



# **Simple practical synodality: Evaluating Synod 2021-24 from a lay movement perspective**

Stefan Gigacz, Australian Cardijn Institute, 16 December 2023

<https://synodality.substack.com/>

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## A synodal Mass at the Domitilla Catacombs





# Vatican II: Starting points for a synodal Church

People of God

Priesthood of the faithful/laity

**Vocation of the laity/lay apostolate**

Conscious participation, collaboration, cooperation, (co-)responsibility

Dialogue

**Organised lay people/groups**

Church in world



# 1. Contribution to the Synod

## A contribution to the Synod on Synodality 2023-24

*This contribution is submitted by a variety of individuals, movements, groups and networks from 34 countries, who are concerned to bring our reflections and proposals to the attention of participants in the Synod on Synodality 2023-24.*

Walking with lay people to foster their vocation and mission in the world and the Church

Lay people >99.9% of the “People of God”: 90% of lives at work, with families, in communities

Importance of movements, communities and organisations that promote this lay apostolate as understood in *Lumen Gentium* §31 and *Gaudium et Spes* §43

Yet since Vatican II: >emphasis on “ministry”; < emphasis on “lay apostolate” (non-reception)

Decline of lay movements: *Apostolicam Actuositatem* §26 not implemented; international mvts not represented at the Synod (only 3 compared to Vatican II 40)

<https://synodality.josephcardijn.com/>



# Response from Dicastery for Laity, Family & Life

On behalf of H.E. Card. Farrell, I would like to thank you for the e-mail addressed to him, in which you sent a contribution to the Dicastery on the lay faithful and the importance of their presence in ecclesial structures, on the occasion of the First Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Sinodality.

In this regard, I would like to thank you and all the Institutions that collaborated in this contribution, since it helps us to know better and better the apostolate that the Church carries out in your places. I would also like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to some of the points you mentioned in your contribution, via the Dicastery website. Indeed, on our website you will be able to see the majority presence of lay people among the officials and the superiors of the Dicastery, as well as the members and consultants, appointed by the Holy Father.

The site also contains the reports and proceedings of all the work carried out by the Dicastery in favor of lay associations, such as the Annual meetings with the moderators of associations, ecclesial movements, new communities or the recent International Conference for the co-responsibility between pastors and lay faithful.

I hope this information about our work to promote the secular identity and baptismal mission of lay people in Church and society will be of interest to you.

Yours in Christ,

Linda Ghisoni  
*Under-Secretary*



Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life  
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# Current dicastery structure: Clerical/Top-down

Movements are NOT represented, do not “have a part” in the Dicastery structure (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* §26)

Lay people are EMPLOYEES not REPRESENTATIVES of movements

Global South **under-represented**: Leadership: Ireland, Brazil, 2 Italy; Members (28) and consultors (9) = 37; Africa: 2 cardinals; Asia: 1 cardinal, 1 married couple; Europe: Spain 4, France 4, Italy 2; Americas: Argentina 3

[Italian/General Catholic Action](#) represented but NOT Specialised Catholic Action; New ecclesial movements highly represented...

<https://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/laityfamilylife/en/il-dicastero/membri-e-consultori.html>



# Back to the future with Vatican II

At Vatican II, movements fought for and Council proposed representative collaborative, participative, dialogical, “synodal” structures

Pope Paul VI’s motu proprio, [\*Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam\*](#), DID NOT fully implement Vatican II

Cardijn and movement leaders deeply disappointed with **non-representative 1967 Council of Laity model**

Minutes of first meeting of Council of Laity: Discussion of **closing down** Conference of International Catholic Organisations (ICOs)

*Apostolicam Actuositatem* §26

*Gaudium et Spes* §90



## Apostolicam Actuositatem §26: Laity in front

“In **dioceses**... there should be **councils** which assist the apostolic work of the Church either in the field of evangelisation and sanctification or in the charitable, social, or other spheres... **clergy and Religious should cooperate with the laity**... These councils will be able to promote the **mutual coordination** of various lay associations and enterprises.

“Councils of this type should be established as far as possible also on **the parochial, interparochial, and interdiocesan level** as well as in **the national or international sphere**.

“**A special secretariat** should be established at the Holy See for the **service and promotion of the lay apostolate**. It can serve as a **well-equipped center** for **communicating information** about the various apostolic programs of the laity, promoting research into modern problems arising in this field, and assisting the hierarchy and laity in their apostolic works with its advice. **The various movements and projects** of the apostolate of the laity throughout the world **should also be represented in this secretariat**, and here clergy and Religious also are to cooperate with the laity.”





## Gaudium et Spes §90: Strengthen int'l movements

“An outstanding form of international activity on the part of Christians is found in the joint efforts which... they contribute to institutes... for the encouragement of cooperation among nations. There are also **various Catholic associations on an international level** which can contribute in many ways to the building up of a peaceful and fraternal community of nations.

“**These should be strengthened** by augmenting in them the number of well qualified collaborators, by increasing needed **resources**, and by advantageously **fortifying the coordination of their energies**.

“The council... regards it as most opportune that **an organism of the universal Church** be set up in order that both the justice and love of Christ toward the poor might be developed everywhere. The role of such an organism would be to **stimulate the Catholic community** to promote progress in needy regions and international social justice.



