

STUDY GROUPS

on relevant questions from the *Synthesis' Report* of the First Session
of the XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

**FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH:
COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION**

STUDY GROUP N. 2 TO HEAR THE CRY OF THE POOR AND THE EARTH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

[Original text: English.]

Study Group 2 explored how the Church can deepen its listening to the interconnected cries of the poor and the earth. Its Final Report begins with a reflective Preamble by Cardinal Michael Czerny, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Part 1 of the Report outlines how the Study Group carried out its work, the limitations and lessons learned, while Part 2 provides a synthesis of recommendations responding to the five questions entrusted to the group. Six appendices offer reflections and further details of recommendations.

Methodology

Study Group 2's methodology was grounded in synodal principles: participation, diversity, encounter, discernment, and collaboration. Its membership brought together clergy, lay experts, theologians, and pastoral practitioners from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, North America, and Oceania, deliberately ensuring diversity of geography, vocation, lived experience, and gender parity. The group met 23 times via Zoom from July 2024 to October 2025, supported by Dicastery staff.

Two specialised subgroups were formed. The Disability Subgroup, largely composed of persons with disabilities, contributed expertise and drafted Appendix B while the Theology Subgroup, composed of theologians engaged with communities experiencing poverty or marginalisation, drafted Appendix E.

The Study Group used multiple methods to gather global insights including:

- Analysis of Synod-generated materials which showed that they raised significant questions rather than offering answers, signalling a need for deeper listening and research.
- Four short surveys sent in five languages to bishops, ministries, organisations, theologians, formators, and Dicastery staff exploring obstacles to listening, effective practices, proposals for new structures, and reflections on formation.
- A session during the Second Assembly of the Synod.
- A worldwide call for written submissions.

- Partnering with USIG in a formation survey of Women's Religious Institutes that generated more than 200 responses, contributing richly to the analysis of Question 5 (Appendix F).
- A global feedback loop that circulated draft recommendations widely producing responses from every continent, including 21 Bishops Conferences and 15 organisations and individuals, ensuring global testing and refinement of proposals.

The Study Group identifies several constraints that shaped its work including:

- Geographical gaps, particularly lacking a Middle Eastern member despite receiving some input from the region.
- Linguistic limitations, as English was the working language, affecting the depth of integration of insights expressed in other languages.
- Insufficient time and resources for culturally appropriate consultation with Indigenous communities, whose protocols require extended relational processes.
- Scope boundaries, intentionally excluding topics such as digital listening and LGBTQIA+ issues, which were expected to be addressed by other Study Groups.
- Limited time for a fully circular synodal process, which would have required more extensive local engagement and feedback loops with communities made poor or marginalised.

Several cross-cutting insights emerge from reflection on the group's own synodal process:

- Synodality requires time, trust, and diversity: Truly synodal work depends on patient relationship-building across cultures and states of life, with an intentional effort to include women and people with lived experience of marginalisation.
- Listening must be relational and participatory: Authentic listening demands sustained, mutual relationships, especially with people who are poor, marginalized, or excluded. Structures alone cannot substitute for relational encounter.
- Listening to the earth requires new capacities: The group noted gaps in how local churches currently listen and respond to the cry of the earth, suggesting a need for new skills and deeper ecological awareness.
- Examples must be offered with care: The group struggled to balance the need for concrete examples with the risk of unintentionally privileging certain contexts. General principles were therefore emphasised to support contextual adaptation.
- Synodal processes are open-ended: Genuine encounter and listening unfold through iterative feedback loops, not linear planning. The group emphasised humility, openness to conflict, and trust in the Holy Spirit in discerning next steps.

Synthesis of Recommendations

Part 2 of the Report gathers the recommendations developed through the Study Group's listening and discernment. They respond to five overarching questions given to the Study Group

related to listening, linking community and service, networking, theological research, and formation.

Listening: Existing and New Means (Question 1)

Key themes included that: the Church already listens through parishes, ministries, participatory bodies, Indigenous Catholic groups, safeguarding structures, and international networks; listening must expand beyond passive consultation to deeper mutual relationships confronting fears, biases, and structural barriers; and the interconnection of the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth must be more intentionally integrated. Appendix A details the Church's existing spaces, times, and processes of listening, while identifying obstacles and proposing improvements.

