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**“Instrumentum laboris” for the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2024)**

**XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

***How to be a missionary synodal Church***

*Instrumentum laboris*

for the Second Session (October 2024)

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Abbreviations

AG VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decr. *Ad Gentes* (7 December 1965)

CD VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decr. *Christus Dominus* (28 October 1965)

CIC *Codex iuris canonici* (25 January 1983)

ITC INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2 March 2018)

DCS GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD, *Document for the Continental Stage* (27 October 2022)

DV VATICAN COUNCIL II, Const. Dogm. *Dei Verbum* (18 November 1965)

EG FRANCIS, Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013)

GS VATICAN COUNCIL II, Past. Const. *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965)

LG VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const. *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964)

LS FRANCIS, Enc. Lett. *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015)

PE FRANCIS, Ap. Const. *Praedicate Evangelium* (19 March 2022)

SR XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BISHOPS SYNODOX, *Synthesis Report* (28 October 2023)

SC VATICAN COUNCIL II, Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963)

UR VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio* (21 November 1964)

UUS JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995)

## Introduction

*On this mountain the Lord of the universe will make for all peoples*

*a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,*

*of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.*

*And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples,*

*the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.*

*Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,*

*and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,*

*for the Lord has spoken*

*Is 25:6-8*

The prophet Isaiah presents the image of a superabundant and sumptuous banquet prepared by the Lord on the mountaintop, a symbol of conviviality and communion intended for all peoples. At the moment of returning to the Father, the Lord Jesus entrusts his disciples with the task of reaching out to all peoples to serve them a banquet of food that gives them the fullness of life and joy. Through his Church, guided by his Spirit, the Lord wants to rekindle hope in the hearts of humanity, restore joy and save all, especially those whose faces are stained with tears and who cry out to Him in anguish. Their cries reach the ears of all Christ's disciples, men and women who walk in the depths of human affairs. Their cries are amplified at a time when the Synod's journey has been accompanied by the outbreak of new wars, adding to the too many that continue to stain the world with blood.

At the heart of Synod 2021-2024, "For a Synodal Church. Communion, participation, mission" is a call to joy and to the renewal of the People of God in following the Lord and in their commitment to serving His mission. The

call to be missionary disciples is based on our common baptismal identity and is rooted in the diversity of the contexts in which the Church<sup>[1]</sup> is present and finds its unity in the one Father, the one Lord, and the one Spirit. It is a call to all the baptised, without exception: "The whole People of God is an agent of the proclamation of the Gospel. Every baptised person is called to be a protagonist of mission since we are all missionary disciples" (ITC, no. 53). This renewal is expressed in a Church that, gathered by the Spirit through Word and Sacrament (cf. CD 11), proclaims the salvation it continually experiences to a world hungry for meaning and thirsting for communion and solidarity. For this world, the Lord prepares a banquet on his mountain.

We renew our commitment to this mission today by practising synodality, which is an expression of the Church's nature. Growing as missionary disciples means answering Jesus' call to follow Him, responding to the gift we received when we were baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It means learning to accompany each other as a pilgrim people journeying through history towards a common destination, the heavenly city. By walking this path, nourished by the Word of God and the Eucharist, we are transformed into what we receive. Thus, we understand that our identity as a people saved and made holy has an inescapably communal dimension, fashioning us into a community that embraces the generations of believers who have preceded us and those who will follow us. The salvation to be received and borne witness to is relational since no one is saved alone. Or rather, using the words offered by an Asian Episcopal Conference, we grow gradually in our awareness that "Synodality is not simply a goal, but a journey of all the faithful, to be accomplished together hand in hand. This is why understanding its full meaning takes time" (CE Bangladesh).[2] St Augustine speaks of the Christian life as a pilgrimage in solidarity, a walking together "towards God not in steps, but with the affections" (Augustine, *Discourse* 306 B, 1), sharing a life of prayer, proclamation and love of neighbour.

The Second Vatican Council teaches that "All people are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world; from him we come, through him we live, and towards him we direct our lives" (LG, no. 3). At the heart of the synodal journey lies the desire, ancient and ever new, to communicate to all the promise and the invitation of the Lord kept in the living tradition of the Church, to recognise the Risen Lord's presence in our midst and to welcome the many fruits of the Spirit's action. This vision of the Church - a pilgrim people in every part of the world seeking synodal conversion for the sake of mission - guides us as we move forward on this path with joy and hope. It is a vision that contrasts starkly with the reality of a world in crisis, whose wounds and scandalous inequalities resonate deeply in the hearts of all Christ's disciples. It prompts us to pray for all victims of violence and injustice and to renew our commitment to work alongside the women and men who are artisans of justice and peace in every part of the world.

### **Three years on the road**

After the opening of the synodal process on 9-10 October 2021, the local Churches worldwide, at different paces and in diverse ways, embarked on an initial listening phase. Belonging to the Church means being part of the one People of God, composed of people and communities living in concrete times and places. Synodal listening started from these communities, moving through diocesan, national and continental stages as part of a continuous dialogue the General Secretariat of the Synod helped foster by publishing synthesis and working documents. The circularity of the synodal process recognises and enhances the Church's rootedness in various contexts, serving the bonds that unite them.

An innovation of the first stage was the convening of Continental Assemblies. These brought together the local Churches of the same region, inviting them to learn to listen to each other, to accompany each other on the journey, and to discern together the main challenges to fulfilling the mission present in their contexts.

The First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2023) opened the second phase, which welcomes the fruits of this listening in order to discern in prayer and dialogue the steps that the Spirit is asking us to take. This phase will continue until the end of the Second Session (October 2024), when the Holy Father will be offered these fruits in preparation for further implementation by the local Churches.

The preparation of the Second Session is necessarily based on the results of the First Session presented in the Synthesis Report (SR). Consistent with the circularity characterising the whole synodal process and in order to

provide a clear focus for the work of the Second Session, a further consultation of the local Churches was launched, guided by the question: "How to be a synodal Church in mission?" As the document *Towards October 2024*[3] explains, the objective of the consultation was "to identify the paths we can follow and the tools we might adopt in our different contexts and circumstances in order to enhance the unique contribution of each baptised person and of each Church in the one mission of proclaiming the Risen Lord and his Gospel to the world today. This is not, therefore, a request that limits you to a plan of technical or procedural improvements to make the Church's structures more efficient, but rather an invitation for reflection on the concrete forms of the missionary commitment to which we are called, that express the dynamism between unity and diversity proper to a synodal Church."

The drafting of this *Instrumentum laboris* for the Second Session has been done in the light of the answers to the guiding question sent in by most of the Episcopal Conferences (EC) and their continental groupings, the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Dioceses that are not part of an Episcopal Conference, the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the Union of Superiors General and the International Union of Superiors General representing consecrated life, as well as the testimonies of experiences and good practices received from all over the world and the observations of almost two hundred groups: university faculties, associations of the faithful, communities and individuals from all over the world. In this way, it is rooted in the life of the People of God present throughout the world.

These voices expressed gratitude for the journey made and witnessed to the hardships it sometimes requires, but above all, they spoke of the desire to move forward. As a North American Episcopal Conference says, "gratitude for this synodal journey is profound. Much has been done to move along the synodal path as companions in the U.S. Church. Mindful of Pope Francis' notion of a culture of encounter, tensions remain that will require continued reflection and dialogue. These tensions need not disrupt the communion of charity in the Church." (EC USA). They also remind us that there is still a long way to go.

As in previous phases, the benefits of adopting the method of conversation in the Spirit have once again been reaffirmed. Note, for example, the words of one federation of Episcopal Conferences: "Many of the reports across Asia show tremendous enthusiasm for the synod methodology, which uses conversation in the Spirit as the starting point for the synodal journey. Many dioceses and conferences have introduced this method into their existing structures with great success." This enthusiasm has already translated into steps taken to experiment with a more synodal way of proceeding. In one European Episcopal Conference: "it was decided [in the light of this] to implement a five-year synodal trial phase. The forms of synodal consultation, dialogue, discernment, decision-making and decision-making are to be developed, evaluated and refined at the national level. Diocesan experience and synodal developments in the universal Church will be taken into account. We are at the beginning of a challenging but important learning journey". There is great awareness in the reports of the value of the local Churches and their journeys, of the richness of which they are bearers and of the need for their voices to be heard. According to one report received from an African Episcopal Conference: "Local Churches are not to be viewed and treated any more simply as recipients of the Gospel with nothing or very little to contribute".

To these contributions were added the fruits of the International Meeting "Parish Priests for the Synod" (Sacrofano [Rome], 28 April - 2 May 2024), which enabled priests engaged in Parish ministry to be heard. The syntheses of the working groups express, above all, "their joy for the opportunity to truly listen to one another. It was an enriching experience in fostering a deep sense of understanding and appreciation for one another's unique backgrounds." They also express "a need to understand the role of Parish priest in the context of synodality acknowledging the various traditions in the Church" and the concern about not being able to reach the peripheries and those who live on the margins: "If the Church wants to be synodal, it must listen to these people".

Similarly, this *Instrumentum laboris* has drawn from material produced by the five Working Groups set up by the General Secretariat of the Synod. These groups were composed of experts from different parts of the world, women and men, and those with different ecclesial roles. Using a synodal method, they have deepened theological and canonical reflection on the meaning of synodality and its implications for the life of the Church.[4]

A group of experts, comprised of bishops, priests, consecrated and lay men and women, theologians, canonists and biblical scholars from all continents and with different ecclesial roles, was entrusted with reading and interpreting the contributions and materials received and compiling answers to the guiding question. Their work contributed to the drafting of this *Instrumentum laboris*. Their reflections, as well as those of the five Working Groups, mentioned above, will also feed into further material that will accompany this *Instrumentum laboris*, providing the theological foundations for some of its contents.

