

**PRESENTATION**

**ON**

**THE SECOND SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR  
AFRICA**

**OF**

**THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

**PRESS BRIEFING BY THE EPISCOPAL  
CONFERENCE OF**

**MALAWI**

**DECEMBER 4<sup>TH</sup> 2009, CATHOLIC**

**SECRETARIAT- LILONGWE**

## **SECOND SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS-ROME 4<sup>TH</sup> TO 25<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2009.**

**THEME:** **The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world** (Mt. 5:13-14)

### **1.0 GENERAL CONCEPT OF A SYNOD**

The word *synod* means "**coming together**". It is derived from two Greek words *syn* meaning "together" and *hodos* meaning "road" or "way".

The Synod can be defined as an assembly of bishops representing the Catholic episcopate, having the task of helping the Pope in the governing of the universal Church by rendering their counsel.

The Synod of Bishops was officially instituted on 15 September 1965 by Pope Paul VI as a result of a document *Motu proprio (that is, arising from the Popes own initiative)* called *-Apostolica Sollicitudo* (The Apostolic Concern). It was promulgated at the beginning of the 128<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (of the second Vatican Council). This was in response to the desire of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to keep alive the positive spirit engendered by the conciliar experience. It has since become a permanent institution in the church.

### **2.0 TYPES OF SYNODS**

#### **a. General Council/ Session**

This happens when **bishops of the whole world** are congregated under the presidency of the pope.

This **general session/council**, deals with matters which directly concern the good of the entire Church.

#### **b. Continental Synod**

This happens when the hierarchy of all the provinces or Conferences of the entire continent assemble. This Synod is convoked by the pope. (Canons 342-348)

#### **c. Diocesan Synod (Mini Synod)**

It is a lawful assembly convoked by the **bishop**, in which he gathers together the **priests** and **clerics** of his **diocese** and all others who are bound to attend it.

The **diocesan** synod is different from all other councils. Other councils are assemblies of **bishops** who have a definitive vote in the matters under consideration, but in a **diocesan** synod there is only one voter and only one lawgiver, the **bishop** of the **diocese**.

### 3.0 PROCESS OF A SYNOD

#### Before the Synod is convened

- The process begins with the calling of a Synod by the Pope.
- He proposes a theme and issues a preparatory document called the **Lineamenta** or “Discussion Guidelines.”
- This document is a guide of topics and questions and serves as the basis for discussion in the dioceses throughout the region selected for the Synod (Africa).
- The Bishops’ conferences then submit to Rome (General Secretariat) the results of these discussions.
- Then an **Instrumentum Laboris** or “Working Paper” is distributed to the Bishops for their consideration during the actual Synod meeting.

#### During & after the Synod

- By its institution, the Synod of Bishops provides information, discusses the questions proposed and expresses votes. These votes are given to the Pope in form of **Propositions**, so that with the help of the ordinary council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, he may possibly elaborate a post-synodal document for the entire Church-**Apostolic Exhortation**.
- **Apostolic Exhortation** highlights special areas for ecclesial attention and pastoral response.
- For example, after the 1994 Synod, Pope John Paul II issued an important document in 1995, **The Church in Africa** (Ecclesia in Africa).

### 4.0 CANONICAL PROVISIONS FOR THE SYNODS OF BISHOPS

The Synod of Bishops came into existence as a result of a document *motu proprio* (that is, arising from the Pope's own initiative) called *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, 15 September 1965, of Pope Paul VI. The provisions of this apostolic letter are contained in Canons 342 - 348 of the Code of Canon Law and Canon 46 of the Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches. **(Refer Appendix 1 for details)**

### 5.0 FROM THE FIRST TO THE SECOND SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA (From 1994 to 2009)

#### 5.1 I Special Assembly for Africa ( 10 April - 8 May 1994)

It was called for by the Pope John Paul II

**Theme: “The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: ‘You Shall Be My Witnesses’ (Acts 1, 8)”**

**Major Topics discussed by the Synod Fathers**

1. **Proclamation of the Message/Evangelisation:** The task of evangelisation is the essential mission of the Church. The church *exists in order to evangelize*".
2. **Inculturation:** It is a requirement for evangelisation, and yet it one of the greatest challenges for the Church in Africa
3. **Dialogue;** Dialogue is to be practised first of all within the family of the Church at all levels within and outside the church(Ecumenical dialogue).
4. **Justice and Peace:** The Church was invited to exercise her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless.
5. **Means of Social Communication**

**5.2 II Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa**

After due consultation, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, chose as the topic for the Special Second Assembly for Africa: ***The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: “You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world” (Mt 5: 13, 14)***

The topic is very significant because it has as a reference to the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops which took place in May 1994.

