

SHORT REPORT ON THE SYNODALITY OBSERVATORY FOR AFRICA WORKSHOP, NAIROBI, KENYA

To: NCBC Synodal Contact Person, **Fr. Veranus Shiimi**
From: SynObs Observer for the Namibian Catholic Bishops' Conference,
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Subject:

Report on the Synodality Observatory for Africa Workshop and Clarification of Roles
Towards the 2028 Ecclesial Assembly

Venue: Nairobi, Kenya
Date: 09 July 2026

1. Introduction

I attended the Synodality Observatory for Africa (SynObs) Workshop in **Nairobi, Kenya** from **03 – 06 July 2026**, in my capacity as the SynObs Observer for the Namibian Catholic Bishops' Conference (NCBC) from the Anglophone countries. A parallel conference happened during the same period in **Abidjan, Ivory Coast** for the Francophone countries.

For the purposes of the record, I learned about me been the NCBC SynObs Observer through the Regional SynObs Representative Fr. Sameul Thembo, as been seconded as the SynObs representative for Namibia. I just accepted the offer out of my willingness to serve the church, since I assumed the NCBC was informed accordingly.

The workshop introduced the purpose and operation of the SynObs initiative, trained Observers on the use of the SynObs App, and clarified the broader synodal journey leading towards the Ecclesial Assembly in Rome in October 2028. A key clarification emerging from the workshop is the distinction between the role of **SynObs Observers** and the responsibilities of **Dioceses, Episcopal Conferences, and their Synodal Contact Persons** in facilitating the formal ecclesial process towards the 2028 Ecclesial Assembly.

2. Objectives of the Nairobi SynObs Workshop

- a) **To orient and train SynObs Observers** on their roles and responsibilities in identifying, documenting, and reporting significant synodal initiatives and activities within their respective countries using the SynObs App.
- b) **To strengthen the SynObs Observer Network across Africa** by promoting consistent, ethical, and systematic collection of information on the implementation of synodality for continental research, analysis, and learning.

- c) **To provide participants with an understanding of the ecclesial process towards the 2028 Ecclesial Assembly**, including the distinct responsibilities of dioceses, Episcopal Conferences, Continental Assemblies, and SynObs Observers within the broader synodal journey.

3. Role and Responsibilities of the SynObs Observer

The SynObs Observer is primarily responsible for **observing, documenting, and reporting significant synodal initiatives and developments taking place within the respective country**. The SynObs network was established in response to the insufficient documentation of synodal initiatives across Africa, particularly grassroots initiatives that often remain unknown beyond their immediate diocesan or national contexts. SynObs therefore functions as a continental platform for gathering, systematising, analysing, and disseminating information on the implementation of synodality in Africa.

The responsibility of the Observer is to identify and document relevant synodal events, activities, processes, and developments through the SynObs App. These include:

- formation programmes on synodality;
- workshops, conferences, diocesan synods, and related gatherings;
- publications and translations of synodal documents;
- the use of participatory methods, including Conversation in the Spirit;
- initiatives promoting the participation of youth, women, marginalised groups, and other sectors of the Church;
- structural, canonical, policy, or accountability changes resulting from the implementation of synodality; and
- theological research, dissertations, and artistic expressions relating to synodality.

The **SynObs App serves as the principal instrument** through which Observers submit information for inclusion in the SynObs database. The data gathered will contribute towards national and regional reports, the identification of emerging practices and challenges, theological reflection, and broader continental learning on the implementation of synodality.

It is important to emphasise that **the SynObs Observer is not responsible for coordinating or facilitating the official diocesan and national synodal processes towards the 2028 Ecclesial Assembly**. The Observer's mandate is specifically to observe, document, and report on synodal developments taking place within the country.

In the Namibian context, this means documenting relevant initiatives undertaken by the NCBC, dioceses, parishes, Small Christian Communities, religious congregations, Catholic institutions, movements, and other Church structures where these initiatives constitute significant expressions of the implementation of synodality.

4. Ecclesial Process Towards the 2028 Assembly

A separate presentation outlined the formal ecclesial process leading towards the Ecclesial Assembly in Rome in October 2028. The process is organised around four stages:

Stage 1: Recollecting,

Stage 2: Interpreting,

Stage 3: Orienting, and

Stage 4: Celebrating.

The **first stage, Recollecting, takes place at diocesan and eparchial level during the first half of 2027**. Dioceses are expected to reflect on the implementation of the 2021–2024 Synod, identify processes and transformations that have emerged, recognise difficulties and challenges, and discern future perspectives. This process should involve broad participation and culminate in diocesan assemblies that produce narrative reports and letters.

The **second stage, Interpreting, takes place at the level of Episcopal Conferences during the second half of 2027**. Episcopal Conferences receive the reports from the dioceses, bring their experiences into dialogue with one another, identify their broader ecclesial significance, and prepare theological-pastoral syntheses and letters.

The **third stage, Orienting, takes place at continental level in early 2028**, where Continental Assemblies will identify shared priorities and orientations that will contribute towards the preparation of the *Instrumentum laboris* for the Ecclesial Assembly.

The process culminates with the **Celebrating stage in October 2028**, when the Ecclesial Assembly will gather in Rome with the Holy Father. The Assembly is understood not as the conclusion of the Synod but as a further impulse towards the continuing reception and implementation of synodality throughout the Church.

5. Role of the NCBC Synodal Contact Person

The process towards the 2028 Ecclesial Assembly requires coordination between dioceses and the NCBC. This responsibility falls within the ecclesial structures responsible for coordinating the synodal process, particularly the **Conference Synodal Contact Person**.

The NCBC Synodal Contact Person therefore has an important role in communicating the process and timelines to the dioceses, facilitating coordination among diocesan Synodal Contact Persons, ensuring that the required diocesan processes and assemblies take place, receiving the resulting narrative reports and letters, and facilitating the national process of interpretation and synthesis during the second half of 2027.

This coordination is particularly important because the national synthesis must emerge from the lived synodal experiences and discernment processes of the dioceses rather than being produced independently at conference level.

6. Conclusion and Way Forward

The Nairobi workshop provided important clarity regarding the complementary but distinct responsibilities of SynObs Observers and the formal ecclesial structures responsible for the synodal journey towards 2028. My responsibility as the **SynObs Observer for Namibia** is to observe, document, and report significant synodal initiatives and developments in Namibia through the SynObs App and contribute to the broader African documentation and research process.

The responsibility for facilitating and coordinating the official ecclesial process towards the 2028 Ecclesial Assembly rests with the appropriate diocesan and conference synodal structures, coordinated at national level by the NCBC Synodal Contact Person.

Given the ongoing synodal initiatives within Namibia, including diocesan synodality activities, Small Christian Community formation and awareness programmes, pastoral planning processes, consultations, workshops, and other participatory initiatives, it will be important to establish effective communication between the NCBC Synodal Contact Person, diocesan Synodal Contact Persons, and the SynObs Observer.

Such cooperation will enable the Observer to remain informed about significant synodal developments for documentation purposes, while maintaining the clear distinction between the **observational and reporting mandate of SynObs** and the **coordination and facilitation mandate of the official ecclesial synodal structures**.