

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE SYNODAL PROCESS?

Fr Jock writes: *‘Last year we spent a lot of time and energy filling in questionnaire, gathering both in small groups and in larger meetings, listening to each other and sharing our joys and sorrows about our Church – before our parishes’ submission followed that of the archdiocese’s in being sent to the Synodal Office in Rome.*

Now we have moved on to the ‘continental’ phase – with Archbishop Leo and Sr Anna Marie McGuan among the 200 participants gathering this last week in Prague. (For more information about the Scottish input click www.archedinburgh.org/news-events)

Below is an interesting article about what has been happening in Prague.’

The mechanics of the European synodal assembly

by Malo Tresca in Prague | Czech Republic

Organizers of Europe's continental phase of the Synod have an ambitious working plan to ensure that voices from participants with very different sensibilities are balanced.

Illustration photo: Opening of the Synod in Prague, February 5, 2023.



The objective is to reflect on the future of the Church in the context of the World Synod launched in October 2021 by Pope Francis.

"We tore our hair out a bit, but it was worth it to persevere. I think we were able to come up with something that could work really well." Thus said a somewhat overwhelmed organizer of the unprecedented continental synodal assembly that has gathered nearly 600 European Catholics – 200 in Prague and nearly 400 online – from this past Sunday until February 12.

The objective? To reflect on the future of the Church in the context of the worldwide Synod that Pope Francis launched in October 2021.

Participants will continue reflections of the place of women, governance, concern for those on the peripheries and margins, the fight against clericalism, sexual abuse and many other issues. While

the diocesan phase surfaces many, and sometimes contradictory expectations, the exercise was tedious. In fact, it was necessary to ensure that the speaking time for participants of all sensitivities was balanced, to mix the different nationalities, to avoid the tendency of one or another group to monopolize the debate in a very fractured ecclesial landscape, etc.

"Spiritual conversation"

Faced with these challenges, the organizers of the continental event – coordinated by the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), in conjunction with the Czech Bishops' Conference and the Archdiocese of Prague – have devised a packed program. They are relying on a method of "spiritual conversation" that is unprecedented on this scale for the Church in Europe.

This work is being divided into two main parts. Participants from all walks of life – bishops, priests, religious and laypeople – will be able to dialogue with each other through various discussion formats in the first part from Monday to Thursday. Two representatives from each national delegation are invited to express, in six minutes, the questions raised in their ecclesial context by the continental document (DSC). The text, which is based on the contributions of 112 episcopal conferences from around the world, was released by the Vatican at the end of October.

Participants will then be divided into small groups – mixing nationalities, languages, states of life, and so on – to discuss their visions and expectations for the Church of tomorrow. Next, they will share with the others a summary of their discussions and the conclusions they have drawn from them.

While the organization of the session raised fears of a resurgence of tensions, "listening to the word of God and life experiences... creates this climate of communal discernment which must avoid the logic of opposition and superficial debates", said Mauricio López Oropeza, one of the coordinators for the continental stage, from the Synod's secretariat.

"Avoiding disputes"

"This method of working in small groups seems to me really relevant and effective to avoid arguing, and for exchanging our opinions in the tradition of listening and respect for the Church," Aleksander Bańka, representative of a large Polish lay association, told La Croix.

"Each intervention is interspersed with a small meditative pause or a prayer, which should allow the assembly to be in a truly spiritual dynamic – and, if ever needed, to calm things down," conceded one of the organizers.

One of the most anticipated moments of this new session will take place on Thursday when a text – produced by six writers of various nationalities – will be submitted to a vote of all the participants in Prague, according to modalities that remain to be specified. Afterwards, the presidents of the European bishops' conferences will meet behind closed doors until Saturday to produce a "commentary" on the document that will be sent to the Vatican.

Everything that will be discussed this week – as well as what has already been, or is to be, discussed in the next few weeks at the other six continental assemblies – will finally be examined again by representatives of all the world's bishops and others who will be gathering in Rome in October 2023 and 2024 for two assemblies of the Synod of Bishops.