

1st World Meeting of Professional Lay Ministers

1.–5.10.2023

First World Meeting of Professional Lay Ministers

Letter to the Synod Participants

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are professional ministers empowered by baptism, theologically trained, and called to serve the mission of Christ in and on behalf of the Church. We come from Austria, Bolivia, Germany, Ghana, India, Korea, the Philippines, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the United States. We serve as lay ecclesial ministers, pastoral workers, religious educators, chaplains and in many other roles. In a spirit of synodality, we gathered from October 1st–5th in Rome in order to reflect on our joys and challenges as professional ministers and to articulate our hopes for the Synod in journeying toward an “all ministerial” missionary Church.

We spent time praying together, sharing our stories and diverse experiences in ministry, listening for the Spirit in silence, and discerning through a synodal process with the guidance of the Instrumentum Laboris. In this same synodal spirit, we share with you our joys, challenges, and hopes, and invite you to carry these with you along the synodal path.

With joy we respond to the gift and grace of our call to serve the People of God, as did our ancestors in the faith. Encouraging us on this path are:

- Our ability to accompany and lead the faithful into the ever-evolving reality of the Church in the world with all the newness and opportunity it brings.
- The richness of our theological preparation, education, and formation for professional service in the name of the Church.
- Co-responsible, collaborative relationships with colleagues, ordained and non-ordained, and, for some of us, formal authorization to ministry.
- The opportunity to actively contribute to the realization of a synodal Church by cultivating the seeds of synodal thinking and methodologies in the fertile soil of our continents, now, and well into the future.

But we are confronted with challenges:

- There is a lack of recognition and acceptance of the value and importance of professional ministers in the Church. There are many who struggle due to the lack of proper structures and financial support for professional ministers.
- Clericalism is a threat to a synodal Church and has led to an abuse of power in a way that has affected and damaged relationships and discouraged laity participation and ministries. Combined with patriarchal mindsets, it has posed severe challenges to women and

persons who identify with the LGBTQ+ community. Women also feel marginalized when it comes to access to theological formation and opportunities of working in Church structures.

- Professional ministers play a major role in the life of the Church but at times they are not given the space and trust to serve the People of God in the liturgy, academy, social work and other pastoral fields.

It is our hope that a synodal Church becomes a reality in our midst, through and with professional ministers:

- We hope however, that communion be experienced through a Church that walks with the people, in fraternity and not elite separation. Thus, we seek authentic gender justice and inclusion in the Church manifested in listening, dialogue, and communal discernment.
- We see our mission in support of a diversity of ministries that recognize the needs of the community and respond to the signs of the times. Thus, we hope that the whole sacramental life of the Church be freshly considered through these diverse ministries. Further, formation in authority and responsibility be reflected in all areas of life of the Church.
- We hope for a Church of participation, co-responsibility, co-decision-making, and mutual empowerment. Thus, we need to rethink existing structures and systems that promote division and clericalism, and instead we need to awaken the importance of the role of the laity.

We commit ourselves and our work to share our joys, overcome these challenges, and realise our hopes for the whole of the Church and its mission. We do not see the 1st World Meeting of Professional Lay Ministers as an end, but rather as the 'beginning of a beginning'. To participate and enrich the mission of the Church, we will create a world network of professional ministers and continue our journey together and work to co-create a synodal Church for the good of all and our Common Home.

Rome, on the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi, 04 of October 2023

The participants of the 1st World Meeting of Professional Lay Ministers

Pedro Alvarez (Bolivia), Patricia Bauer (Austria), Christian Bauer (Germany), Thomas Bergmeister (Germany), Fredy Bihler (Switzerland), Konstantin Bischoff (Germany), Cirilo Boloron (Austria), Jessica Joy Candelario (Philippines), Emmanuel Zumabakuro Dassah (Ghana), Grace David (India), Gabriele Eder-Cakl (Austria), Johannes Frenz (Germany), Esther Göbel (Germany), Edward Hahnenberg (USA), Isabelle Molz (Germany), Regina Nagel (Germany), Bibiana Joohyun Roh (South Korea), Hildegard Scherer (Germany), Danilo Siter (Slovenia), Karoline Wilkens (Germany), and others.

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