# 1967 Mexican JOC proposal: Synodal/Bottom-up

“The lay members should be nominated as follows:

One part by the **Conference of International Catholic Organisations,**

Another part from representatives of different movements of the laity organised on a national level, with the provision for an **equal distribution according to continents, languages and kinds of apostolic movements;**

A third part, **a minority, of eminent catholic personalities chosen according to their personal competence.** The members from these two latter categories should be **chosen from lists presented by national Councils of the lay apostolate** mentioned in paragraph two of number 26 of the Conciliar Decree.

The president of this organisation should be a cardinal; it is advisable that there be an ecclesiastical vice-president and a lay vice-president together with a lay person who should be the secretary general.”



# Synodal change proposals

1. **More representation** of international movements at the **Second Assembly of the Synod**  
=> Religious congregations: 10 reps; => Lay movements > 10
2. Introduce process for participation by international movements: No process in prep doc:  
[https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2023-12-12\\_towards-2024/ENG\\_Document\\_TOWARDS-OCTOBER-2024\\_XVI\\_II-Session.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2023-12-12_towards-2024/ENG_Document_TOWARDS-OCTOBER-2024_XVI_II-Session.pdf)
3. Revive or launch a successor to the **Conference of International Catholic Organisations**
4. Renew Dicastery structure in line with AA26 as a horizontal, dialogue, collaboration body with a balanced **representation** of lay movements having a **genuine role**
5. Organise academic study of **movement synodality models**, e.g. priest as accompanist, not director



## 2. Synod synthesis





# Key ideas in the Synthesis of the First Assembly

Mission: 109

**Community: 94**

**Ministry: 76**

**Experience: 76**

**Women: 57**

Formation: 52

Pastoral: 42



# World

World 36 vs *Lumen Gentium* 79

*Gaudium et Spes*: Church in the world of today

Does this imply that the Synod's understanding of "mission" is narrower than that of Vatican II?



# Lay people: 99.9% of Church

Lay people/laity 29 vs *Lumen Gentium* 36

Bishop 70

Priest 26

Deacon 16

Minister 11

Consecrated 23



# The missionary role of lay people

“If mission is a grace that engages the whole Church, the lay faithful **contribute** in a vital way to realising it (i.e. the Church’s mission) in all environments and in **the most ordinary situations of every day life**.

“It is they above all who **make the Church present and announce the Gospel** in

the culture of the digital environment, which has such a strong impact throughout the world,

in youth cultures,

in the world of work, economics and politics, the arts and of culture, scientific research, education and formation,

in the care of the common home and, in particular, in participation in public life.”





# Clericalism

“There is also the danger, expressed by many at the Assembly, of ‘**clericalising**’ the laity, creating a sort of **lay elite** that perpetuates inequalities and divisions among the People of God.”

But what about the “clericalism” of the clergy?

What about the “clericalism” of the existing dicastery structures?



# Lay groups

Chapter 10: “Consecrated life and lay groups: a charismatic sign”: Why are “lay groups” lumped together with “consecrated” religious?

“With equal gratitude, the People of God recognises **the ferments of renewal** present in **communities that have a long history** and in the **flowering of new experiences** of ecclesial aggregation.

**Lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities** are a precious sign of the maturation of the co-responsibility of all the baptised.

Their value lies in the promotion of communion between different vocations, in the enthusiasm with which they announce the Gospel, in their proximity to those who experience economic or social marginalisation and in their commitment to promoting the common good.

They are often **models of synodal communion** and **participation in view of the mission**.



## Developing organic relationships

“At the level of both individual local Churches and groupings of Churches, the promotion of missionary synodality requires the institution and a **more precise configuration of Consultations and Councils** in which representatives of lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities converge to **promote organic relationships** between these realities and the life of the local Churches.”

=> Vaguely in line with *Apostolicam Actuositatem* §26

=> Need to spell out this configuration



## Community-oriented structures

“Pastoral structures must be reorganised in order to help **communities** to bring out, recognise and animate lay charisms and ministries, inserting them into the missionary dynamism of the synodal Church.

“Under the guidance of their pastors, communities will be able to send and support those they have sent.”

- Positive but no mention of the role of lay movements



## 3. Simple, practical synodality

Define and implement the **simple things** that contribute to a synodal Church

- Acknowledging and answering emails, responding on social media
- Establish dialogue channels (ICO Conference! Catholic NGO Forum!)

**Practise Catholic Social Teaching** IN the Catholic Church

- Just wages, limit wage differentials e.g. Mondragon: Max salary = 6x min salary
- Cooperative structures NOT capitalist structures

Revive the **theology of the laity and the lay apostolate** (vs theology of ministry) & movement history

Hold a **Catholic Social Forum** during the Second Assembly of the Synod in October 2024



# Walking together & Gathering in assembly

Synodality denotes the **particular style** that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the **People of God**

**journeying together** and

**gathering in assembly,**

**summoned** by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit **to proclaim the Gospel.**

Synodality ought to be expressed in **the Church's ordinary way of living and working.**



# References and Bibliography

## [Contribution to the Synod](#)

Specialised Catholic Action Movements, [Vatican laity body proposal 1964](#)

Joseph Cardijn, [Critique of the Council of the Laity 1967](#)

JOC Mexico, [Alternative proposal for Council of the Laity 1967](#)

Stefan Gigacz, [Synodal Reflections](#)

[Mass at the Catacombs 2023](#)



# Evaluating from a movement perspective

Local

Diocesan

National

Regional/Continental

Global