Alongside the preparatory work for the Second Session, the work of the ten Study Groups[5] has begun. They are entrusted with the task of delving into ten themes[6] emerging from the SR and identified by the Pope at the end of an international consultation. These Study Groups, made up of pastors and experts from all continents, use a synodal working method and are "constituted by common agreement between the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia responsible for the various themes and the General Secretariat of the Synod, which is entrusted with the coordination", according to the Chirograph signed by Pope Francis on 16 February 2024 and in the spirit of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate evangelium* (art. 33). They will complete their in-depth study by June 2025, if possible, but will offer a progress report to the Synod Assembly in October 2024. Ahead of the conclusion of the Second Session, Pope Francis has already accepted some of the requests of the First Session and begun the work of implementation in the form envisaged by the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*: "Together with the competent dicastery of the Roman Curia, as well as other dicasteries interested in various ways according to the theme and the circumstances, the General Secretariat of the Synod for its part promotes the implementation of the synodal recommendations approved by the Roman Pontiff." (art. 20, c. 1). In agreement with the Dicastery for Legislative Texts, a Canon Law Commission has been set up to serve the Synod. Finally, following the request of the First Session (cf. SR 16q), on 25 April 2024, SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) announced the establishment of a special Commission to discern the theological and pastoral implications of polygamy for the Church in Africa.

### **A working tool for the Second Session**

Our journey has been characterised by silence, prayer, listening to the Word of God, dialogue and joyful encounters. It has not been without difficulties. Yet through this, as the People of God, we have matured into a deeper awareness of our relationship with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, with a common responsibility to be a community of the redeemed that proclaims the beauty of the Kingdom of God to the whole world in word and life. This identity is not an abstraction but a lived experience imprinted with names and faces. In preparation for the Second Session, and during its work, we continue to address this question: *how* can the identity of the synodal People of God in mission take concrete form in the relationships, paths and places where the everyday life of the Church takes place?

This *Instrumentum laboris* serves that purpose, cohering also with what was said about the *Instrumentum laboris* prepared for the First Session: "it is not a document of the Magisterium of the Church, nor the report of a sociological survey; it does not offer the formulation of operative indications, of goals and objectives, nor the complete elaboration of a theological vision" (n. 10, cf. DCS n. 8). To understand this document, it is essential to place it within the synodal process as a whole. It is shaped by the circularity of dialogue between the Churches, supported by the work of the General Secretariat of the Synod. The First Session of the Assembly (2023) gathered the fruits of the local and continental consultations in search of the "characteristic signs of a synodal Church and the dynamics of communion, mission and participation that inhabit it" (SR, Introduction). Through prayer, dialogue and discernment, the First Assembly drew forth and expressed in the Synthesis Report the convergences, the matters that require consideration and the proposals. What emerged can be understood as an initial response to the question, "How does a Synodal Church describe itself?". The Second Session does not retrace these steps but is called to go further, focusing on its guiding question: "*How* to be a synodal Church in mission?". Other questions that emerged during the journey are the subject of work that continues in other ways, at the level of the local Churches as well as in the ten Study Groups. The two Sessions cannot be separated, nor can they be opposed. They are in continuity, and above all, they are part of a broader process which, as the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* states, will not cease at the end of October 2024.

In practical terms, this *Instrumentum laboris* opens with a section dedicated to foundational understandings of synodality, presenting the awareness of synodality that has matured along the way and was approved by the

First Session. This is followed by three closely interwoven sections, which illuminate the missionary synodal life of the Church from different perspectives: I) from the perspective of the Relationships - with the Lord, between brothers and sisters and between Churches - which sustain the vitality of the Church in ways more profound than the merely structural; II) from the perspective of the pathways that support the dynamism of our ecclesial relationships; III) from the perspective of the places that are the tangible contexts for our embodied relationships, marked by their variety, plurality and interconnection, and rooted in the foundation of the profession of faith, resisting human temptations to abstract universalism. Each of these Sections will be the object of prayer, exchange and discernment in one of the modules that will structure the work of the Second Session. Each participant will be invited to "offer one's contribution as a gift for others and not as something absolute or certain" (SR, Introduction) on a path that the members of the Assembly are called to walk together. On this basis, a final document relating to the whole process will be drafted and will offer the Pope proposals on steps that could be taken.

We can expect a further deepening of the shared understanding of synodality, a better focus on the practices of a synodal Church, and the proposal of some changes in canon law (there may be yet more significant and profound developments as the basic proposal is further assimilated and lived.). Nonetheless, we cannot expect the answer to every question. In addition, other proposals will emerge along the way, on the path of conversion and reform that the Second Session will invite the whole Church to undertake. Among the gains of the process so far, we can include having experienced and learned a method for addressing questions together, in dialogue and discernment. We are still learning how to be a missionary synodal Church, but it is a task we have learned that we can undertake with joy.

## **Foundations**

*This section of the Instrumentum laboris seeks to outline the foundations of the vision of a missionary synodal Church, inviting us to deepen our understanding of the mystery of the Church. It does not offer a complete treatise on ecclesiology but is placed at the service of the particular work of discernment to be undertaken by the Synodal Assembly of October 2024. Responding to the question "How to be a synodal Church in mission?" requires a horizon within which to place pastoral and theological reflections and proposals, helping to orient us on a path of conversion and reform. In turn, the concrete measures implemented by the Church will allow the horizon to be brought into sharper focus and a deeper understanding of foundations to be gained in generative reciprocity between theological reflection and pastoral practice that marks the entire history of the Church.*

*In Christ, light of all the nations, we are one People of God, called to be a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity. We do this by walking together in history, living the communion that is a partaking in the life of the Trinity, and promoting the participation of all in view of our common mission. This vision has deep and strong roots in the Church's living tradition. The synodal process has simply allowed a renewed awareness of this vision to mature. This renewal is expressed in the convergences that have emerged during the journey since 2021 and have been collated by the First Session of the Synodal Assembly (October 2023). Its Synthesis Report presented them to the whole Church to aid the discernment that will complete the Second Session.*

### **The Church, People of God, sacrament of unity**

1. Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit gives rise to the mystical, dynamic and communitarian identity of the People of God. It orients us to the fullness of life in which the Lord Jesus precedes us and to the mission of inviting every man and woman to accept the gift of salvation in freedom (cf. Mt 28:18-19). In Baptism, Jesus clothes us with Himself and shares His identity and mission with us (cf. Gal 3:27).

2. It has pleased God "to sanctify and save men and women not individually and without regard for what binds them together, but to set them up as a people who would acknowledge him in truth and serve him in holiness" (LG 9), sharing in the communion of the Trinity. In and through His people, God realises and manifests the salvation He gives us in Christ. Synodality is rooted in this dynamic vision of the People of God with a universal vocation to holiness and mission while being on a pilgrimage to the Father in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and

animated by the Holy Spirit. This synodal and missionary People of God proclaims and bears witness to the Good News of salvation in the different contexts in which it lives and walks. Walking together with all the peoples of the earth, shaped by their cultures and religions, it dialogues with them and accompanies them.

3. The synodal process has developed a deeper awareness in us of what it means to be the People of God gathered as "the Church from every tribe, tongue, people and nation" (SR 5), living its journey towards the Kingdom in different contexts and cultures. The People of God is the communal subject that goes through the stages of salvation history on its way to fulfilment. The People of God is never simply the sum of the baptised; rather, it is the 'we' of the Church, the communitarian and historical subject of synodality and mission, so that all may receive the salvation prepared by God. Incorporated into this people through faith and Baptism, we are accompanied by the Virgin Mary, "a sign of sure hope and comfort for the pilgrim people of God" (LG 68), by the apostles, by those who have borne witness to their faith to the point of giving their lives, and with the saints who have gone before us.

4. "Christ is the light of the nations" (LG 1), and this light shines on the face of the Church, which "is in Christ as a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity" (*ibid.*). Like the moon, the Church shines with reflected light: it cannot, therefore, understand its mission self-referentially but receives the responsibility of being the sacrament of bonds, relationships and communion in service to the unity of all humanity. We bear this responsibility in times now dominated by the crisis of participation, the absence of a sense that we have a common destiny, and a too-often individualistic conception of happiness and, therefore, of salvation. In living out this mission, the Church communicates God's plan to unite all humanity to Himself in salvation. In doing so, it does not proclaim itself "but Christ Jesus the Lord" (2 Cor 4:5). If this were not so, it would lose its being in Christ "as a sacrament" (cf. LG 1) and therefore, its own identity and *raison d'être*. On the way to fullness, the Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom of God in the world.

### The shared meaning of synodality

5. The terms *synodality* and *synodal*, derived from the ancient and constant ecclesial practice of gathering in *synod*[7], have been better understood and, above all, lived thanks to the experience of recent years. They have been increasingly associated with the "desire for the Church as God's home and family, a Church that is closer to the lives of Her people, less bureaucratic and more relational" (SR 1b), the home and family of God. During its First Session, the Assembly converged in understanding the meaning of 'synodality', an understanding that underlies this *Instrumentum laboris*. The in-depth study groups now underway aim to better focus the Catholic perspective on this constitutive dimension of the Church in a dialogue with other Christian traditions that respect the differences and particularities of each one. In its broadest sense, "synodality can be understood as Christians walking in communion with Christ toward the Kingdom along with the whole of humanity. Its orientation is towards mission, and its practice involves gathering in assembly at each level of ecclesial life. It involves reciprocal listening, dialogue, community discernment, and creation of consensus as an expression that renders Christ present in the Holy Spirit, each taking decisions in accordance with their responsibilities." (SR 1h).

