



SYNODALITY IN ACTION: EMERGING ECCLESIOLOGIES, VITALITY OF WOMEN AND DISCERNING LEADERSHIP FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

In 2023, Hekima University College (HUC), in collaboration with Doctoral Scholarship for African Women Theologians, convened an African Women Theologians Conference for the first time to mark its 40 years of significant contribution to the education of women Theologians with a Theme: **“African Women Theologians and Synodality”**. Through this conference, HUC wished to celebrate its contribution to women’s empowerment and to make the voices of African women better heard in theology in Africa. The setting of the conference recalled Pope Francis’ call for a Synodal approach in both words and actions. The conference offered for emerging African women scholars an opportunity to dialogue with established scholars from Africa and beyond. The result was a process of mutual listening and learning, which is vital for a synodal Church.

Following the 1994 Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, St. John Paul II, in 1995, issued Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (EA) on the Church in Africa and its evangelizing mission towards the year 2000. The Exhortation considered the situation of the Church in Africa and the various aspects of the evangelizing mission which the Church needed to take into account at the time (EA 8). *Ecclesia in Africa* presented urgent challenges facing the Church in Africa some of which included: the thirst for God felt by the peoples of Africa; various forms of division that need to be healed through honest dialogue; threats to Christian marriage and family life, yet the future of the world and of the Church passes through the family; material, social and political difficulties yearning for the application of the Gospel to concrete life (EA 46-52). Taking the *Church as God’s Family model* as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa, the Synod Fathers acknowledged it as an expression of the Church’s nature particularly appropriate for Africa. This image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust. Avoiding all excessive particularism, this model encourages reconciliation and true communion, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches (EA, 63).

In 2021, Pope Francis convened a Synod on Synodality, which highlighted and invited all to the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. The intention was to make Synodality the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church. This way, the notion of the People of God and communion obtains substance as members journey together and actively participate in the Church’s evangelizing mission. As part of this Synodal journey, Pope Francis emphasized the need to safeguard children, vulnerable adults, and those to whom the law recognizes equal protection. He has demonstrated in his words and actions his commitment to enabling a culture of safety within the Catholic Church.

Consequently, for the last three years, the Catholic Church has learnt how “to synod.” The last session of the Synod on Synodality ended in October 2024. As we get into the implementation phase of the Synod, HUC, in collaboration with *Watawa wa Taa* and the Doctoral Scholarship for African Women Theologians, would like to convene a second Conference as a follow-up of the first African Women Theologians Conference held in 2023, with the Theme: **“Synodality in Action: Emerging Ecclesiologies, Vitality of Women and Discerning Leadership for the 21st Century.”**

As we enter the implementation phase of the Synod, some of the fundamental questions we face include: How must the Church in Africa carry out her evangelizing mission as a “Synodal Church” and become an ever more faithful witness to the Lord Jesus while remaining attentive to the needs of Africa? Going forward, how do we cultivate the culture of see, judge and act in the evangelizing mission, recognizing the importance of safety for all in the Church? How do we reimagine leadership in a continent prone to bad leaders? How does the synodal process invite African women religious to reimagine and revitalize their way of life?

With this conference therefore, HUC, in collaboration with the Conrad Hilton Foundation, *Watawa wa Taa* and the Doctoral Scholarship for African Women Theologians, wishes to create a forum for women to share their experiences, challenges, opportunities and aspirations since the implementation of the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* up to the eve of the implementation phase of the Synod on Synodality. See the *Addendum* for the details of the Conference.

Addendum

Objectives of the Conference

1. To create a platform for the voices of African women theologians to be heard in global theological and ecclesial discourse.
2. To strengthen and channel the intellectual abilities, leadership, and contributions of African women religious towards the growth of the Church in Africa and beyond.
3. To foster a spirit that is liberating and empowering for women.
4. To create a network of African women scholars committed to the mission of the Church in Africa and beyond.

Outcomes

1. Attracting more women to the field of theological research, creating a network of African Women Scholars and respecting their voices in global theological discourse.
2. Recognizing and accepting women's abilities as competent intellectual, ecclesial and societal leaders.
3. Creating a network of African women committed to the mission of the Church in Africa and beyond.
4. Publishing the proceedings from the conference.

Terms and Conditions

1. Applications are open to any African woman theologian, Canonists and African Religious women under the umbrella of *Watawa wa Taa*.¹
2. Other theologians and women scholars in other fields are welcomed upon invitation.
3. Prospective participants must submit an abstract not exceeding 500 words.
4. HUC, in collaboration with Watawa wa Taa and the St. Ignatius Scholarship for Women Theologians, shall fund the travel and accommodation of presenters only.

Possible (but not limited) sub-themes for consideration

1. Reimagining leadership in a continent saddled with poor governance.
2. Turning challenges into opportunities in ministry and society.
3. Gospel witnesses: Grounded in faith and highlighting transformative enterprises.
4. Communion, participation, and mission as vital pillars of a synodal Church.
5. Cultivating the culture of see, judge and act in the evangelizing mission.
6. Recognising the importance of safety for all in the Church.
7. Deep and respectful listening: The unheard voices of witnesses at the peripheries.
8. Making Synodality the evangelical path in the service of God's kingdom: An invitation to African women religious to reimagine and revitalize their way of life.
9. An evangelizing Synodal Church, faithful witnesses yet attentive to the needs of Africa.

Submission Deadline

1. Please submit a PDF file abstract to awt.conference@hekima.ac.ke before 30th April 2025.
2. Successful applicants will be notified by 20th May 2025.
3. Once selected, participants must prepare a presentable and publishable conference paper.
4. The conference will take place from 3 –6 September 2025 at Hekima University College (HUC), Nairobi, Kenya. Activities are as follows:

2 September 2025	Arrival
3–6 September 2025	Conference (Full-days)
7 September 2025	Closing Mass, remarks, Sightseeing.
8 September 2025	Departure

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¹ *Watawa wa Taa* is a Kiswahili phrase that can be loosely translated as 'Consecrated Women of Light'. The name was chosen as a recognition to the remarkable presence and works of women religious in Africa. Consecrated women are found at the forefront of our societies, working for sustained and systemic change in the areas of spirituality, healthcare, education, social work, pastoral care, agriculture, etc.