



# Africa Prepares for the Synod on Synodality

## A Summary of the Synodal Conversation (26/07/2024)



### **THEME: SOME THEOLOGICAL AND CANONICAL MATTERS REGARDING SPECIFIC MINISTERIAL FORMS AND PASTORAL ISSUES (POLYGAMY, PERMANENT DEACONS, FEMALE DEACONS).**

#### Opening Prayers

The opening prayer for this synodal conversation was led by Professor Clema Jawa. He prayed that God grants us the wisdom that will enable us to discern between right and wrong, between truth and error, good and evil as we discuss, share, discern and engage under today's theme "Some Theological and Canonical Matters Regarding Specific Ministerial Forms and Pastoral Issues (Polygamy, Permanent Deacons, and Female Deacons)". He prayed that the will Lord give us the wisdom to discern these sensitive, critical and challenging pastoral issues. Prof. Clema prayed that the fruits of this palaver help us to be intimately united with Jesus our eternal vine who is the good shepherd. He finally prayed God to grant wisdom and guide the leadership and organizers of this synodal palaver series, the Cardinals, Bishops, priest and religious and all agents of evangelization present at this sharing. The opening prayer was concluded by commending into the hands of God a Dominican priest and a founding member of PACTPAN, Rev. Fr. Iheanyi Enwerem who was called by the Lord into eternity that his soul may rest in perfect peace.

#### Opening Speech

At the end of the prayer, one of the moderators, Milliam invited Professor Clema Jawa, a specialist in Dogmatic Theology in the African context to give an introductory remark at the beginning of the 8th week of the palaver series on the future of the church in Africa on the verge of the synod on synodality. In this opening speech, Prof Clema, reiterated his conviction that this palaver has an agenda of uniting Catholic faithful on the African Continent. He stressed that Pastoral issues of polygamy, permanent deacons, and married permanent deacons just like others; religious cultism, extreme Pentecostal charismatics, devil worship, witchcraft, pseudo-devotions, if not properly discerned, understood, interpret, handled, applied and guided in the light of the sacred scriptures, church's doctrine, sacred tradition, living magisterium, and identity ethos, then intention, division, superficial Christianity and loss of sense of direction can slow

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our work of evangelization on the continent. Hence, he exhorts all the participants to pay attention with a sincere heart to the speakers who would discuss pastoral issues that affect the African continent on a specific way. At the end of his opening remark, prof. Clema reminded that we are all called to be instruments of peace, love, pardon, faith, hope, light and joy on the African continent through this palaver series.

The chief moderator of the day Shiela Pires welcomed and introduced the guest speakers of the day. The palaver was divided into two sessions. The first session looked at Polygamy while the second entailed a dialogue on whether Africa needs new ministries in the church or if the present pastoral structure should be maintained it also reflected on women's possible access to the diaconate and the acceptance of permanent married deacons in Africa.

### FIRST SESSION OF THE PALAVER

#### Part One

##### - On Issues of Polygamy

The first speaker Sr. Katunge started by reminding the participants that with the introduction of Christianity in Africa and in the whole world, each culture, people regardless of the color had to abandon certain practices in relation to their way of life in order to embrace Christianity.

The speaker noted that since February 2024, she has been carrying out a research on polygamy in understanding of the Catholic Church and how best the church can come in to take care of those Catholics who are Christians and have accepted to be part and parcel of the Christian community but they are living in a polygamous relationships with the emphasis on the question "How can we assist them?" She shared some of the findings from her study which was conducted in West, East, Central, Southern and Northern Africa. The questions raised by those living in polygamous families were as follows: 1) why is the Catholic Church engaging us in leadership if we are living irregular marriages in our lives? 2) Why do they deny us the sacraments and yet they give us leadership roles in the parishes and in the small Christian communities? 3) They also asked if they are not better living openly with more than one wife than those who are keeping mistresses in secret. Hence, they puzzled how would the church tell them to choose one wife over the other, will that not amount to divorce? And what will happen to the children they gave birth to in their marriages in case they choose one woman over

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the other to take her as a legal wife in the context of the Catholic Church. The research participants asked whether polygamy is the only issue of concern in the church questioning what would happen to the women in those African countries with more number of women than men. What is the moral value behind monogamy as opposed to polygamy? They asked. Hence, they demanded that the church allow them receive sacraments, to be allowed to formalize their marriages in the church with all their wives.