6. Synodality, therefore, designates "the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church" (ITC, n. 70a), a style that starts from listening as the first act of the Church. Faith, which is born from listening to the proclamation of the Good News (cf. Rom 10:17), lives from listening: listening to the Word of God, listening to the Holy Spirit, listening to one another, listening to the living tradition of the Church and its Magisterium. In the stages of the synodal process, the Church once again has experienced what the Scriptures teach: it is only possible to proclaim what one has heard.

7. Synodality "ought to be expressed in the Church's ordinary way of living and working. This *modus vivendi et operandi* works through the community listening to the Word and celebrating the Eucharist, the brotherhood [and sisterhood] of communion and the co-responsibility and participation of the whole People of God in its life and mission, on all levels and distinguishing between various ministries and roles" (*ibid.*). The term then indicates the ecclesial structures and processes in which the synodal nature of the Church is expressed at the institutional level, and finally designates those particular events in which the Church is convoked by the competent authority



(cf. *ibid*). In describing the Church, the notion of synodality is not an alternative to that of communion. In fact, in the context of the ecclesiology of the People of God illustrated by the Second Vatican Council, the concept of communion expresses the profound substance of the mystery and mission of the Church, which has its source and culmination in the celebration of the Eucharist, that is, in communion with the Triune God and the unity among human persons that is realised in Christ through the Holy Spirit. In that same context, Synodality "is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission." (ITC, n.6)

8. Synodality in no way entails the devaluation of the particular authority and specific task that Christ entrusts to the pastors: the bishops with the presbyters, their collaborators, and the Roman Pontiff as "the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity both of the bishops and of the multitude of the faithful" (LG 23). Rather, it offers "the most appropriate interpretative framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself" (Francis, *Address in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015), inviting the whole Church, including those who exercise authority, to true conversion and reform.

9. Synodality is not an end in itself. Insofar as it offers the possibility of expressing the nature of the Church and insofar as it allows all the charisms, vocations and ministries in the Church to be valued, it enables the community of those who "look to Jesus in faith" (LG 9) to proclaim the Gospel in the most appropriate way to women and men of every place and time, and to be a "visible sacrament" (*ibid.*) of the salvific unity willed by God. Synodality and mission are thus intimately linked. If the Second Session is to focus on certain aspects of synodal life, it does so with a view to greater effectiveness in mission. At the same time, synodality is the condition for continuing the ecumenical journey towards the visible unity of all Christians. The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices is the title and theme of Study Group 10.

### **Unity as harmony in diversity**

10. The dynamism of ecclesial communion and, therefore, of the synodal life of the Church finds its own model and fulfilment in the Eucharistic liturgy. In it, the communion of the faithful (*communio fidelium*) is at the same time the communion of the Churches (*communio Ecclesiarum*), which is manifested in the communion of the bishops (*communio episcoporum*), because of the very ancient principle that "the Church is in the Bishop and the Bishop is in the Church" (St Cyprian, *Ep.* 66.8). At the service of communion, the Lord placed the Apostle Peter (cf. Mt 16:18) and his successors. By virtue of the Petrine ministry, the Bishop of Rome is "the perpetual and visible principle and foundation" (LG, n. 23) of the unity of the Church, expressed in the communion of all the faithful, of all the Churches, of all the bishops. Thus, is manifested the harmony that the Spirit works in the Church, the Spirit who is harmony in person (cf. S. Basil, *In Ps 29:1*).

11. Throughout the synod process, the Church's desire for unity has grown hand in hand with an awareness of its diversity. It was precisely the sharing among the Churches that reminded us that there is no mission without context, that is, without a clear awareness that the gift of the Gospel is offered to people and communities living in particular times and places, not closed in on themselves but bearers of stories that must be recognised, respected, and opened to broader horizons. One of the greatest gifts received along the way has been the opportunity to encounter and celebrate the beauty of the "pluriform face of the Church" (John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40). Synodal renewal favours the appreciation of contexts as a place where God's universal call to be part of his people, of that Kingdom of God, which is "justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17), is made present and realised. In this way, different cultures can grasp the unity that underlies and completes their vibrant plurality. Appreciating contexts, cultures, and diversity is key to growing as a missionary synodal Church.

12. Similarly, awareness has grown of the variety of charisms and vocations that the Holy Spirit constantly awakens in the People of God. This gives rise to the desire to grow in the ability to discern them, understand their relationships within the concrete life of each Church and the Church as a whole, and articulate them for the good of mission. This also means reflecting more deeply on the question of participation in relation to communion and mission. At every stage of the process, the desire emerged to broaden the possibilities of

participation and the exercise of co-responsibility by all the baptised, men and women, in the variety of their charisms, vocations and ministries. This desire points in three directions. The first is the need to renew the proclamation and transmission of the faith in ways and means appropriate to the current context. The second is the renewal of liturgical and sacramental life, starting with liturgical celebrations that are beautiful, dignified, accessible, fully participative, well-inculturated and capable of nourishing the impulse towards mission. The third is to recognise and transform the sorrow evoked by the non-participation of so many members of the People of God in this journey of ecclesial renewal and the Church's struggle to live well the relationships between men and women, between the generations, and between people and groups of different cultural identities and social conditions, especially those made poor and the excluded. This weakness in reciprocity, participation and communion remains an obstacle to a full renewal of the Church in a missionary synodal sense.

### **Sisters and brothers in Christ: a renewed reciprocity**

13. The first difference we encounter as human persons is between men and women. Our vocation as Christians is to honour this God-given difference by living within the Church a dynamic relational reciprocity as a sign for the world. In reflecting on this vision from a synodal perspective, the contributions received at all stages highlighted the need to give fuller recognition to the charisms, vocation and role of women, to better honour this reciprocity of relations in all spheres of the Church's life. The synodal perspective highlights three theological reference points as a guide for discernment: a) participation is rooted in the ecclesiological implications of Baptism; b) we are a communion of baptized persons, called not to bury talents but to discern and call forth the gifts that the Spirit pours out on each for the good of the community and the world; c) while respecting and acknowledging the diverse vocations and gifts of each, the gifts that the Spirit bestows on the faithful are ordered to each other in a complementary manner and the collaboration of all the baptised is to be practised as an act of co-responsibility. Guiding us in our reflection is the testimony of the Holy Scriptures: God chose women as the first witnesses and heralds of the Resurrection. By virtue of Baptism, they enjoy full equality, receive the same outpouring of gifts from the Spirit, and are called to the service of Christ's mission.

14. In this sense, the first change to be made is one of mentality: a conversion to a vision of relationality, interdependence and reciprocity between women and men, who are sisters and brothers in Christ, oriented to a common mission. The communion, participation and mission of the Church suffer the consequences of a failure to transform relationships and structures. As a contribution of a Latin American Episcopal Conference notes: "a Church in which all members can feel co-responsible is also an attractive and credible place".

15. The contributions of the Episcopal Conferences recognise that women can participate in many areas of Church life. However, they also note that these possibilities for participation often remain untapped. That is why they suggest that the Second Session promote awareness of and encourage the full use and further development of these possibilities within Parishes, Dioceses and other ecclesial realities, including positions of responsibility. They also call for further exploration of ministerial and pastoral modalities that better express the charisms and gifts the Spirit pours out on women in response to the pastoral needs of our time. As a Latin American Episcopal Conference says: "In our culture the presence of machismo remains strong, while a more active participation of women in all ecclesial spheres is needed. As Pope Francis states, their perspective is indispensable in decision-making processes and in the assumption of roles in the different forms of pastoral care and mission".

16. Concrete requests emerge from the contributions of the Episcopal Conferences for consideration at the Second Session, including: (a) the promotion of domains for dialogue in the Church so that women can share their experiences, charisms, skills, and spiritual, theological and pastoral insights for the good of the whole Church; (b) a wider participation of women in the processes of ecclesial discernment and all stages of decision-making processes (drafting and decision-making); c) wider access to positions of responsibility in Dioceses and ecclesiastical institutions, in line with existing provisions; d) greater recognition and support for the life and charisms of consecrated women and their employment in positions of responsibility; e) access for women to positions of responsibility in seminaries, institutes and theological faculties; f) an increase in the number of women judges in all canonical processes. The reports received also continue to call for greater attention to be paid to the use of language that is more inclusive and to a range of images from Scripture and Tradition in preaching, teaching, catechesis and the drafting of official Church documents.

17. While some local Churches call for women to be admitted to the diaconal ministry, others reiterate their opposition. On this issue, which will not be the subject of the work of the Second Session, it is good that theological reflection should continue, on an appropriate timescale and in the appropriate ways. The fruits of Study Group 5, which will take into consideration the results of the two Commissions that have dealt with the question in the past, will contribute to its maturation.

18. Many of the demands expressed above also apply to laymen, whose lack of participation in the life of the Church is often lamented. In general, reflection on the role of women often highlights the desire to strengthen all the ministries exercised by the laity (men and women). There is also a call for adequately trained lay men and women to contribute to preaching the Word of God, including during the celebration of the Eucharist.

### **Call to conversion and reform**

19. Jesus began his public ministry with a call to conversion (cf. Mk 1:15). This call represents an invitation to rethink personal and communal ways of living and to let oneself be transformed by the Spirit. No reform could be limited to structures alone but must be rooted in an inner transformation according to the “mind of Christ” (Phil 2:5). For a synodal Church, the first conversion is to listening, the rediscovery of which has been one of the greatest fruits of the journey to date. This is, first of all, listening to the Holy Spirit, the real protagonist of the Synod, and then listening to each other as a fundamental disposition for mission.

