

National/International Report

Synod working paper 'collects' local church responses

By John Thavis

Vatican City (NC) — The working document for the October synod on the laity, prepared by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, considers the responses by local churches to the 1985 *lineamenta* for the synod, but says it is not a "summary" of those responses.

Instead, the document describes itself as a "kind of collection, resulting from an analysis of the reflections, experiences, suggestions and proposals" received by the synod secretariat.

The 70-page text, released at the Vatican April 28, is divided into three main sections: The first describes society's situation, seen

from a perspective of faith; the second is a doctrinal analysis of the nature of the vocation and mission of the laity; the third outlines real-life situations in which the laity are called on to fulfill their vocation.

Part I praises the dominant trend toward full political and cultural participation by individuals in modern societies as an expression of "an increased personal responsibility for the common good."

It makes the following specific points regarding the modern world: the church needs to denounce totalitarian systems and show solidarity with people who are persecuted, poor or outcast; the women's liberation movement has been "significant" in terms of open-

ing up areas of participation, but the roles of men and women should not be seen as interchangeable; the "mentality of secularism" and the lack of ethical criteria are reflected in current world threats; democratic participation in society makes many lay people ask for a similar process in Church decision-making.

Part 2 examines the nature of the "vocation" of all lay people — "to become saints in all their conduct" — and their "mission" of transforming the world, which depends on individual talents and circumstances.

"The mission of the laity receives its specific character by their immediate involvement in worldly affairs," it says, and continues: "The mission of authoritatively preaching the faith in the world is entrusted to ordained ministers, while the laity have the mission of bearing witness to the faith."

Lay people have a service to the church community, but in a different form than the priest's sacramental service, it states. It says there was a "grave danger" of clericalizing the laity by forgetting the secular character

of non-ordained ministries.

Part 3 elaborates on the need for faith to inspire every realm of daily living and lists "some attitudes essential to a Christian conscience": sharing and solidarity, forthrightness and realism, and seeing sin as the root of every division. It places a special emphasis on dialogue, saying lay people should work together with other Christians and people of good will, but "without ideological compromises."

It stresses Catholic education and continuing formation for laity, as well as the need for frequent participation in the sacraments, as the basis for lay people's relationship with the world.

One brief section underlines the participation of women in the church's mission, which it said is "often more vast and committed than that of men."

The document also states that lay people need to overcome an "overemphasis on the organizational and bureaucratic aspects" and tensions over representation within the local church.

Some bishops' conferences seek synod discussion on opening permanent diaconate to women

Vatican City (NC) — Some bishops' conferences have asked that the October world Synod of Bishops discuss ordaining women to the permanent diaconate, said Archbishop Jan Schotte, general secretary of the synod, at a press conference making public the synod's 18,000-word working document. The request is part of a general interest by bishops in examining the overall role of women in the church.

The working document, drawn from answers to a 1985 Vatican questionnaire sent to the world's bishops' conferences, was prepared by the synod's General Secretariat. Replies came from bishops' conferences in the United States, Canada and all Western European countries, he said.

"Some answers state very expressly the issue of the participation of women in church decisions," Archbishop Schotte said in a prepared statement which he read to reporters. "Others asked for a discussion on the access of women to the ordained ministry (acolyte, lector and permanent diacon)," he

said.

"On the whole, the answers on the women's issue were not given in terms of a feminist revindication, but as a necessary deepening of the authentic and specific role of women in society and in the church," he added.

"The participation of women in the life and mission of the church is often more vast and committed than that of men. The church wishes to avoid every discrimination with regard to the dignity of all the laity — women and men," the document said.

The church feels the need to "promote the gifts and the responsibilities of women so that they might participate more fully in the activity of the church in her different tasks in the apostolate," it added.

This need parallels the general trend in society toward greater participation for women, it said. An increased role for women in the church, however, must be seen within the overall picture of lay participation in the church, it added.

Lay participation limited at laity synod

Vatican City (NC) — The October world Synod of Bishops will discuss the role of the laity in the Church and the world, yet no lay person will be a voting member at the synod.

In the United States, Canada and Western Europe, the ordination of women is a major topic for many lay people, yet the issue probably will not receive much attention.

While at first glance these situations may seem ironic, they are normal under the rules and regulations of the synod.

Under canon law, the overwhelming number of voting delegates to the synod must be chosen from bishops. Canon law also allows for the selection of several priests who are officials of religious orders.

"It is a synod of bishops. I cannot change

it into a synod of laity or a general assembly of the people of God," said Archbishop Jan Schotte, synod secretary general, at an April press conference on the upcoming synod.

Moreover, the synod cannot on its own authority decide or resolve the issues set before it.

"It is the role of the Synod of Bishops to discuss the questions on their agenda and to express their desires about them but not to resolve them or to issue decrees about them," says canon law.

Basically, the synod is a sounding board for advising the pope, who under canon law is empowered to choose the theme, determine the specific topics on the agenda and have the final say regarding synod suggestions.



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