

Synodal process on Synodality- a CIDSE contribution

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INTRODUCTION

If Synodality is to walk together, journey together, and listen to each other, then we must also be attuned to the cries we are hearing. We, as people of the Church, as one human family, must hear the cries of racism, of exclusion and violence towards one another, of the grave inequalities experienced by women, as well as the cries of the planet in its richness and biodiversity. To all of these cries we must respond together, in solidarity and out of love. We must defend those we love and what we love, and we must apply this to people of all cultures, and especially the most marginalised, as well as to the living organisms that are part of Creation with us. We must celebrate this great diversity, and learn to share this earth with one another, in a culture of care, in a gentle song of harmony, all voices and rhythms growing and swelling from the land and forests and oceans together, not trying to dominate or overpower, but blending in our distinct chords to form one melody. This music of harmony and understanding, and justice, and solidarity is what can heal our broken relationships as humanity, with the earth, and with each other, as well as within our Church. We at CIDSE, are just a few voices, but we join ours to the multitude of those from our sisters and brothers across all continents. This house of ours needs repairing. It needs healing through global solidarity, social justice, peace, equality, and dignity. All of this begins with Love.

Who is CIDSE?

Since our very early days, we have been and continue to be an international family of Catholic social justice organisations. We are a network of 18 members in Europe and North America and an international secretariat in Brussels. Our members' partners work in nearly 120 countries and territories worldwide.

We work together with global partners and allies to promote justice, harness the power of global solidarity and create transformational change to end poverty and inequality. We do this by challenging systemic injustice and inequity as well as the destruction of nature. We promote just and environmentally sustainable alternatives. We believe in a world where every human being has a right to live in dignity.

Our mission, values, and principles are inspired by the Gospel and drawn from Catholic Social Teaching, which continues to evolve and serve as our compass for social justice and solidarity. We are part of a worldwide community of faith, commitment, learning, and action that is open to working with all people and groups of good will.

The CIDSE secretariat is a facilitator and initiator, contributes to leadership in implementing decisions taken by the network and can act on behalf of the network, but CIDSE is the sum of its parts and more, where members inspire each other and form a stronger presence when working together, as well as with allies and partners.

What the Synod on Synodality means to CIDSE

CIDSE had the honour of sending a representative to the Synod on the Amazon in October 2019. Over two hundred people came together for three weeks to discuss Integral Ecology, the Amazon and the Church. In the spirit of *Laudato Si'*, this Synod embodied the idea that we cannot disconnect our pastoral and spiritual needs and selves from the environment in which we live and breathe. Integral ecology teaches us that there is only one complex and interconnected crisis. The way we treat each other is linked to the way we treat creation as a whole.

Connecting means listening

The expertise of the 230 Synod participants was humbling. They told of the threat of foreign corporations, the oppression of indigenous culture, the destruction of our Mother Earth, the violence of everyday life in the Amazon, but also of the strength of community and their faith. The participants inside the Synod auditorium were only part of the story. Synodality, as Pope Francis calls it, requires that all voices be heard with humility. The Synod was a process that began over a year earlier with listening to the Pan-Amazonian communities. That original spirit of engagement, inclusion, listening and respect was carried into the Synod Hall. And so, the stories we shared and listened to were not only those of the 87,000 people who participated in the consultation process leading up to the Synod, but also those of the communities who preceded us and those we meet every day. There were also crucial, caring voices outside the Vatican walls. Hundreds of people came to Rome during the Synod to participate in the "Amazonía Casa Común", a space of prayer, solidarity and action for the Amazon with parallel events. These extraordinary people kept us in a sacred circle and protected us within the Synod from criticism, negativity, ignorance and doubt. Through their love and prayers they kept us strong, stable and peaceful and enabled us to focus on the inner discussions.

Raw power from the bottom up

Colonialism was an intense central theme, with the voices of indigenous and traditional peoples guiding us throughout all our discussions. We explored its continuing impact in international relations, trade and the exploitation of people and resources in the Amazon. The voices, knowledge and experiences of indigenous and traditional peoples - their rights, culture, suffering, spirituality, courage and history - were central. This is part of a deeper and longer

process of decolonisation: we must allow these messages to transform us and create space for our collective and individual conversion.