20. The Church's synodal style offers humanity many important insights. In an age marked by increasing inequalities, growing disillusionment with traditional models of governance, democratic disenchantment and the dominance of the market model in human interactions, and the temptation to resolve conflicts by force rather than dialogue, synodality could offer inspiration for the future of our societies. Its attractiveness stems from the fact that it is not a management strategy but a practice to be lived and celebrated in a spirit of gratitude. The synodal way of living relationships is a social witness responding to the deep human need to be welcomed and recognised within a concrete community. Synodal practice challenges the growing isolation of people and cultural individualism, which even the Church has often absorbed, and calls us to mutual care, interdependence and co-responsibility for the common good. Equally, it is also a challenge to an exaggerated social communitarianism that suffocates people and does not allow them to be free subjects of their own development. The willingness to listen to all, especially those made poor, a willingness that the synodal way of life promotes, stands in stark contrast to a world in which the concentration of power shuts out the voices of the poorest, the marginalised and minorities. The concreteness of the synodal process has shown how much the Church itself needs to grow in this dimension. Study Group 2 is also working on this issue.

21. At every stage of the synodal process, the need for healing, reconciliation, and restoration of trust within the Church and society resonated strongly. Walking this path of healing and restoration is a missionary commitment of the People of God in our world and a gift we must invoke from above. The desire to walk further on this path is a fruit of synodal renewal.

### **Part I - Relations**

*Throughout the synodal process and from all regions of the globe, the request emerged for a Church less focused on bureaucracy and more capable of nurturing relationships with the Lord, between men and women, in the family, in the community, and between social groups. Only a web of relationships that weaves together the multiplicity of belongings can sustain individuals and communities, offering them points of reference and orientation and showing them the beauty of life according to the Gospel. It is in relationships - with Christ, with others, in the community - that faith is transmitted.*

*As it exists in service to mission, synodality should not be thought of as an organisational expedient but lived and cultivated as the way the disciples of Jesus weave relationships in solidarity, capable of corresponding to the divine love that continually reaches them and that they are called to bear witness to in the concrete contexts in which they live. Understanding how to be a synodal Church in mission thus passes through a relational conversion, which reorients the priorities and the action of each person, especially of those whose task it is to*

*animate relationships in the service of unity, in the concreteness of an exchange of gifts that liberates and enriches all.*

### **In Christ and in the Spirit: Christian initiation**

22. "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (AG 2). The encounter with Jesus, the adherence in faith to his person, and the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation lead us into the very life of the Trinity. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus enables those who receive Baptism to participate in his relationship with the Father. The Spirit with whom Jesus was filled and who led him (Lk 4:1), who anointed him and sent him out to proclaim the Gospel (Lk 4:18), who raised him from the dead (Rom 8:11) is the same Spirit who now anoints the members of the People of God. This Spirit makes us children and heirs of God, and it is through the Spirit that we cry out to God, calling him "Abbà! Father!".

23. To understand the nature of a synodal Church in mission, it is indispensable to grasp this Trinitarian foundation, and in particular, the inextricable link between the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in human history and the Church: "It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and filling and ruling over the Church as a whole, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful. He brings them all into intimate union with Christ, so that he is the principle of the Church's unity" (UR 2). This is why the process of Christian initiation of adults is a privileged context for understanding the synodal life of the Church. It highlights its origin and foundation: the relationships that unite and distinguish the three divine Persons. With the baptismal gifts, the Holy Spirit conforms us to Christ, priest, prophet, and king, makes us members of His Body, which is the Church, and makes us children of the one Father. Thus, we receive the call to mission and co-responsibility for what unites us in the one Church. Those gifts have a threefold and inseparable orientation: personal, communal and missionary. They empower and commit every baptised man or woman to building cordial relationships, as sisters and brothers, in their own ecclesial community, to the search for an ever more visible and profound communion with all those with whom they share the same Baptism, and to the proclamation and witness of the Gospel.

24. If, on the one hand, missionary synodality is rooted in Christian initiation, on the other hand, it must illuminate how the People of God lives the journey of initiation, making it its own for what it really means. This includes overcoming a static and individualistic vision of initiation that is insufficiently linked to the following of Christ and life in the Spirit and so recovering the dynamic and transformative value of Christian initiation. In the early Church, Christians reading the words of the Book of Genesis "on the sixth day", God said: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness" (Gen 1:26), saw how relational dynamism was inscribed in the anthropology of creation. They saw in the image that of the incarnate Son and in the likeness the gradual possibility of conformation, the manifestation of the beneficial adventure of the freedom to choose to be with and like Christ. This adventure begins with listening to the Word of God, through which the catechumen gradually enters into the following of Christ Jesus. Baptism is at the service of the dynamism of the likeness, and for this reason, it is not a punctual act closed at the moment of its celebration but a gift that must be confirmed, nourished and put to good use through the commitment to conversion, service to mission and participation in the life of the community. Christian initiation culminates, in fact, in the Sunday Eucharist, which is celebrated every week, a sign of the unceasing gift of grace that conforms us to Christ and makes us members of his Body and nourishment that sustains us on the path of conversion and mission.

25. In this sense, the Eucharistic assembly manifests and nourishes the missionary synodal life of the Church. In the participation of all Christians, in the presence of different ministries and the presidency of the bishop or priest, the Christian community is made visible, in which a differentiated co-responsibility of all for the mission is realised. The liturgy, as "the high point towards which the activity of the Church is directed, and, simultaneously, the source from which all its power flows out" (SC 10) is at the same time the source of the synodal life of the Church and the prototype of every synodal event, making the mystery of the Trinity appear "as in a mirror" (1 Cor 13:12; cf. DV 7).

26. It is necessary that the pastoral proposals and liturgical practices preserve and make ever more evident the link between the journey of Christian initiation and the synodal and missionary life of the Church. In this way, we

avoid reducing this journey to a solely pedagogical instrument or an indicator of a mere social belonging and promote instead the acceptance of this personal gift oriented towards mission and community building. The appropriate pastoral and liturgical arrangements must be developed in the plurality of situations and cultures in which the local Churches are immersed, also attentive to the difference between those in which Christian initiation involves mainly young people or adults and those in which it concerns mainly, if not exclusively, children.

### **For the People of God: charisms and ministries**

27. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:4, 7). The freedom of the Holy Spirit is at the origin of the variety of charisms (gifts of grace) and ministries (forms of service in the Church in view of her mission). The Spirit grants them and works unceasingly so that they manifest the unity of the faith and belonging to the one and unique Catholic Church in the variety of persons, cultures and places. Charisms, even the simplest and most widespread, are bestowed in response to the needs of the Church and for its mission (cf. LG 12). At the same time, they contribute effectively to the life of society, in its different aspects. Charisms are often shared, giving rise to the different forms of consecrated life and the pluralism of ecclesial associations, groups and movements.

28. The primary sphere in which the charisms borne by each baptised person are called to manifest themselves is not the organisation of ecclesial activities or structures but in daily life, family and social relationships. In the most diverse situations, Christians - individually and communally - are called to make the gifts of grace they have received flourish for the good of all. Like that of ministries, the fruitfulness of charisms depends on God's action, the vocation God addresses to each one, the generous and wise acceptance of the baptised, and recognition and accompaniment by authority. Therefore, they cannot be interpreted as the property of those who receive and exercise them, nor as intended for their exclusive benefit.

29. As an expression of the Spirit's freedom in bestowing gifts and as a response to the needs of individual communities, there is in the Church a variety of ministries that can be exercised by any baptised man or woman. These take the form of a regular service offered to and recognised by the community and those who guide it. They can be called baptismal ministries to indicate their common root (baptism) and to distinguish them from ordained ministries rooted in the sacrament of Order. There are, for example, men and women who exercise the ministry of coordinating a small church community, the ministry of leading moments of prayer (at funerals or otherwise), the extraordinary ministry of communion, or other services not necessarily liturgical. The Latin and Eastern canonical norms already provide that, in some cases, lay faithful, men or women, may also be extraordinary ministers of baptism. According to the Latin norms, the bishop may delegate to lay faithful, men or women, to assist at weddings. It is useful to continue reflecting on how to entrust these ministries to the laity in a more stable form. This reflection should be accompanied by further consideration of how we can promote more forms of lay ministry, including outside the liturgical sphere.

30. In recent times, certain modes of service that have long been present in the life of the Church have received a new configuration as instituted ministries, including the ministry of lectors and that of acolytes (cf. Apostolic Letter in the form of *motu proprio Spiritus Domini*, 10 January 2021). The instituted ministry of catechists has also developed (cf. Apostolic Letter in the form of *motu proprio Antiquum ministerium*, 10 May 2021). Instituted ministries are conferred by the bishop on men and women once in a lifetime via a special rite after appropriate discernment and adequate formation. The time and manner of their exercise must be defined by a mandate from the legitimate authority. Some theological and canonical questions concerning specific forms of ecclesial ministry - in particular, the question of the necessary participation of women in the life and leadership of the Church - have been entrusted to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, in dialogue with the General Secretariat of the Synod (Study Group No. 5).

31. While not all charisms take on properly ministerial forms, all ministries are founded on charisms given to certain members of the People of God, who are called to act in different ways so that each one in the community

can participate in the building up of the body of Christ (cf. Eph 4:12), in mutual service. Like charisms, ministries must also be recognised, promoted and valued. The synodal process has repeatedly highlighted how the discernment and promotion of charisms and ministries, as well as the identification of the needs of communities and society to which they are intended to respond, is an aspect in which the local Churches need to grow, giving themselves adequate criteria, tools and procedures. The Second Vatican Council teaches that it is the task of pastors "to acknowledge their [the faithful's] ministries and their charisms, so that all may cooperate unanimously, each in her or his own way, in the common task" (LG 30). The discernment of charisms and ministries is a properly ecclesial act: in order to recognise and promote them, the bishop is obliged to listen to the voice of all those involved: individual faithful, communities, and participative bodies. To this end, procedures suitable to the different contexts must be identified, always taking care to make possible a real consensus on the criteria and outcomes of discernment. The results of the "Parish Priests for the Synod" meeting strongly emphasise these needs.

