chair of We Are Church international since 2018. We welcome the invitation from the Synod Office for We Are Church International to send delegates to the Jubilee Synod in Rome.

We Are Church International has supported the Synodal process from the start. We encouraged our Member groups to participate and to initiate conversations.

The planned meetings that are part of The Jubilee gathering of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies in Rome, are important to re-invigorate the synodal process.

Local Churches must be more active in making appropriate concrete proposals to implement synodality. Synodality calls for a spiritual and structural renewal of our church.

We need to find new ways of being church. But many Parish Priests feel they will lose power to the community; therefore they refuse to promote Small Christian Communities (SCC's) of which women make up the majority of the leaders.

We Are Church International wrote to our bishops on 25 July 2025 suggesting some concrete initiatives we would support including these 3:

1. Ordination of Women Deacons
2. Competent Women and Men preaching and leading parishes.
3. Lay led liturgies with communion

The Final Document of the Synod on Synodality allows different initiatives to be taken in different places. This represents unity in diversity. After 4 years of listening and dialogue and prayer it is past time for concrete initiatives to be taken with all the baptised for reform of structures and institutions. This is a crucial point in the entire process: Without concrete changes in the short term, the vision of a synodal Church will not be credible. **Pope Leo XIV has endorsed Pope Francis' synodal process for which appropriate decision making and decision taking processes need to be developed at all levels.**

At the Jubilee Synod I will be offering a postcard to those I meet. It shows a painting by Polish artist Bohdan Piasecki of the "Last Supper". Of course Leonardo da Vinci's famous "Last Supper" in Milan is an artistic masterpiece! But it is also FAKE NEWS! It shows a scene in Italy with 13 Italian men eating Italian food. Piasecki shows a scene in Jerusalem with Jewish people eating Jewish food – **and it includes women!** Nowhere in the gospels does it say that the women were excluded! And the next day it was the women who were at the foot of the cross and the men ran away!

To conclude I would like to put one question to Pope Leo:

Dear Pope Leo, Maybe you could show your concrete support for Synodality by expanding your C9 Council of Cardinals advisory team to include several women?

Thank you.

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Dr Martha Heizer (AUSTRIA) Vice-Chair *We are Church International*, one of the co-founders of We Are Church in Austria 30 years ago

Too many bishops are taking a wait-and-see approach

My name is Martha Heizer and in 1995, together with two others, I initiated the Church People's Petition in Austria. The abuse scandal surrounding the then Cardinal Groer and the way the church leadership dealt with it was the straw that broke the camel's back and prompted so many to take action.

We were concerned with five important issues:

1. Shared Decision Making – synodality on all levels
2. Equality for all Genders - eg women in all ministries
3. Optional Celibacy
4. Positive and helpful Sexual Morality
5. A Welcome for All, magnanimity instead of a rigid adherence to the law

These demands were signed by over half a million people in Austria and subsequently by millions more worldwide.

Since then – and that is 30 years ago – we have been waiting for at least a serious discussion on the matter. We see promising first steps in the Synod, but our patience continues to be tested. However, we will not cease to closely observe and comment on what is happening.

In Austria, there is a big commitment to the path of synodality. At least one bishop (Marketz in Carinthia) speaks very clearly about this. He has even appointed his own (female) episcopal vicar for church development and synodality in his diocese. There are many theologians who are working hard to implement synodal processes. They understand that this is the only way for the Church to flourish. For example, the **Diocese of Linz** has its own Department for Synodality at the Catholic University of Linz and its own course entitled '**School of Synodality**'. It is **led by Klara Csiszar** who worked here in Rome as an expert at the Synod.

We hear little from the other bishops; they seem to be waiting to see what the others will do, and in the meantime they provide us with many well-meaning pious slogans... And we observe that there are many bishops around the world who are taking a wait-and-see approach. They probably still need a lot of encouragement from the Pope – and of course from the rank and file. We know it is not easy to relinquish power – and that is precisely what synodality means.