This conversion reveals to us the responsibility of our privileged societies - especially in Europe and North America - for our extractivist economy, our consumerist desires and the threat to life in the Amazon. We are clearly called to radically change our lifestyle, our economy and our politics. Justice is not an option, but a fundamental principle of our faith. Our conversion is necessary so that we can reconcile with our Creator, our brothers and sisters, the earth and all life on earth, and also future generations.

We were deeply inspired and impressed by the women present. These women from all parts of the Amazon reflected many different views and identities: indigenous, lay and religious. They were strong, listened to, paid respect and called for action. The raw power of their courageous testimonies in and out of Synod discussions, and their invaluable contribution to the life of the Church in the Amazon, show a love for humanity and for our common home that came through with passion and urgency.

Always forward, always changing

Almost all of the issues discussed at the Amazon Synod are of direct relevance to the work and mission of church actors worldwide: extractivism, ecological justice and conversion, intergenerational justice, systemic change and the urgent need to transform Western lifestyles, the protection and defense of human rights and social justice, integral ecology and species conservation, and human dignity. There is a risk that the strong appeals of this Synod will end up being silenced by a part of the Church in the Amazon, which has been preferring omission to prophetic commitment. This teaches us the importance of considering every Synod as a process, which needs to be cultivated and nurtured also after the celebration of its Assembly.

For this reason, these issues need more allies inside and outside the Church. Working for transformative change requires just relationships with one another and in all working alliances. We must reach out inside and outside the Church to build on our shared values and strengths and move forward together. The Church must not be silent, must not lose heart, and must not lose sight of its commitment to carry these messages of justice and a fraternal way of life to all territories. Too many human lives have already been threatened or killed in the name of progress, and too many beings of the divine creation are currently and will be in danger.

After the Amazon Synod, another important event marked the Latin American Church: during 2021, the Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean was a wider synodal experience, involving also many of CIDSE local partners as a step forward in building participation and co-responsibility in the Church. The coming Synod on Synodality is the next great learning step for us as a global community of faith, journey and solidarity, in the aftermath of a pandemic and in the face of war that once again brutally demonstrates the links between our actions, economic dependencies and lifestyle issues. In the face of politics shaped by

geopolitical and economic power interests, it requires us as a Church to build solidarity and to draw courage and hope from Christian faith and to pass it on to others. We need spaces for a free and respectful exchange, we need love for one another, we need hope for a future worth living, where life in fullness is possible for all.

As CIDSE, we have walked the synodal path, through our relationships to partners around the world.

We have had numerous experiences over the many decades of international cooperation of listening, learning, sharing and growing together with others. The cooperation that builds on this offers the possibility of breaking down the sometimes visible, but often unconscious structure of inequality characterized by an unjust distribution of power in the world and also in access to economic resources, leading to true fraternity. The universal Church must also finally eliminate the hidden and obvious structures of racism and discrimination against women.

The universal Church, understood as a community of faith, solidarity and journey, demands that we, after living in countries that are in many respects largely responsible for the current crises, humbly and prayerfully offer spaces and auditoriums to those who for a very long time have had too little or no hearing at all. Those brothers and sisters who pay the price for our greed, our ignorance, our self-centeredness, our convenience. We are interdependent. We need each other and this is not weakness but strength. It is the beginning of the healing we must engage in together to repair our Common Home and our Family that is the Church.

PROCESS AND INVOLVEMENT

How we reflected on Synodality together

The CIDSE family and network has been attentive to the call to integrate synodality as a structural principle of the Church and has used all places of encounter in committees and work units to continue this inspiration. In joint meetings, the requirements, the pitfalls but also the importance of the action of the Holy Spirit were recognised and integrated. Our service as God's witnesses for a fraternal world in justice and love for creation became even more intensely perceptible and also more lively. We have embraced the process and the approach of synodality in our new strategy, in our way of meeting and encountering others, and we cherish the learning we have acquired from one another – across cultures, across roles, across generations.