32. Also emphasised is the call to grow in a deeper trust in the action of the Spirit and greater courage and creativity in discerning how to put the gifts received and welcomed at the service of the Church's mission in a way that is appropriate to different local contexts. It is precisely the variety of contexts, and therefore of the needs of communities, that suggests that the local Churches, under the guidance of their pastors, and their groupings "in every great socio-cultural region" (AG 22), undertake with humility and confidence a creative discernment on which ministries that they must recognise, entrust or institute to respond to pastoral and societal needs. Therefore, criteria and ways to carry out this discernment must be defined. Reflection must also consider how to entrust baptismal ministries (non-instituted and instituted) at a time when people move from one place to another with increasing ease, specifying the times and areas of their exercise.

33. The journey so far has led to the recognition that a synodal Church is a Church that listens, is capable of welcoming and accompanying, and is perceived as home and family. A need emerges in all continents concerning people who, for different reasons, are or feel excluded or on the margins of the ecclesial community or who struggle to find full recognition of their dignity and gifts within it. This lack of welcome leaves them feeling rejected, hinders their journey of faith and encounter with the Lord, and deprives the Church of their contribution to mission.

34. It seems appropriate to create a recognised and properly instituted ministry of listening and accompaniment, which would make this characteristic feature of a synodal Church an enduring and tangible reality. An 'open door' of the community is needed, allowing people to enter without feeling threatened or judged. The forms of exercising this ministry will need to adapt to local circumstances according to the diversity of experiences, structures, social contexts and available resources. This opens up a space for discernment to take place at the local level, with the involvement of national or continental Episcopal Conferences. However, the presence of a specific ministry does not mean reserving the commitment to listening to these ministers alone. On the contrary, it has a prophetic character. On the one hand, it emphasises that listening and accompaniment are an ordinary dimension of the life of a synodal Church, which in different ways engages all the baptised and in which all communities are invited to grow; on the other hand, it reminds us that listening and accompaniment is an ecclesial service, not a personal initiative, the value of which is thus recognised. This awareness is a mature fruit of the synodal process.

#### **With ordained ministers: at the service of harmony**

35. Contrasting data emerged from the synodal process concerning the exercise of the ordained ministry within the People of God. On the one hand, the joy, commitment and dedication of bishops, priests and deacons in carrying out their service were emphasised; on the other hand, they have spoken of a certain fatigue, linked above all to a sense of isolation, loneliness, being cut off from healthy and sustainable relationships, and of being overwhelmed by the demand to provide answers to every need. This can be one of the toxic effects of clericalism. In particular, the figure of the bishop is frequently overloaded with unrealistic expectations of what a single person can reasonably achieve.

36. The meeting "Parish Priests for the Synod" linked this fatigue to the difficulty of bishops and priests in truly

walking together in their shared ministry. A reimagining of the ordained ministry within the horizon of the missionary synodal Church is thus not only a demand for coherence but also an opportunity for release from these burdens, provided it is accompanied by an effective conversion of practices, which makes the change and the benefits deriving from it evident to ordained ministers and the other faithful. In addition to the journey of conversion of ordained ministers, this path will entail a new way of thinking about and organising pastoral action, which takes into account the participation of all baptised men and women in the mission of the Church, aiming, in particular, to bring out, recognise and animate the different baptismal charisms and ministries. The question "How to be a synodal Church in mission?" prompts us to reflect concretely on the relationships, structures and processes that can foster a renewed vision of ordained ministry, moving from a pyramidal way of exercising authority to a synodal way. Within the framework of promoting baptismal charisms and ministries, a reallocation of tasks whose performance does not require the sacrament of Orders can be initiated. A more detailed distribution of responsibilities will favour decision-making and taking processes marked by a more clearly synodal style.

37. In the conciliar texts, the ordained ministry is conceived primarily as service in the Church for the very existence of the Church. By its authority, the Council has restored the form of the ordained ministry of the early Church, a ministry which "is exercised in different orders by those who right from ancient times are called bishops, priests and deacons" (LG 28). In this articulation, episcopate and presbyterate correspond to a special participation in the priesthood of Christ the shepherd and head of the ecclesial community, while the diaconate is "not for the priesthood, but for the ministry" (LG 29). The different orders are organically related one to the other, in mutual interdependence, in the specificity of each. The ordained cannot think of themselves as isolated individuals on whom powers have been conferred but as sharers in the gifts (*munera*) conferred by ordination, which are Christ's, in collegiality with other ordained ministers and in an organic bond with the People of God of which he is a part and which, albeit in a different way, shares in those same gifts of Christ in the common priesthood founded on Baptism.

38. The bishop has the task of presiding over a Church, being a visible principle of unity within it and a bond of communion with all the Churches. The singularity of his ministry entails a power that is proper, ordinary and immediate, powers that each bishop exercises personally in the name of Christ (cf. LG 27) of the proclamation of the Word, presiding over the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and pastoral guidance. This does not imply his separation from the portion of the People of God entrusted to him (cf. CD 11), and which he is called to serve in the name of Christ the Good Shepherd. The fact that "the fullness of the sacrament of order is conferred by episcopal consecration" (LG 21) is not the justification for an episcopal ministry that is 'monarchical', conceived as an accumulation of prerogatives from which every other charism and ministry derives. Instead, it affirms the capacity and duty to gather and compose in unity every gift that the Spirit pours out on baptised men and women and on the various communities. Certain aspects of episcopal ministry, including the criteria for selecting candidates for the episcopate, are being addressed by Study Group 7.

39. The ministry of priests should also be conceived and lived in a synodal sense. In particular, priests "constitute along with their bishop one presbyterium" (LG 28) at the service of that portion of the People of God, which is the local Church (cf. CD 11). This requires that we do not consider the bishop as external to the presbyterate but as the one who presides over a local Church, first of all presiding over its presbyterate, of which he is a part with a particular singularity, being called to exercise special care towards priests.

40. Bishops and priests are assisted by deacons in a bond of mutual interdependence of the two types of ministry for the implementation of the apostolic service. Bishops and presbyters are not self-sufficient with respect to deacons and vice versa. Since the functions of deacons are many - as tradition, liturgical prayer and post-Vatican II praxis show - they must be related to the particularity and specificity of each individual local Church. The service of each deacon must, in any case, be conceived in harmony and communion with that of all other deacons, in accordance with the nature of the diaconal ministry and within the framework of mission in a synodal Church.

41. Besides promoting unity in the local Church, the Diocesan or Eparchial bishop, assisted by priests and deacons, is also responsible for relations with the other local Churches and the whole Church around the Bishop of Rome in a mutual exchange of gifts. Re-establishing the traditional link between being a bishop and presiding

over a local Church is important, restoring the correspondence between the communion of bishops (*communio episcoporum*) and the communion of Churches (*communio Ecclesiarum*).

### **Between the Churches and in the world: the concreteness of communion**

42. Synodality is implemented through networks of people, communities, bodies and a set of processes that enable an effective exchange of gifts between the Churches and an evangelising dialogue with the world. Walking together as baptised persons in the diversity of charisms, vocations and ministries, as well as in the exchange of gifts between Churches, is an important sacramental sign for today's world, which, on the one hand, experiences increasingly intense forms of interconnectedness, and on the other is immersed in a mercantile culture that marginalises gratuitousness.

43. According to the Council, it is by virtue of the catholicity of the Church that "the individual parts bring their own gifts to the other parts and to the whole" (LG 13). "Between the different parts of the Church there are bonds of intimate communion with regard to spiritual riches, apostolic workers and temporal resources. For the members of the people of God are called to share their goods, and the words of the apostle are applicable also to the individual churches: 'As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace' (1 Pet 4: 10)" (*ibid.*).

44. The Episcopal Conferences hope that goods will be shared in a spirit of solidarity between the Churches that make up the one and unique Catholic Church, without any desire for domination or claim to superiority. The existence of rich Churches and Churches that live in great hardship is a scandal. It is therefore suggested that arrangements be made to promote mutual ties and form support networks, including in the context of groupings of Churches.

45. All the local Churches receive and give in the communion of the one Church. There are Churches that need the support of financial and material resources; others that are enriched by the witness of living faith and loving service to the poorest; still others need, above all, the help of evangelisers who devote their lives to communicating the Gospel to other peoples. In particular, the generosity of priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, lay men and women engaged in the mission *ad gentes* is recognised and solicited.

46. The local Churches express a desire for an exchange of spiritual, liturgical and theological gifts and also for a greater shared witness on social issues of global importance, such as the care of the common home and migratory movements. In this regard, a synodal Church will be able to testify to the importance of solutions to common problems being worked out based on listening to the voices of all, especially those groups, communities and countries that usually remain on the margins of major global processes. Today, large supranational geographical areas, such as the Amazon, the Congo Basin, the Mediterranean, or similar regions, are particularly promising areas in which to implement forms of exchange of gifts and coordinate efforts.

47. In particular, a synodal Church is invited to approach the reality of human mobility from the perspective of the exchange of gifts. This can be an opportunity for encounters between the Churches in the concreteness of the daily life of cities and neighbourhoods, of Parishes and Dioceses or Eparchies. In this way, the synodal path is rooted in the experience of the communities. Particular attention should be paid to the possibility of encounter and exchange of gifts between the Churches of Latin tradition and the Eastern Catholic Churches in the diaspora. Study Group 1 is working on this theme.

