



Catholic Women's Ordination (CWO) UK

Response to The Synthesis Report: A Synodal Church in Mission (October 2023)

'You are, all of you sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. All baptised in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus.' Galatians 3:26–28

The foregoing is the UK organisation, [Catholic Women's Ordination](#) (hereafter referred to as CWO) response to the Synthesis Report of the XVI ordinary General Assembly of Bishops published by the Vatican in October 2023. CWO acknowledges the bishops' recognition, clearly expressed in the Report, that the laity's role in discernment is an important one. This response is offered in that spirit and in the spirit of Canon Law 212.3, 'the Christian faithful have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters that obtain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known.'

CWO began in March 1993 as a national (UK) group of women and men who care deeply about the Roman Catholic Church. We want to be a part of building a church community that truly lives the justice demanded by Jesus; a justice which demands that women be equal with men. Women equal with men means not only that women can fulfil their own God given vocations, but that the Church community benefits from their experience, gifts and strengths in the ministerial priesthood.

CWO is a forum to examine, challenge and develop the current understanding of priesthood and aims to achieve the ordination of women to a renewed priesthood within the Roman Catholic Church. CWO co-operates with and works alongside other organisations, from across the world, campaigning for women's ordination. It is affiliated to [Women's Ordination Worldwide](#), a global organisation 'working for women's equality and ordination in the catholic church'.

Justice for Women

CWO affirms calls for justice for women made in other Catholic Church reform organisations Synthesis Report responses. We recognise that the Church's call for equality and justice is undermined when it denies "women equality of opportunity and access" (ICRN, 2024)¹, that "consideration of women only as deacons is in itself inadequate" and supports the repeal of Canon 1024 which excludes women from sacred ordination (CCRI, 2024)².

Despite Pope Francis' call at a meeting of the International Theological Commission (a body with only 5 women among its 28 strong membership) in November 2024 to "demasculinize the church"³, he has now stated that the ten study groups set up in the wake of the 2023

¹ International Church Reform Network (ICRN), *A Response to the Synthesis Report*, (2024). p.4

² Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI), *Agenda Issues for 2nd Assembly of the Synod on Synodality* (CCRI, 2024), p2.

³ 'Pope Francis wants to demasculinize the church', *America: The Jesuit Review* (2023), Available online: <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2023/12/07/pope-francis-demascualizing-church-women-246661>.

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Synod in order to examine 'controversial' topics in detail and enumerated in a letter in March 2024 to Cardinal Mario Grech, the Secretary General of the General Secretariat of the Synod, will not report, beyond "an initial account of their activity", to the second and final part of the Synod in October 2024.⁴ They will not therefore be voted on at this second Synod and will instead complete their mandates in June 2025. The work of the study groups should enable the Synod Assembly "to concentrate more easily in its second session on the general theme that I once assigned to it, and which can now be summarised in the question: How to be a synodal Church that goes out?" as the Pope outlined to Cardinal Grech.⁵ We are disappointed that the study group set up to consider Sections 8 and 9 of the Synthesis Report, which includes a discussion about 'Women in the Life and Mission of the Church' will not now be submitting a full report at the second Synod and that any proposals that emanate from it will not now be voted on.

We know from [Content Analysis of England and Wales Diocesan Synodal Reports](#) undertaken by Root & Branch Community for Reform in 2021 that equal ministry is supported by as much as 91% of laity in the dioceses in England and Wales and, from our international sister organisations, by an increasing number of lay Catholics, religious and clergy across the world. It is therefore deeply disappointing that this issue, which lies at the heart of a renewed church, has effectively been kicked into the long grass. The Report concedes that "clericalism, a chauvinist mentality and inappropriate expressions of authority continue to scar the face of the Church" (9f). It goes on to acknowledge a need to "avoid repeating the mistake of talking about women as an issue or a problem. Instead, ... to promote a Church in which men and women dialogue together, to understand more deeply the horizon of God's project, that sees them together as protagonists, without subordination, exclusion, and competition" (9h).

Catholic Women's Ordination is therefore disappointed that the only proposal in this section relating to women's ministry: "Theological and pastoral research on the access of women to the diaconate should be continued" (9n) appears to exclude any research or discussion in relation to women's ordination to the priesthood despite Jesus having considered "women his interlocutors" whom he "welcomed ... as disciples" (9a).

We will continue to pray, to challenge, to witness and to work across our church, with our international partner organisations, and ecumenically for this injustice to be righted. The Spirit filled gifts and charisms of women called to the priesthood by God cannot be allowed to be disregarded any longer.

Rhiannon Parry Thompson & Katharine Salmon: on behalf of Catholic Women's Ordination UK. May 2024.

⁴ Holy See Office. *Letter of the Holy Father to His Eminence Cardinal Mario Grech, 14.03.2024*, Available online: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/03/14/240314f.html>

⁵ Holy See Office. *Letter of the Holy Father to His Eminence Cardinal Mario Grech, 14.03.2024*, Available online: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/03/14/240314f.html>