



The Church is your home ***The contribution of people with disabilities to the Synod on Synodality***

19 May 2022

An online listening session, lasting about two hours, was held yesterday afternoon on the theme "The Church is your home. The contribution of people with disabilities to the Synod on Synodality" promoted by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life in collaboration with the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

The session, attended by representatives of bishops' conferences and international associations, aimed to "give voice" directly to people with disabilities, faithful who are often on the margins of our Churches. Although many of them have already been involved in the meetings promoted by parishes, dioceses and associations, the meeting was in fact the launch of a true international synodal process dedicated to them.

In a dynamic of dialogue, approximately 30 participants with sensory, physical or cognitive disabilities - connected from more than 20 countries around the world - were able to express themselves in their own languages (including three sign languages) in sight of the joint drafting of a document to answer the synod's fundamental question: *How are we walking with Jesus and our brothers and sisters to proclaim Him? For the future, what is the Spirit asking our Church to grow in our journey with Jesus and with our brothers and sisters to proclaim Him?*

Four moving testimonies from Liberia, Ukraine, France and Mexico drew attention about the need to overcome discrimination, exclusion and paternalism. Very touching were the words of a French catechist with Down syndrome: 'At birth, I could have been aborted. I am happy to live,' she said, 'I love everyone and I thank God for creating me'. Consecrated, she received a double mandate from her bishop: prayer and evangelisation.

At the opening, Card. Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, shared his personal experience: 'I'm in debt to people with disabilities. One of them lead me to path priestly vocation. If the face of the disabled brother or sister is discarded, it is the Church that becomes disabled'.

The Secretary of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello, told the participants that in the synodal process the challenge is to "overcome every prejudice of those who believe that those who have difficulty expressing themselves doesn't have a thought of their own, nor anything interesting to communicate".

In closing, Sr. Nathalie Becquart, Undersecretary of the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, proposed that participants observe a moment of silence, to "hear," she said, "how the Holy Spirit has spoken to each one. There are treasures of humanity that have been shared and are offered to the Church".

The participants were invited to elaborate in the coming months a common document based on their experiences and knowledge of the world of disability that they have gained first-hand and through their pastoral commitment. The document will then be delivered to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops to be considered in the continuation of the synodal path.

The meeting is part of a path started in December 2021 by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life with the video campaign #IamChurch, on the ecclesial protagonism of people with disabilities and desires to be a response to the appeal of the Pope in *Fratelli Tutti* (n.98) when he invites communities to "give voice" to those "hidden exiles" ...who feel they exist without belonging and without participating". "The goal," the Holy Father continues, "is not just assistance, but 'active participation in the civil and ecclesial community."

The process will be concluded in the coming months with a presential meeting in Rome.

Photos of the meeting are available through this link: <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjzQCVg>.

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