



INTERNATIONAL UNION  
SUPERIORS GENERAL

**In conclusion I would like to offer a few thoughts on the significance of this Working Document for us as religious?**

Firstly it provides us with the opportunity to share this document widely especially with those who did not participate in the local consultation. They include those who feel alienated from the Church and those who felt skeptical about participating because they felt that their voices would not be heard or included. This document highlights the many groups of people who feel excluded and marginalized and we must seek them out – one by one, especially we are called to involve young people.

The document uses the phrase “the synodal journey marked the first steps of the return from the experience of collective exile.” (#24) We can point to this new moment in the church – a moment of novelty and freshness with a deep desire for radical inclusion. The image of the eggshell shattering (#23) is a powerful symbol of this new experience of walking together as brothers and sisters “who have received the blessing of baptism.....sharing and discerning the guidance of the Holy Spirit who calls us.....to communion, participation and mission.”

Secondly as religious women and men we have had experiences of “spiritual conversations” and discernment.” While the method of spiritual conversation was deeply appreciated in the local consultation it was noted that deep listening is not easy and needs practice. This is an area that requires formation because this way of proceeding can facilitate the participation of all in moments of discernment and decision-making in parishes, in various ministry contexts.

The opportunity for each person “to speak (without response), the deep listening by others and the discernment of the fruits of the group” (#109) need to become a habitual practice that can be used at different types of meetings. Bringing the Word of God to the centre of our reflection and sharing is important as we seek

to deepen unity in our diversity and cooperate with God's grace. In our different spiritual families and spiritualities can we make formation in and the practice of "spiritual conversations" and "discernment" part of our way of proceeding.

Thirdly the focus on diversity and the importance of recognizing that "the Church fulfils its mission within different cultural contexts" (#50) calls for "a more meaningful inter-cultural approach" (#53). Walking together begins by appreciating cultural differences but it call for much more - we are being called to create a new culture as we encounter one another (#53). This is call for deep personal and communal conversion where we face our sins of racism, xenophobia, stereotyping, tribalism etc. and ask for forgiveness of one another for our part in any exclusion or oppression. Many religious congregations have begun to educate their members in how to live and minister in multicultural contexts so that intercultural conversion and transformation takes place. Now is the time to share that leaning widely.

There are particular paragraphs that hold special resonance for religious life. #59 expresses a deep and energetic desire for renewed forms of leadership - priestly, episcopal, religious and lay. Such leadership is to be relational and collaborative, with forms of authority that generate solidarity and co-responsibility. There is a deep desire on the part of many to put their talents and gifts at the service of the Church and a desire for the exercise of leadership that enables such participation. #81 has a similar focus acknowledging that the adoption of an authentically synodal style calls for the participation of all members in the life of the community to which they belong. Note the reference to ALL members - this includes members of all ages because synodality in consecrated life affects discernment and decision-making and all voices need to be heard. The paragraph emphasizes the need for improvement with regard to participation in a more circular way moving away from away from a pyramidal style of governance.

Throughout the document a number of images are referenced:

- The tent (cloth, ropes and pegs) as a place of radical inclusion and participation
- The shattering eggshell as a symbol of new life
- The lamp to our steps - showing the importance of the Word
- The fruits and the weeds of synodality
- The open wound of abuse
- New Life unfurls its wings

- A refuge for the wounded
- Collective exile/home
- Horizons/peripheries.....and I am sure there are many others.

Let us explore these images both from a biblical and human perspective, listening deeply to the personal and collective stories that these images will evoke and how they will call us to conversion and transformation.

Finally throughout the document we come across the word DESIRE. These are holy desires. I suggest that we read the text noting each of these desires. Saint Teresa of Avila insisted on the explicit fostering of great desires. She wrote: “Let them begin with a sense of joyousness and freedom.....with great courage, full of desires to excel in God’s service, for His Majesty loves courageous and daring souls.”

Let us place before God each of the desires mentioned in the document. . . for individuals, for families, for groups and communities, for the Church . . . Let us have the courage to overcome all defeatism and pessimism. May we desire and hope for great things . . . as we continue this synodal journey “reading the Word of God and the signs of the times so as to move forward in the direction the Spirit is pointing us.” (#100)

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