How our members have been involved across Europe and in North America

Since most of the CIDSE members have an active base of committed volunteers on the one hand and at the same time maintain relations with clergy interested in the world church and

development policy, there was a great effort to use the process for discussions, resonance spaces and motivation. This happened within the framework of local church involvement and not infrequently led to submissions to the national bishops' conference or even inclusion in diocesan or national church consultation processes. CIDSE members encouraged their volunteers to participate actively in parish discussions and offered opportunities to inform volunteers and others interested about the progress of the diocesan process. Some members also held their own Synodal sessions with gatherings of volunteers and in conjunction with other Catholic agencies, with wider gatherings.

How our partners and allies have been involved around the world

This also applied to the partner organisations that were involved in processes in their countries and local churches or initiated some themselves. The aim was to go to the margins of society, to give the marginalised a space in which they could raise their voices with equal rights. The culture of communicating and deciding with each other, refined by this inspiration, has already brought about a change in togetherness and attentiveness to each other, even if it cannot be denied that structures of exercising power or attitudes of economic or ethnic superiority could not be eliminated everywhere, but still require further time and attention.

As CIDSE, we worked with ENA (Ecclesial Network of Alliances) as well as participated in the synodal reflections of the regional territorial spaces (RAOEN and ELSiA) and exchanged between the territories represented in ENA what this synodal path meant to us. We all agreed that global solidarity and social justice must be the key messages we would bring to the process. And we agreed that though our voices would sound different and each would speak in their own words, that it was critical and essential that we reflect back that we were one family and that we had listened to each other. Beyond regional concerns, there are global human concerns and we have identified some of these questions which are part of the crisis of solidarity and justice that we are facing on earth right now.

What we bring to the Synod

We believe our work embodies the justice, compassion and solidarity that are core to the Gospels. We can offer the Church our experience and practice in education and social action to express solidarity with our sisters and brothers in all parts of the world. Through our members and partners, we celebrate the diversity of God's people. Our approach to working in partnership embodies the spirit of accompaniment that Pope Francis calls us to realise – we are journeying together with our sisters and brothers.

Through the process of listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit, we have learned that we could do much more – we are called to help others, to share the earth's resources and to treat each other as equals. By listening and being attentive to one another, as the Synodal process has shown us, we can truly journey together.

Emerging questions and themes

The following questions are how we deconstruct the current integrated crises: ecological and human. We must address them in a systemic and integral way – together – as sisters and brothers.

Climate crisis and loss of biodiversity

Climate science is clear: there are just a few years left with current carbon budget reserves to stay within the 1.5°C limit. Green House Gas (GHG) emissions continue to rise alongside multiple crises of energy poverty, hunger injustice, inequality, and human rights violations that are rooted at the core of our current social, economic, and political system.

As we cannot solve one of those crises at the expense of the others, and as the window of opportunity to tackle climate change is shrinking, we urgently need to act. These times require thorough proposals for an ecological transition – alternative models that can answer the needs of the vulnerable communities that are at the frontlines of climate change, without having contributed to global emissions. Climate mitigation and adaptation are core objectives at the center of the models we propose for just and sustainable production of food and energy.

At the same time, we can no longer stand by while the biodiversity of the planet is under such severe threat. We are living with great loss, grieving, and fear for our planet and life on this planet. We also know that the creatures that live with us help us live and need us now to defend them as well. Our lifestyles are of consumption and of a throwaway culture but we are also throwing cultures away, because as species disappear, so do medicines that will no longer save our lives and so will plants and animals who once fed people around the world. The unlimited greed for minerals, with particular emphasis on gold and also strategic minerals for the energy transition, increasingly threatens communities and territories. We are making ourselves sick with our own extractivist and violent practices. We must stop. We must change. We must act now and we must act together.

Land grabbing and deforestation

The last twenty years have seen the rapid acquisition of large plots of land in the global south by national and international elites, often referred to as land grabbing. Land grabbing can be defined as the control of land – whether through ownership, lease, concession, contracts, quotas, or general power – for purposes of speculation, extraction, resource control or

commodification. Land grabbing is a violation of human rights by threatening access to food and livelihoods. The new land proprietors often favor profitable export of their crops or minerals over feeding the hungry. Peasant farmers lose access to their land and thus their income and nutrition. The environmental health of the land is compromised as industrial forms of agriculture are implemented. We cannot feed ourselves if we see land as a commodity and as a means of making profit. The whole food system is broken and a source of global injustice and concentration of power. Again, we must listen to the voices of communities and sources of traditional wisdom, but we must also put people and planet before profit and focus on sufficiency and creative solutions which do not take us beyond planetary boundaries and natural cycles of regeneration.