Keeping in mind this background which continues to have relevance today, the synod fathers, guided by the Pope, thoroughly examined the topics of reconciliation, justice and peace, so that the Church, in her communities and institutions, and Christians, might increasingly become on African soil the salt of the earth and the light of the world in its social, cultural and religious spheres.

**6.0. ECM INTERVENTIONS**

The Malawi delegation to this Special Assembly of Bishops comprised Archbishop Tarcisius G. Ziyaye, Bishop Joseph Zuza, and Bishop Peter Musikuwa. The interventions of the Malawi delegation revolved around three major themes:

- **The Church as a Family of God** where love, Justice and Reconciliation prevail. Article 20 of the *Instrumentum Laboris* articulates that ‘creativity is necessary in addressing the spiritual and moral needs of the family.’ In support of this theme, the bishops in Malawi issued a pastoral letter in 1994 on family life entitled “Caring for Our Families “. In the letter the bishops raised the influence of the family in the community; how to be happy in a family; things that bring unhappiness and some problems affecting marriages and how to assist marriages in general.
- **Ongoing Formation and Catechesis** of the heart (Formation of Conscience). Article 95 of the *Instrumentum Laboris* states that: “Christians grow weak, because they do not have a sound grasp of their faith which enables them to live and ‘make a defence to any one who calls them to account for the hope that is in them.’ (1 Pt 3:15). Sacred Scripture, which ought to be an assistance, has not yet become a part of their lives as a source of understanding their journey with God in the midst of the world and through history. Sometimes, they have recourse to witchcraft and the lamentable practices.....” The Malawian church has strengthened this catechesis through Small Christian Communities(SCC)
- **Working for a reconciled Africa through ecumenical dialogue.**  
Reconciliation, Justice and Peace cannot take root if the Church does not dialogue with and work with our separated brethren. As avenues of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, the Churches have to be seen to be reconciled and at peace with one another if they are going to be *credible* and *relevant* in the eyes of the wider society.

By and large, the Catholic Church in Malawi continues to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in this regard. Engagement in inter religious dialogue has been through various areas and organizations through which Christians and Moslems work together. The involvement of the Church in providing healthcare, education and development as is highlighted in Section 92 of the *Instrumentum laboris*, provides an entry point for ecumenical dialogue.

The number of bodies that the Church in Malawi has set up in collaboration with other Christians and Moslems to provide healthcare, education, good governance and development are a case in point. These bodies include: **Public Affairs Committee (PAC)-1992; Christian Service Committee (CSC)-1968; Ecumenical Counselling Centre (ECC)-2005; Christian Health Association of Malawi(CHAM)-1966; Association of**

**Christian Educators in Malawi(ACEM)-1994; Malawi  
Interfaith AIDS Association (MIAA)-**

**7.0. KEY MESSAGE COMING FROM THE SYNOD**

**The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world** (Mt. 5:13-14)

This theme has been reflected upon by the synod in a deeper way taking into consideration the contemporary existing socio-economic, political and cultural dynamics on the African continent.

“The Church in Africa, both as family of God and as individual faithful has the duty to be instruments of peace and reconciliation, after the heart of Christ, who is our peace and reconciliation. And it shall be able to do this to the extent that she is herself reconciled to God. Her strategies for reconciliation, justice and peace in society must go beyond and deeper than how the world handles these matters. Like St. Paul, the Synod calls on all the people of Africa: "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).”

In turn, the synod is calling several categories of the church and the wider society to take up their rightful responsibilities in designing responses that shall allow for true reconciliation, justice and peace amidst all people and with the environment.

**TO THE WORLD CHURCH**

This Synod is beaming its light of concern and solidarity on the continent of Africa. We thank the Holy Father for walking with Africa in her struggles and defending her cause with the full weight of his enormous, moral authority. Like his predecessors, he has always been a true friend of Africa and of Africans. In addressing our challenges, we have been enriched and guided by the treasures and wisdom of the magisterium of the Popes on socio-political issues

**TO THE BISHOPS OF AFRICA.**

- As bishops, we challenge ourselves to work in unity in our various Episcopal Conferences and Assembly, giving our nations a model of a reconciled and just national institution, ready to offer ourselves as artisans of peace and reconciliation, whenever and wherever called upon.