48. The exchange of gifts between Churches takes place in contexts marked by violence, persecution and lack of religious freedom; indeed, some Churches struggle for their very survival and invoke the solidarity of other Churches while they continue to share their riches, the fruit of the constant encounter with opposition to the Gospel and the persecution faced by Lord's disciples throughout history. Moreover, the exchange of gifts takes place in a context still overshadowed by continuing forms of colonialism and neo-colonialism. A Church growing in the practice of synodality is invited to understand the impact of these social dynamics on the exchange of gifts and to seek their transformation. Also, part of this commitment is the recognition that many Churches carry a wounded memory and that there is a need to promote paths of reconciliation.



49. The concept of the 'exchange of gifts' has particular significance in relations with other Churches and ecclesial Communities. St John Paul II applied this idea to ecumenical dialogue: "Dialogue is not only an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an 'exchange of gifts'" (UUS 28). Besides theological dialogue, the exchange of gifts takes place in the sharing of prayer, whereby we open ourselves to receive the gifts of spiritual traditions other than our own. For example, the lives and spiritual insights of holy women and men from other Churches and ecclesial Communities are also gifts we can receive, inserting their memories in our liturgical calendar, especially the martyrs. In this spirit, we must also be generous, offering other Christians the opportunity to come on pilgrimage and pray at the shrines and holy places of which the Catholic Church is a custodian.

50. Dialogue between religions and with cultures is not external to the synodal journey but is part of its call to live closer relations, given that "At all times and in every nation whoever fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God" (LG 9). Therefore, the exchange of gifts is not limited to the Christian Churches because an authentic Catholicity broadens the horizon and calls for the willingness to embrace those factors that promote life, peace, justice, and integral human development present in other cultures and religious traditions.

## Part II – Pathways

*A synodal Church is a relational Church in which interpersonal dynamics form the fabric of the life of a mission-oriented community, whose life unfolds within increasingly complex contexts. The approach proposed here does not separate but grasps the links between experiences, allowing us to learn from reality, which is reread in the light of the Word of God, from Tradition, from prophetic witnesses, and also reflects on mistakes made.*

*Part II highlights the processes that ensure the care and development of relationships, especially union with Christ, oriented towards mission and the harmony of community life through the ability to face conflicts and difficulties together. This part focuses on four distinct but profoundly intertwined areas in the life of the missionary synodal Church: formation, especially to listening (to the Word of God, to the brothers and sisters, and the voice of the Holy Spirit) and discernment, which leads to the development of participatory decision-making and taking that respects the different roles involved, in a mutual relationship that promotes transparency, accountability, and opens the space again to enable discernment for mission.*

*The source and culmination of this dynamism is the Eucharist, which places at the heart of all relationships the gratuitousness of the Father's love through the Son in the Spirit. This daily bread that nourishes a missionary synodal Church is also the content of its proclamation to the world.*

### **An integral and shared formation**

51. "Each baptised person is called to take care of their own formation as a response to the gifts of the Lord, making use of the talents they have received in order that they bear fruit and put them at the service of all" (SR 14a). These words from the Synthesis Report of the First Session explain why the need for formation was one of the themes that emerged universally and most strongly throughout the Synodal Process. Therefore, responding to the question of "How to be a synodal Church in mission?" requires prioritising effective formation pathways, with particular attention to ongoing formation for everyone.

52. For many, participating in synodal gatherings has been an opportunity for being formed in the understanding and practice of synodality. This has drawn forth the strong desire for a better understanding of the meaning of baptismal dignity or that "supernatural sense of faith" (LG 12) that the Spirit bestows as a gift to the People of God. The first need is, therefore, for a deeper formation in the knowledge of how the Spirit acts in the Church and guides it through history.

53. Just as there is no mission without context, there is no Church which is not rooted in a given place, with its particular culture and unique history. This is why it is impossible to envisage abstract formation initiatives. These should be defined by local Churches, and their groupings, Episcopal Conferences, and equivalent Eastern hierarchical structures. This document, therefore, will limit itself to indicating some guidelines and fundamental

characteristics of formation with regard to synodality, which should then be put into practice, taking into consideration the specific contexts, cultures, and traditions of a given place.

54. A synodal Church in mission is grounded in the ability to listen, which requires recognising that no one is self-sufficient in the Church's mission and that everyone has a contribution to offer and something to learn from others. Formation in listening is, therefore, an essential initial requirement. The practice of conversation in the Spirit has made it possible to experience how listening to the Word of God and our brothers and sisters can be woven together and how this dynamic gradually opens one up to listening to the voice of the Spirit. Many contributions have been received that insist on the importance of formation in this method. The Church has a diverse range of methods for listening, dialogue, and discernment, arising from diverse cultures and spiritual traditions. It is important to promote formation in this plurality of methods as well as dialogue between them in local contexts. A key point in this regard is listening to people who experience various types of poverty and marginalisation. Many local Churches report that they feel unprepared for this task and express the need for specific formation. This is one of the points entrusted to the work of Study Group 2.

55. The purpose of formation in the perspective of missionary synodality is to form witnesses, that is: men and women capable of assuming the mission of the Church in co-responsibility and cooperation with the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8). Formation is therefore based on the dynamism of Christian initiation, aiming to promote the personal experience of encounter with the Lord that entails a process of continuously converting our attitudes, relationships, mentality, and structures. The subject of mission is always the Church, and each of its members is a witness and herald of salvation by virtue of Baptism. The Eucharist, "the source and culmination of all Christian life" (LG 11), is the fundamental context of our formation in synodality. As a community of life and love, the family is a privileged place of education for faith and Christian practice. In the interweaving of generations, it is a school of synodality, inviting everyone to care for others and making visible that everyone - the weak and the strong, children, young and old - have much to receive and much to give.

56. In a synodal Church, formation must be integral. Indeed, it not only aims at acquiring various ideas, beliefs or skills but also at promoting the capacity for encounter, sharing, cooperation, and discernment in common. Formation must, therefore, engage all the dimensions of the human person: intellectual, affective, and spiritual. It cannot remain a purely theoretical formation but must include concrete experiences and meaningful accompaniment. It is equally important to foster knowledge of the cultures in which local Churches live and work, including the digital culture, which has become widespread, especially among young people. The work of Study Group 3 is devoted to the digital culture and the promotion of relevant formation in this field.

57. Finally, there has been a clear insistence on the need for a formation that is communal and shared, in which lay men and women, consecrated men and women, ordained ministers and candidates for ordained ministry participate together, thus enabling them to grow in their mutual knowledge and esteem for one another, and in their ability to co-operate. To this end, special attention is required to promote the participation of women in formation programmes alongside seminarians, priests, religious, and lay people. It is crucially important that women have access to teaching and formation roles in theological faculties, institutes, and seminaries. It is also suggested that priests, bishops, and the laity be offered formation to make them aware of the roles and tasks women can already perform in the Church and that an evaluation of the effective use of these opportunities be promoted in all areas of Church life: Parishes, Dioceses, lay associations, ecclesial movements, new communities, consecrated life, ecclesiastical institutions, and the Roman Curia. The work of Study Group 4 is dedicated to revising the formation of candidates for ordained ministry (*Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*) from a missionary synodal perspective. A request coming from all continents is to improve formation for preaching. Finally, there is a need for a shared formation that is both theoretical and practical in communal discernment within and appropriate to various local contexts.

### **Ecclesial discernment for mission**

58. The one Spirit, who gives rise to a great variety of charisms, guides the Church towards the fullness of life and divine truth (cf. Jn 10:10; 16:13). By the continuous presence and action of Spirit, the "tradition which comes from the apostles progresses in the Church" (DV 8). Thanks to the guidance of the Spirit, the People of God, as

sharers in the prophetic function of Christ (cf. LG 12), “discern the true signs of God's presence and purpose in the events, needs and desires which it shares with the rest of modern humanity” (GS 11). For this ecclesial task of discernment, the Holy Spirit bestows the *sensus fidei*, which can be described as “the instinctive capacity to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church” (Francis, *Address for the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015).

59. Discernment commits those who participate in it at a personal level and all participating together at a community level to cultivate dispositions of inner freedom, being open to newness and trusting surrender to God's will in order to listen to one another so as to hear “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (Rev. 2:7). Mary, with her prayerful presence at the heart of the apostolic community in the cenacle (cf. Acts 1:14), is for all a living model and generative guide for an authentic synodal spirituality: in persevering and responsible listening to the Word and in meditative discernment of events (cf. Lk 1:26-38; 2:19. 51), in generous openness to the action of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35), in sharing thanksgiving for the Lord's work (cf. Lk 1:39-56), and in concrete and timely service to each and every person (cf. Jn 2:1-12) whom Jesus entrusted to her maternal care (cf. Jn 19:25-27).

60. Precisely insofar as it requires each person to share his or her point of view on the common mission we share, a process of discernment articulates in a concrete way communion, mission, and participation. In other words, it is a way of walking together. This is why it is crucial to promote broad participation in processes of discernment, taking special care to involve those on the margins of the community and society.

61. The starting point of all ecclesial discernment is listening to the Word of God. Sacred Scripture constitutes the witness *par excellence* of God's communication with humanity. They testify that God has spoken to his People and continues to do so, and they present the different channels through which this communication occurs. God speaks through personal meditation on Scripture, which resonates in the hearts of those who pray with it. God speaks to the community in the liturgy, the pre-eminent place of interpreting what the Lord says to his Church. God speaks through the Church, both Mother and Teacher, through its living Tradition and practices, including those of popular piety. God continues to speak through the events in space and time, provided we know how to discern their meaning. Moreover, God communicates with his People through the natural world, whose very existence points us to the Creator's handiwork, filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit, who gives life. Finally, God speaks in each person's own conscience, which “is the most intimate centre and sanctuary of a person, in which he or she is alone with God whose voice echoes within them” (GS 16). An authentic discernment cannot neglect any of these channels of divine communication.