Indigenous rights and position as guardians of the forest and oceans

As Pope Francis had his visit to Canada, to meet with the Indigenous peoples, we see this Synod as an opportunity to acknowledge once again the position and role the Church has sometimes played in denying the humanity and integrity of Indigenous peoples and their cultures, but also as a moment to lift up their wisdom and knowledge about caring for Creation. We know that the best way to save this planet and to slow ecological collapse is to defend the rights of Indigenous and Traditional Peoples. We know that they have been the guardians of the forest and oceans. We have heard from our partners, sisters, and brothers in the Amazon, but also in the Pacific islands, and in the Congo Basin, that we cannot continue on this path of exploitation of resources. We know that we must radically shift our ways. The Church must be a place where these voices can be heard and can lead us to living in harmony with Creation. Respect for and celebration of Indigenous rights and cultures must be part of that transformation.

Decolonizing systems of power and upholding women's voices and leadership

Political and decision-making systems are currently perpetuating injustice and violence but we must work together to transform them so that they are rooted in people's sovereignty and self-determination, as well as their own cultural dreams. Patriarchal and other discriminatory structures of power and oppression will need to be dismantled to allow an enabling environment for gender equality and justice. All people must be considered as valued and loved. Their voices must have an opportunity to be heard if we are to emerge from our current crises. Pain and exploitation from the past and current unjust systems – built on the foundations of colonialism must be recognized through truth, in order to allow for us all to heal together and build a new dream of justice, harmony, and peace. Those of us who have benefited from the unequal distribution of power and resources must now listen and be prepared to share the space and cede it when necessary. There is room for everyone at the table, and we must share our meal together, and celebrate every person as a full member of the family.

Transforming economic and political systems and the urgent need to act and engage

Economic and political systems are leading to ecocide and human rights violations around the world. They are rooted in the same historic injustices that are destroying the planet and feeding violence and conflict. We must come together to propose new ways: just, sustainable and transformative alternatives and we must do this by putting our energies together as a community, as a human family, across generations and cultures.

We believe the Church needs to be more politically engaged in the social justice issues of the age, to be good news for and fighting for the poor and marginalized, to stand for justice. This will particularly attract younger people, who are as seized by injustice as every previous generation. We want to support and encourage much greater focus on the Prophet and King elements of the Church's mission, where the Prophet tells truth to power, crying out in the wilderness the injustices of the world and is political (there is no more political text than the Gospels) and the King cares for those in our midst – the poor, the needy and the vulnerable.

CONCLUSIONS

Communion

In a Synodal Church – we walk together, in truth, in community, and in reconciliation. We listen to each other and we listen to the creatures and life around us in our Common Home. We listen to the cries of the Earth as well as to the cries of our sisters and brothers. We know that we all need each other, that we are vulnerable as individuals but strong as a human family and are capable of making profound transformations and of being converted. We can learn from one another and take courage in each other.

Participation

All members of the human family must be invited into the discussion. We must listen to all voices, and especially those who have been marginalized, forgotten or given second, and even last place up till now. We dream of a Church that is welcoming, inclusive, respectful of the dignity of all. We dream of a Church where the voices of women are not silenced or forgotten, but listened to and celebrated. We dream of a Church who leads the fight against racism and discrimination and leads in a culture of care, compassion, and love, but also truth and justice. Our Church has the courage to keep the conversation going, keep the dialogue open with others and within, so that we may continue to grow together.

Mission

We dream of our Church leading on the issues that are fundamental to humanity. We must stand up and fight against injustice, fight for social justice and global, intergenerational, intercultural justice. Our Church can be prophetic and propositional. A Church of powerful words that inspire and of humble but courageous actions that carry us forward and bring others along with us. We can be contagious in our joy and in knowing that the transformations we must undergo will bring us peace and justice.