The pastoral approach of the church in Africa and the position of the church is that marriage is monogamous not polygamous, hence the speaker gave some points on what is happening in the church at the moment.1) regarding the doctrine and tradition of the Catholic Church, marriage is monogamous. The Catholic Church upholds monogamous marriage is an ideal form of marriage reflection on the union of Christ and the church in 532 and marriage is a sacrament in the church which is strictly between one man and one woman which present a clear doctrinal stance against polygamy. The presenter opined that the inclusion of those living in polygamous family in leadership positions is a way through which the church is taking care of them. She cited catechesis and education as an approach employed by the church to assist people living in polygamous marriages. At the end of her presentation, the speaker proposed for dialogue between the church and those living in a polygamous marriages.

### Part Two

**- What Canonical and Pastoral issues needs to be understood, appreciated, retained or revised in the pastoral accompaniments of polygamous couples in Africa**

Agnès Sory a professor of Canon Law and a coordinating servant of PACTPAN was the presenter for this session. She admitted that the polygamy is an important pastoral question which the universal and the church in Africa pay utmost attention to. She offered the points that should be maintained when talking about marriage in the Catholic setting. She discussed canonical aspects of marriage and polygamy, proposing pastoral solutions including the option for the polygamous spouse to choose one wife while dismissing others, though acknowledging difficulties

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our seminaries have the means to form seminarians in the virtues, such as mercy, compassion and generosity which are essential to our faith. “I firmly believe that women should be involved in the formation of seminarians and lay people in general should be involved. Students and seminarians shouldn't lose their contact with the struggles, the joys, and the grief of ordinary people” he concluded. Fr. Augustine Anwuchie a Nigerian priest and one time formator, pointed out that most seminarians do not live authentic lives while in the seminary because of how seminary formation is structured which makes them to adopt a “survival mentality” driven by fear factor. He recommends that formation to the priesthood in Africa should encourage disposition to openness, communication and authenticity doing away with the survival mentality.

### Interventions

The moderator, invited the participants to make contribution in the light of the just concluded session. Fr. Augustine Anwuchie, a Nigeria priest on Mission in Niger Republic narrated his experience with a faithful in his parish who is very dedicated to church activities despite living in a polygamous union. He advocated for a concrete pastoral solution to the issue at hand.

Mr. Justin Giningakpio a South Sudanese and an ex-seminarian who is in a polygamous marriage and yet an active Catholic faithful shared his experiences as a man with two wives and twelve children. He explained that all the members of his family are taking active part in church's activities at the parish and diocesan levels. Justin made a link between belief, culture and religion to justify his stance that polygamy is the foundation of religion in Africa. According to him, polygamy is pride and a way of moral life. He concluded by saying that Africa risks being Islamized if the Catholic Church insists on monogamous marriage for its faithful.

In a similar vein, Fr. Dor Luka from South Sudan highlighted how young people in his parish who are in polygamous marriages decay been denied Holy Communion despite their active roles in the church activities and overall welfare. Likibi for his part insists that polygamy which is an African value should be incorporated in the church since the church upholds inculturation.

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### SECOND SESSION OF THE PALAVER

***Theme: Does Africa need new ministries in the church or if the present pastoral structure should be maintained. And women's possible access to the diaconate and the acceptance of permanent married deacons in Africa.***

The discussion touched on the ongoing synodal process, the potential ordination of women as deacons and permanent deacons, and the value of lay and religious women in pastoral work. The role of women in the church, particularly in the context of the female diaconate, was a central concern of this session.

The first speaker for this session was Sr. Prof Josee Ngalula a member of International Theological Commission and a member of in-depth commission charged by Pope Francis with providing research and proposal to the above topic of discussion as well as a senate delegate. She provided theological and cultural context for these proposals, emphasizing the importance of respecting the traditions of the Catholic Church in Africa.

The second Speaker, Fr Ogbuefi Tony Nnacheta then discussed the challenges faced by the Catholic Church in Nigeria, particularly the cultural expectation of celibacy for priests, and suggested a recruitment process for married priests. He also highlighted the challenges of changing long-held beliefs and traditions, particularly in Nigeria, and emphasized the need for ongoing conversation and exploration.

### Interventions

Cardinal Winfrid Napier directed that focus should be on the needs of the church and how it can be supplied.

Fr Stan advised that the fear of having women get involved in ministry is not rooted in the early experience of the church and further noted that God's action goes beyond women contingency.

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### Closing

The moderator Sheila wrapped up the discussion and invited participants to make a prayer as the meeting came to an end. In their closing prayers, Sr Dominic thanked God for his understanding of humanity, Emmanuel thanked God for the opportunity of being able to listen to one another and Cardinal Napier asked the Lord to have mercy on his people and to continue inspiring and guiding the church in Africa to understand its mission and vision.

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