We are very careful in speaking about “signs of hope” but definitely the appointed new bishop of Vienna Josef Grünwidl is such a sign.

Anyway, we do not pin our hopes on a nail or on anything or anybody but God. God will not abandon us.

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Christian Weisner (GERMANY) is one of the founder members of the Kirchenvolksbewegung *We Are Church* in Germany in 1995 and still active

Austria, Germany and the world-wide process for reform

My name is Christian Weisner. I was one of the initiators of the **church referendum *We are Church*** (KirchenVolksBegehren *Wir sind Kirche* in **1995, with the same goals for reform as in Austria**. We were **strongly supported by Hans Küng**, the great Swiss theologian, and by many other well-known scholars.

I see a **direct line – a red thread** – from the Vienna abuse scandal with Cardinal Groër to the 1995 ***We are Church Referendum* in Austria** and Germany to the ***Synodal Path* in Germany**, which was started in 2019, to the ***World-Wide Synodal Process* initiated by Pope Francis** in 2021, which Pope Leo is now continuing. For us not surprisingly: the same topics have been discussed in all these forums.

We are glad that **representatives of *We Are Church International*** from Austria, Germany, Italy and Ireland will participate in the meeting of synodal bodies this weekend in the Vatican and will be able to **bring our gifts and ideas to the global church**.

What happened in the official church after the *We are Church* referendum with 1,8 million signatures in Germany in 1995? At that time the German bishops denied sexual abuse as the fundamental problem. As late as 2001, Cardinal Ratzinger as prefect of the CDF placed everything under papal secrecy.

The **German “annus horribilis” was 2010**, the uncovering of the long-standing abuse scandal at the Jesuit school in Berlin. Only then the German bishops felt forced to take action. In 2014 they commissioned an **interdisciplinary study on abuse in the Catholic Church**, known as the [***MHG Study***](#).

The results of that study, published in 2018, were shocking. This study very clearly identified **risk factors for sexualized violence and its cover-up within the clerical system**: the church's sexual morality, understanding of the ministry and the handling of power.

These were **precisely the topics of the *We are Church Referendum 1995 in Austria*** – I would say in a prophetic manner. The exclusion of women was also identified as a systematic failure for a church that claims to follow in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth.

In 2019 the German bishops asked the official lay organization, the *Central Committee of German Catholics*, to **launch with them the *Synodal Path (Synodaler Weg)* in Germany as a joint venture**. The ***Synodal Path* is focused on these topics, “our” four topics**. The results are well documented. But four out of 27 German diocesan bishops do not cooperate at the moment and make negotiations with the Vatican difficult.

In 2021 Pope Francis initiated the XVI Bishops’ Synod. We are very glad that Francis enlarged this bishops’ synod to a *World-Wide Synodal Process* to stimulate a global exchange about the message of our church in today's world. For the first time also lay men and women could vote in the assembly. And, no real surprise: **the topics of the *We are Church Referendum 1995* are topics all over the world**. We are very glad that Pope Leo has confirmed the roadmap for implementation issued by Pope Francis until 2028.

But now the local churches have to become active. The final document of the World Synod of October 26, 2024, makes it clear: Local churches in particular must now create structures that ensure that the entire community plays an active role in all essential decision making and decision taking. These structures must make clear how lay people, and especially women, who all have the same baptismal dignity as the clergy, must be equally involved in the decision-making and administration of the Church. This is one big step in a direction supported by millions world-wide.

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Recognize Unity in Diversity

Tomorrow, while participants in the international Jubilee of the Synodal Teams gather in workshops and language groups, the Italian Church will experience its third Synodal Assembly: a completely unexpected assembly, which demonstrates how **the synodal process, if taken seriously, can truly change the way of being Church!**

At the end of March-beginning of April, the second Italian Synodal Assembly was convened to approve a final document, the “50 Propositions”, which the Bishops’ Conference would then promulgate at its assembly in May.

