

Articulating Ecclesial Synodality and Episcopal Assemblies in Europe
A contribution of Justice and Peace Europe to the Continental Assembly of the Synod on Synodality, Prague 5 – 9 February 2023

Justice and Peace Europe is the European network of about thirty national Justice and Peace Commissions in Europe. It is our goal to promote the Social Teaching of the Church in the European context.

In its no 76 the DCS says that the “Continental Stage, through the proposed ecclesial and episcopal assemblies, will offer the opportunity to work out in grounded and practical terms how to articulate ecclesial synodality and episcopal collegiality”. Indeed, we are aware of the ecclesial novelty we are experiencing during these days. It is a sort of an experiment we are living here. And like so many of you I am amazed about what is happening here among us. On Sunday I arrived somewhat intimidated and, yes, fearful: So many unknown faces, so many languages. And then in the course of the days I could add more and more names to the faces, and more and more stories to the names and the faces. Although limited in time, we are forming an ecclesial community of its own kind, an ecclesial community *sui generis* at the level of our continent. One could say the ecclesial experiment is successful.

How to go on from here? Let me suggest to you the following idea:

An ecclesial assembly for Europe

In November 2021 the first ecclesial assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Mexico in view of the forthcoming synod. Following on the general assemblies of the region’s bishops that structured the ecclesial life in the past, this first ecclesial assembly brought together bishops, together with priests, religious and laity in order to discuss the pastoral priorities in the Latin American and Caribbean countries for the coming years. Could we consider this first ecclesial assembly as a model and a prophetic gathering, which also holds a message for the Church in Europe?

We believe that an ecclesial assembly, called to foster mutual co-operation and understanding in a shared missionary response by the Church in Europe would be a gift of the Holy Spirit. It could take place in 2025. Sixty years after the Ecumenical Council proclaimed the Pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* this Ecclesial Assembly could gather to share “the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time”. We could listen to the cry of the poor and the Earth in Europe and the world, we could pray and work together for Justice and Peace.

This is our first proposal, which we humbly submit to this wonderful continental assembly.

The synodal path for dialogue with society

Europe, its people and governments, have been able to establish a form of cooperation which is unprecedented in history. The Council of Europe, the European Union and the Organisation for Cooperation and Security (OSCE) have been created successively in order to promote democracy and human rights, to further prosperity and social justice and to secure peace and security. These international organization, and especially the European Union, are a unique feature of political cooperation among states in the world. In their uniqueness they have been positively acclaimed by successive Popes. Today they are challenged by the reality of a brutal war of aggression by Russia against Ukraine.

We think that there is also an opportunity to enhance the synodal path in the dialogue of the Church with these political organisations. In particular, the Commission of Bishops' Conferences in the European Union (COMECE), which brings together bishop delegates of the episcopal conferences and episcopates in the EU, has played a major role in the development and continuation of the dialogue with the institutions of the European Union. Over the years it has called upon and integrated into its commissions and working groups the competence, experience and professional skills of women and men throughout Europe. In the future laity and religious could enhance the assembly of COMECE and, thus, strengthen the synodal path at the European level when it comes to dialogue with EU institutions and European society.

This is our second proposal.

Thank you

Stefan Lunte
(Secretary General of Justice and Peace Europe)