- Each bishop must put issues of reconciliation justice and peace high up on the pastoral agenda of his diocese. He should ensure the establishment of a Justice and Peace Commission at all levels. We should continue to work hard on forming consciences and changing hearts, through effective catechesis at all levels.
- We have to continue to do our best to tackle poverty, which is a major obstacle to peace and reconciliation. Here suggestions for micro-finance schemes deserve careful attention. Finally, as head of his local Church, the bishop has the duty to mobilize all his faithful, and get them involved in their appropriate roles in the planning, formulating, implementing and evaluating of diocesan policies and programmes for reconciliation, justice and peace.

### **TO THE PRIESTS**

- The priest is the "necessary and closest collaborator of the bishop". The synod Fathers address priests, who occupy key positions in the apostolate of the diocese. They represent the face of the clergy most visible to the people, both within and outside the Church. Their example of living together in peace across tribal and racial lines can be a powerful witness to others.

### **TO THE LAY FAITHFUL**

- It is in and through the laity that the life and witness of the Church are made visible to the world. The laity therefore share in the mandate of the Church to be "ambassadors for Christ" working for reconciliation of people to God and among themselves. This requires of them (laity) to allow their Christian faith to permeate every aspect of life; in the family, at work, in the professions, in politics and public life.
- The Synod fathers commend Catholics in public life who, not minding all the dangers and uncertainties of politics in Africa, have generously offered themselves for the public service of their people, as an apostolate to promote the common good and God's kingdom of justice, love and peace, in line with the teachings of the Church (cf. Vat. II, Gaudium et spes, 75).

### **TO CATHOLIC FAMILIES**

The synod is asking Catholic families to be on their guard against some virulent ideological poisons from abroad, claiming to be "modern" culture. They should continue to welcome children as gift from God, and train them in the knowledge and fear of God, to be people of reconciliation, justice and peace in future.

### **TO CATHOLIC MEN**

- Similarly, the Synod calls on men, our Catholic men, to play their important roles as responsible fathers and good and faithful husbands. Follow the example of St. Joseph (cf. Mt 2:13-23), in the care of the family, in the protection of life right from the moment of conception and the education of the children. They should make sure that they organize themselves into associations and Catholic Action Groups that would enable them to improve the quality of Christian life and commitment to the Church. This would also put them in a better position to play leading roles in society and to become more effective witnesses and promoters of reconciliation, justice and peace, as salt of the earth and the light of the world.

### **TO CATHOLIC WOMEN**

- Catholic women are often the backbone of the local Church. In many countries, the Catholic Women Organizations are a great force for the apostolate of the Church.
- The Synod is charging, our Catholic women to be fully involved in the women's programmes of their nations, with their eyes of faith wide open. Armed with good information and the social teachings of the Church, they should make sure that the good ideas are not high jacked by the peddlers of foreign and morally poisonous ideologies about gender and human sexuality. May our Mother Mary, the Seat of Wisdom, guide them in doing this.

### **TO THE YOUTH**

- The Synod further addresses, our sons and daughters, the youth in their communities. They are not just the future of the Church: They are with us already in big numbers.
- They should be in the forefront of positive social change and instruments of peace

### **TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

- The Synod fathers are pleading the International Community to treat Africa with respect and dignity. Africa has been calling for a change in the world economic order, with unjust structures piled heavily against her. Recent turmoil in the financial world shows the need for a radical change of rules. But it would be a tragedy if adjustments are made only in the interest of the rich and again at the expense of the poor. Many of the conflicts, wars and poverty of Africa derive mainly from these unjust structures.

**On the whole, the UN** agencies are doing good work in Africa for development, peace keeping, defence of the just rights of

women and the child, and combating poverty and diseases: HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis and other issues. The Synod commends the good work that they are doing. However, the synod is calling on them to be more consistent and transparent in implementing their programmes. They urge the countries of Africa to carefully scrutinise the services being offered to our people, to ensure that they are good for us. In particular, the Synod denounces all surreptitious attempts to destroy and undermine the precious African values of family and human life (e.g. the obnoxious art. 14 of the Maputo Protocol and other similar proposals).

#### **ON INTER-RELIGIOUS COLLABORATION AND DIALOGUE**

- The Synod calls for ever greater ecumenical collaboration with our brothers and sisters of other Christian traditions. We also look forward to more dialogue and cooperation with Muslims, the adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and people of other faiths.