62. Communal discernment is not a mere organisational technique but a demanding practice that qualifies the life and mission of the Church lived out in Christ and the Holy Spirit. For this reason, it must always be carried out with the awareness and the will to be gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus (cf. Mt 18:20), listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus promised, only the Holy Spirit can lead the Church towards the fullness of life and truth (cf. Jn 16:13), that these may be made available to a world thirsting for meaning. The means by which the People of God lives out its mission of proclaiming and bearing witness to the Gospel is rooted here. It is, therefore, a priority to learn to practise at all levels that evangelical art that enabled the community of the apostles in Jerusalem to characterise the first synodal event in the history of the Church with these words: “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28). It is in this spirit that the practice of the Church's missionary synodal life taking place in specific places, structures, and events must be understood and oriented.

63. Concrete procedural options, in their variety, must be consistent with the requirements of an underlying synodal theological methodology. Based on the experience of the synodal process, it is possible to identify some key elements, including the need for (a) a personal and communal prayer life, including participation in the Eucharist; (b) an adequate personal and communal preparation, based on listening to the Word of God and reality; (c) respectful and profound listening to the word of each person; (d) the search for the widest possible consensus not by finding the lowest common denominator, but by overflow, aiming at what most “makes hearts burn” (cf. Lk 24:32); and (e) while the consensus is to be formulated by those conducting the process, it must be given back to all those who participated, so that they can verify their representation in that formulation.

64. Discernment always takes place ‘with one’s feet on the ground,’ meaning within a concrete context, aware of its particularities and complexities. Discernment, therefore, can only benefit from the analytical contribution of the various human, social, and administrative sciences relevant to the issue at hand. This does not mean that technical and scientific expertise has the last word – such an approach would constitute a technocratic drift. Rather, the aim is to “provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows” (LS 15). Therefore, these forms of expertise must be given a chance to offer their important contribution without dominating other perspectives.

65. In the Church, there is a great variety of approaches to discernment and various well-established methodologies. This diversity is a richness. With appropriate adaptations to different contexts, utilising these diverse approaches can prove fruitful. With a view to the common good, they should enter into a fruitful dialogue without diluting their respective traits or identitarian entrenchments. The fruitfulness of Conversation in the Spirit, evident at all stages of the synodal process, invites us to consider this particular form of ecclesial discernment as particularly well suited to the exercise of synodality.

66. In the local Churches, it is essential to offer formation opportunities that spread and nurture a culture of discernment, particularly among those in positions of responsibility. Equally important is the formation of accompaniers or facilitators, whose contribution often proves crucial in carrying out discernment processes. The work of Study Group 9, dedicated to the preparation of theological criteria and synodal methodologies for a shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues, unfolds along these lines.

### Decision-making processes

67. “In the synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God’s will” (ITC 68). This statement needs to be decisively implemented. It is difficult to imagine a more effective way to promote a synodal Church than the participation of all in decision-making and taking processes. This participation takes place based on a differentiated responsibility that respects each community member and values their respective skills and gifts in view of a shared decision.

68. To facilitate the implementation of such a vision, it is helpful to reflect on how such decision-making processes take form. The latter usually involves a phase of engagement and elaboration (decision-making, according to English terminology that is also used in other languages) “through a joint exercise of discernment, consultation and co-operation” (ITC 69), which informs and supports the decision that is subsequently made, which is ultimately the responsibility of the competent authority (for example, in a Diocese or Eparchy, the bishop). There is no competition or conflict between the two phases, but by their combination, they contribute to ensuring that the decisions made are in conformity with God’s will as much as possible: “Working things out is a synodal task; the decision is a ministerial responsibility” (*ibid.*).

69. In many cases, existing law already prescribes that, before deciding, the authority is obliged to conduct a consultation. This ecclesial consultation cannot be omitted and goes far beyond listening because it obliges the authority not to proceed as if it had not taken place. The authority remains free from a juridical point of view since the consultative opinion is not binding, but if a general agreement emerges, the authority will not depart from it without a convincing reason (*sine praevalenti ratione*; CIC, Canon 127, §2, 2°). If the competent authority were to do so, it would isolate itself from those consulted, injuring the bond that unites them. In the Church, the exercise of authority does not consist in the imposition of an arbitrary will but rather constitutes a moderating force in the common search for what the Spirit requires, as a ministry at the service of the unity of the People of God.

70. In a synodal Church, the responsibility of the bishop, the College of bishops and the Roman Pontiff to make decisions is inalienable since it is rooted in the hierarchical structure of the Church established by Christ. However, it is not unconditional. An orientation that emerges in the consultative process as the outcome of proper discernment, especially if carried out by the participatory bodies of the local Church, cannot be ignored. The aim of synodal ecclesial discernment is not to make the bishops obey the voice of the people, subordinating

the former to the latter, nor to offer the bishops an expedient to make decisions that have already been taken seem more acceptable, but rather to lead to a shared decision in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Any opposition between consultation and deliberation is therefore inadequate: in the Church, deliberation takes place with the help of all, never without the pastoral authority that takes decisions by virtue of its office. For this reason, the recurring formula in the *Code of Canon Law*, which speaks of a 'consultative vote only' (*tantum consultivum*), diminishes the value of consultation and should be corrected.

71. It is up to the local Churches to increasingly implement all the possibilities of giving life to authentically synodal decision-making processes that suit the context's specificities. This is a task of great importance and urgency since the successful implementation of the Synod largely depends on it. Without tangible changes, the vision of a synodal Church will not be credible. This will alienate those members of the People of God who have drawn strength and hope from the synodal journey. This applies most especially to the effective participation of women in drafting and decision-making and taking processes, as called for in many of the contributions received from the Episcopal Conferences.

72. Finally, it should not be forgotten that processes of consultation, communal discernment and synodal decision-making require those who take part in them to have effective access to all relevant information so that they can formulate their own reasoned opinion. The authority initiating the process is responsible for ensuring that this happens. Sound synodal decision-making processes require an appropriate level of transparency. Likewise, it is important to recognise the delicacy of the task and the special responsibility borne by those who express their opinion in a consultation.

### **Transparency, accountability, and evaluation**

73. A synodal Church requires both a culture and practice of transparency and accountability, which are essential to fostering the mutual trust necessary for walking together and exercising co-responsibility for the sake of the common mission. In the Church, the exercise of accountability does not primarily respond to social and organisational needs. Rather, its foundation is found in the very nature of the Church as a mystery of communion.

74. In the New Testament, we find accountability practices in the early Church's life that are significantly related to protecting the communion of the Church. Chapter 11 of the Acts of the Apostles offers us an example of this. When Peter returns to Jerusalem after having baptised Cornelius, a pagan, the circumcised believers rebuked him, saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" (Acts 11:2-3). Peter responds by expressing the reasons behind his actions. Thus, accountability of one's ministry before the community belongs to the oldest of the Church's traditions, dating back to the time of the apostles. The Christian theology of stewardship offers a framework within which to understand the exercise of authority and situate reflection on transparency and accountability.

75. In our time, the demand for transparency and accountability in and by the Church has come about as a result of the loss of credibility due to financial scandals and, even more so, sexual abuse and other abuses of minors and vulnerable persons. The lack of transparency and accountability fuels clericalism, which is based on the implicit assumption that ordained ministers are accountable to no one for the exercise of the authority vested in them.

76. If the synodal Church wants to be welcoming, then accountability and transparency must be at the core of its action at all levels, not only at the level of authority. However, those in positions of authority have a greater responsibility in this regard. Transparency and accountability are not limited to sexual and financial abuse. They must also be concerned with pastoral plans, methods of evangelisation, and how the Church respects the dignity of the human person, for example, regarding the working conditions within its institutions.

77. While the practice of accountability to superiors has been preserved over the centuries, the dimension of accountability of authority to the community must be recovered. Transparency must be a feature of the exercise of authority in the Church. Today, structures and forms of regular evaluation of how ministerial responsibilities of

all kinds are exercised emerge as necessary. Evaluation, understood in a non-moralistic sense, enables ministers to adjust quickly and fosters their growth and ability to perform their service better.

78. In addition to observing what is already provided for in the canonical norms regarding control criteria and mechanisms, it is up to the local Churches and, above all, their groupings (i.e. ecclesiastical provinces, Episcopal Conferences, and Eastern hierarchical structures) to construct effective forms and procedures of transparency and accountability, appropriate to the variety of contexts, based on the civil regulatory framework, the expectations of society, and the actual availability of expertise in the field. However, even where resources are scarce, the Church will work for an evolution of its work, ethos, and mentality in the direction of transparency and a culture of accountability.

79. In particular, in forms appropriate to each context, it seems necessary to guarantee at least a) an effective functioning of the Councils for Economic Affairs; b) the effective involvement of the People of God, especially the most competent members, in pastoral and economic planning; c) the preparation and publication (with real accessibility) of an annual financial statement, as much as possible certified by external auditors, which makes transparent the management of the goods and financial resources of the Church and its institutions; d) an annual statement on the performance of the mission, including an illustration of the initiatives undertaken in the area of safeguarding (protection of minors and vulnerable persons) and promoting women's access to positions of authority and their participation in decision-making and taking processes; and e) periodic evaluation procedures on the performance of those exercising any form of ministry and holding any position within the Church. These are points of great importance and urgency for the credibility of the synodal process and its implementation.