The 11 recommendations concerning means of listening included:

- Establishment of online platforms to share global examples of good practice (e.g., Laudato Si' Action Platform).
- Encouragement of use of the Mass for the Care of Creation during the Season of Creation.
- Expansion of inclusiveness in participatory bodies, ensuring representation of vulnerable groups, women, and those from territories affected by climate change and conflict.
- Establishment of regional or international structures for listening to Indigenous Peoples and monitoring caste-based discrimination.
- Creation of an Ecclesial Observatory on Disability and adaption of this model locally to listen to other marginalised groups.

Linking Community and Service (Question 2)

Key messages were that social ministry cannot be delegated; all Christians bear responsibility for listening and responding and that two-way communication between parishes, ministries, bishops, and agencies is essential for shared mission. Appendix C emphasizes that responding to the cries of the poor and the earth is integral to the mission of the entire Christian community, not just specialists.

The 3 recommendations concerning linking community and service addressed:

- Strengthening communication and collaboration among pastors, bishops, ministries, and agencies.
- Requiring ongoing formation in social and ecological justice for pastoral personnel, with direct experiences of listening and encounter.
- Providing spiritual and pastoral support—chaplains, pastoral workers, theologians—to accompany those working in charitable and justice ministries.

Networking Initiatives and Rights-Based Advocacy (Question 3)

Key themes were that: the cries of the poor and the earth must be addressed together, not separately, recognising their structural interconnections; networking—across dioceses, regions, religious traditions, and civil society—strengthens effectiveness; and reflection, evaluation, gender analysis, and transparency are essential to improving listening and action. Appendix D stresses that

charitable works, advocacy, research, and ecological care must be interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

The Report's 7 recommendations concerning networking and combining different kinds of initiatives included:

- Promotion of integrated responses to both cries, using expertise and multi-level networking.
- Formation in Catholic Social Teaching of those engaged in social ministry, advocacy, conflict resolution, and alliance-building.
- Supporting spiritual nourishment and communal discernment practices, including spiritual conversation methods.

Theological Research That Listens (Question 4)

Key messages were that the lived experience of the poor and the earth is a privileged locus of theological wisdom and insight, and that theologians must cultivate intercultural competence, deepen relationships with marginalized communities, and work in transdisciplinary ways. Appendix E presents a vision for a synodal theology rooted in encounter with communities made poor and ecological communities.

The Report's 7 recommendations concerning how theological research can listen to what those made poor and the earth have to teach include:

- Appointment of theologians from poor, marginalized, or underrepresented communities to advisory bodies across all levels of the Church.
- Facilitation of access to theological education for lay people, especially women from marginalized communities.
- Creation of global networks linking theologians with organisations working with people who are poor or ecological communities.
- Strengthening dialogue among poor communities, Christians of other confessions, and interreligious partners on issues of marginalisation and ecology.
- Enhancing communication training for theologians, including digital and pastoral communication.

Formation for Listening to the Poor and the Earth (Question 5)

Key themes were that formation should be shared across vocations—lay, religious, and ordained—fostering mutual esteem and collaboration and that listening must be taught explicitly, not assumed, and its transformational impact must be evaluated. Appendix F identifies practices that support formation for listening and highlights the need to integrate listening across intellectual, spiritual, relational, and experiential dimensions.

The Report's 20 recommendations concerning the crucial area of formation included:

- Prioritising direct encounters with people made poor and vulnerable ensuring a diversity of voices such as women, children, Indigenous communities, and creation itself are heard.
- Recognizing persons made poor as agents of evangelisation, not just recipients of service.

- Teaching listening as integral to Catholic Social Teaching, advocacy, and spiritual discernment.
- Integrating ecological and social concerns.
- Ensuring access to formation for those on the margins, especially First Nations peoples, women, and people with disabilities.
- Providing resources for listening, intercultural competency, gender and cultural analysis, and responsiveness to the cry of the earth.

Conclusion

The Report articulates a synodal vision of listening that is relational rather than merely procedural, inclusive and attentive to those most often unheard, integrated across ministries, disciplines, and levels of the Church, and committed to ongoing conversion through encounter, discernment, action, and evaluation.

The Study Group sought to model the very synodal dynamics it recommends; diverse participation, humble learning, listening across boundaries, and responsiveness to the concrete cries of people and the earth. Its recommendations offer strategic pathways for strengthening the Church's capacity to become ever more a community that listens with the heart of Christ.