However, the document, prepared by the presidency of the Italian Synod without consulting the National Committee, was a bland text that completely betrayed the four years of synodal dialogue, and was heavily criticised by the Synodal Assembly, to the extent that the presidency had to withdraw it. The Bishops’ Conference had to postpone its annual assembly for the first time, and **a new Synodal Assembly** was convened, to be held tomorrow, to discuss a new text.

We have seen the draft: it is not a particularly bold text, but at least **all the thorniest issues have been put back on the table**, from the recognition of LGBTQ+ people to women deacons.

On this very topic, we are still awaiting the conclusions of the **second Study Commission on the female diaconate**, appointed by Pope Francis in 2020, following the requests of the Amazon Synod, and of one of the 10 study groups established by Francis himself in 2024 at the end of the first Assembly of the Universal Synod: **Group No. 5: *Some Theological and Canonical Questions about Specific Ministerial Forms***, the only study group whose members are unknown, which coincides with the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Last year, Pope Francis entrusted a Salesian nun, Linda Pocher, with organizing **four meetings with the C9, the Council of Cardinals**, as part of a reflection on the presence and role of women in the Church.

The Pope and the cardinals listened to female theologians, economists, canon lawyers, religious women, and even **a female Anglican bishop**, who explained how her Church came to recognise the ordination of women.

It is very interesting what Bishop Jo Bailey Wells said: it was possible to ordain women first as deacons, then as priests and finally as bishops because **the 42 provinces of the Anglican Communion have the possibility to accept or oppose the ordination of women.**

Could this be the solution, also for the Catholic Church, as has already happened with the male diaconate, after the Second Vatican Council?

That is, **to recognize unity in diversity**, on the one hand so as not to clip the wings of Bishops’ Conferences that are calling for female ordination, and on the other so as not to force Bishops’ Conferences that do not feel ready for this step?

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Marlies Prinz (AUSTRIA/ITALY)

member of *We Are Church* Austria and student of theology in Rome

The Synod must continue here in Rome and around the world

Hello everyone!

I'm very happy to have the opportunity to talk to you today – thank you very much for attending this press conference.

My name is Marlies Prinz, I'm a theology student from Austria and a member of *We Are Church* Austria.

I'm really sorry that I can't be with you in person today – at the moment you're hearing this, I'll be sitting in my canon law lecture at university.

Today marks the beginning of the meeting of the Jubilee of Synodal teams and participatory bodies in the Vatican.

Over the past few days, whenever I opened Instagram, I kept seeing posts from the Synod.va account appear in my feed. I started following it during last year's Synod, and now I've been seeing their countdown posts – “10 days to go,” “8 days,” “5 days,” “3 days,” and so on.

Each time I saw one, I felt something warm inside – because it reminded me of what Pope Francis and others have emphasized so often:

The Synod does not end with the big meeting in Rome in 2024; it continues – and it must continue – both here in Rome and in every diocese and parish around the world.

It is a very strong sign of synodality that people from synodal teams all over the world are gathering here in Rome to share their experiences and their work.

So yes – synodality is moving forward, we can clearly see that.

But I would also like to express a concern: I sometimes feel that synodality is increasingly becoming a buzzword, without much real substance behind it.

Nowadays, the word “synodality” appears everywhere – but it is not always truly lived out.

For example, when bishops praise the synodal way of working, but then go back to making all decisions on their own, without listening or seeking advice – that must not happen!

The word synodality must not become toothless.

A synodal Church is not simply a nice-to-have – it is a constitutive element of being a Church in the spirit of the Gospel.

We must not slacken in our efforts to achieve true synodality in our Church – in our local parishes, in our dioceses, and yes, here in Rome as well.

There is still much to be done.

I'm looking forward to this meeting – to the exchange, to learning from one another, and to sharing my own experiences as a young person in the Church.

I wish us all a pleasant meeting at the Vatican, and I send you my warmest regards at the Villa Angeli. Thank you very much.

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