### Part III – Places

*The missionary synodal life of the Church, the vital relationships of which it is composed, and the pathways that enable its development should not overlook the concreteness and specificity of “place”, that is, the Church placed within a given context and culture. Part III invites us to overcome a static vision of places that orders them by successive levels or degrees according to a pyramidal model (i.e. Parish, deanery, Diocese or Eparchy, ecclesiastical province, Episcopal Conference or Eastern hierarchical structure, and universal Church). This has never been our vision. The network of relationships and the exchange of gifts between the Churches have always been interwoven as a web of relations rather than conceived as linear in form. They are gathered in the bond of unity of which the Roman Pontiff is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation. In this sense, the catholicity of the Church has never coincided with an abstract universalism. Moreover, in the context of a rapidly changing conception of space, constricting the Church's action within purely spatial boundaries would imprison it in a fatal immobilism and produce a worrying pastoral redundancy, rendering it incapable of reaching the most dynamic parts of the population, especially the young. Instead, places must be understood from a perspective of mutual interdependency, which becomes concrete in the relationships between Churches and the groupings they form, endowed with a unity of meaning. The service of unity, which is incumbent upon the Bishop of Rome and the College of bishops in communion with him, must take this perspective into account and find the appropriate institutional forms necessary for its exercise.*

#### Areas of shared journeying

80. "To the Church of God *that is in Corinth...*" (1 Cor 1:2). The proclamation of the Gospel, by awakening faith in the hearts of men and women, causes a Church to be established in a place. The Church cannot be understood without being rooted in a place and a culture and without the relationships established between places and cultures. Emphasising the importance of place does not mean giving in to particularism or relativism but enhancing the concreteness in which, in space and time, a shared experience of adherence to the manifestation of the Triune God who saves takes shape. The dimension of place preserves the generative plurality of the forms of this experience and their rootedness in specific cultural and historical contexts. The variety of liturgical, theological, spiritual, and disciplinary traditions demonstrate how much this plurality enriches the Church and makes it beautiful. The communion of the Churches, each with its local concreteness, manifests the communion of the faithful in the one and unique Church, avoiding its evaporation into an abstract and homogenising universalism.

81. The pluralism of cultures and the fruitfulness of the encounter and dialogue between them are a condition of the Church's life, an expression of and not a threat to its catholicity. The salvific message remains one and the same: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6). This message is pluriform and expressed in diverse peoples, cultures, traditions, and languages. Taking this plurality of forms seriously avoids hegemonic tendencies and mitigates the risk of reducing the message of salvation to a single understanding of ecclesial life and its liturgical, pastoral, or moral expression. The web of relations within a synodal Church, made visible in the exchange of gifts between the Churches and guaranteed by the unity of the College of bishops headed by the bishop of Rome, is a dynamic guardian of a unity that can never become uniformity.

82. Today, this vision of a Church rooted in concrete contexts encounters the socio-cultural conditions of our times, which have profoundly altered our experience of being rooted in a given territory. A place can no longer be understood in purely geographical and spatial terms; rather, it points to our belonging to a web of relations and a culture that is more dynamic and mobile than in the past. This reality challenges the Church's organisational forms, which are structured based on a different concept of place. This also requires adopting differentiated criteria appropriate to different contexts, which do not contradict each other, in order to incarnate the one truth in people's lives.

83. Urbanisation is one factor in this shift. Today, for the first time in human history, most of humanity lives in urban rather than rural areas. The sense of belonging to a place takes different forms in an urban context, where the boundaries that structure a locality are forged in a different way. In large megacities, it takes only a few underground or subway stops to cross the boundaries not only of the Parish but of the Diocese: a journey many people make several times a day. Many lives routinely take place moving between different church localities.

84. A second factor is increased human mobility within a globalised world. Refugees and migrants often form vibrant communities, enlarging the practice of faith and thus making the place where they settle more diverse. At the same time, they maintain connections and relationships with their country of origin, often thanks to digital media. They frequently experience simultaneous belonging to multiple local, cultural, and linguistic groups. Communities of origin experience, on the one hand, a reduction in their membership, sometimes to the point of struggling for survival. On the other hand, their relational and cultural fabric is expanded globally. As the First Session noted, emblematic in this respect is the situation of some Eastern Catholic Churches: with current migration rates, their diaspora members could become more numerous than those living in their canonical territories (cf. SR 6c). In any case, defining place in purely geographical terms will become increasingly anachronistic. Study Group 1 is called to reflect upon the challenges this poses for relations between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church.

85. Finally, we cannot overlook the spread of digital culture, especially among young people. It radically impacts the experience and conception of space and time and reshapes all kinds of human activities, including communication, relationships, and faith. It is no coincidence that the First Session states that "digital culture, then, is not so much a distinct area of mission as a crucial dimension of the Church's witness in contemporary society" (SR 17b). Study Group 3 is dedicated to studying this challenge.

86. These dynamics of society and culture invite the Church to think anew about the meaning of its own local dimension for the sake of mission. Without forgetting that life always takes place in physical contexts and concrete cultures, it is necessary to move away from a purely spatial interpretation of place: places, even and especially those of the Church, are not just spaces but environments and networks in which relationships can develop, offering people rootedness and a basis for mission, which they will carry out wherever their lives unfold. The synodal conversion of minds and hearts must be accompanied by a synodal reform of ecclesial realities, called to be roads on which to journey together. However, this does not mean consigning pastoral action to elective affiliations. The aim is to encounter every man and woman.

87. This reform must be conducted based on an understanding of the Church as the holy People of God, articulated in the communion of Churches (*communio Ecclesiarum*). Experience has shown us that launching

the synodal process in the local Churches does not compromise the unity of the whole Church but rather expresses the variety and universality of the People of God (cf. LG 22). Nor does it jeopardise but instead enhances the exercise of the Bishop of Rome's ministry of unity. We do not start thinking about the Church from its institutions. Indeed, these must be rethought in the logic of missionary service, including those at the highest level.

88. Given the ministry of the Bishop of Rome as the visible principle of unity of the whole Church and of each Bishop as visible principle of unity in his local Church, the Council was able to say that the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, is also a body of Churches, in and from which exists the one unique Catholic Church (cf. LG 23). This body comprises: (a) the individual Churches as portions of the People of God, each entrusted to a bishop; (b) the groupings of Churches, where the instances of communion are represented above all by the hierarchical bodies; and (c) the whole Church (*Ecclesia tota*), where the Church as a communion of Churches is expressed by the College of bishops gathered around the Bishop of Rome in the bond of episcopal (*cum Petro*) and hierarchical (*sub Petro*) communion. The reform of ecclesial institutions cannot but follow this ordered articulation of the Church.

### **Local Churches in the one and unique Catholic Church**

89. By its very nature, the local Church is where we most immediately experience the missionary synodal life of the whole Church. The contributions submitted by the Episcopal Conferences speak of Parishes, base and small Christian communities as contexts of communion and participation in mission. As the parish priests gathered in Sacrofano stated: "The members of parishes are and become missionary disciples of Jesus gathered in his name for prayer and worship, service and witness in times of joy and sorrow, hope and struggle." God is at work in these ecclesial realities. At the same time, we are aware that we must do more to harness the great flexibility of the Parish, which is understood as a community of communities in the service of missionary creativity.

90. Today, the local Churches are also made up of associations and communities that are old and new expressions of Christian life. In particular, Institutes of consecrated life and Societies of apostolic life contribute much to the life of the local Churches and the vitality of missionary action. The same applies to lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities. Today, belonging to the Church is expressed in an increasing number of forms not formally attached to a geographically defined base but related to bonds of association. This variety of forms must be promoted in the light of the missionary orientation and the ecclesial discernment of what the Lord asks in each context. Animating this manifold variety and caring for the bonds of unity are the specific competencies of the diocesan or eparchial bishop. Study Group 6 has been entrusted with reflecting upon these aspects.

91. As in the previous phases of the synodal process, so too in the consultation that preceded the drafting of this *Instrumentum Laboris*: many of the contributions received consider the different types of Councils Parish, deanery, Diocesan, or Eparchial as essential instruments for the planning, organisation, execution, and evaluation of pastoral activities, and point to the need to enhance them. These structures are envisaged by existing canon law already in force. With the appropriate adaptations, they could prove to be even more suitable for giving a synodal approach a concrete form. These Councils can become subjects of ecclesial discernment and synodal decision-making and places for the practice of accountability and the evaluation of those in positions of authority, without forgetting that they, in turn, will have to account for how they perform their duties. Therefore, this is one of the most promising areas on which to act for a swift implementation of the synodal proposals and orientations, leading to changes with an effective and rapid impact.

92. Many contributions point to the need to reshape the profile of these bodies and their *modus operandi* in order to move in this direction. Significantly, this will require attention to how members are appointed, aiming to ensure that their composition reflects that of the community they serve (Parish or Diocese/Eparchy) in order to promote a culture of transparency and accountability credibly. It is, therefore, necessary that the majority of members are not chosen by the authority (parish priest or bishop) but designated in another way, effectively expressing the reality of the community or local Church.



93. In a similar vein, attention must be paid to the composition of these bodies to encourage greater involvement of women, young people, and those living in conditions of poverty or marginalisation in the composition of these bodies. Moreover, as the First Session emphasised, it is fundamental that these bodies include men and women committed to witnessing to the faith in the ordinary realities of life and in their social contexts, with a recognised apostolic and missionary disposition (cf. SR 18d), and not only those involved in organising the life and services of the community. In this way, the ecclesial discernment carried out by these bodies will benefit from greater openness and ability to analyse reality and a diversity of perspectives. Finally, many contributions point to the desire to make mandatory those Councils whose establishment is discretionary under current law.

94. Some Episcopal Conferences have shared experiences of reform and have identified good practices already in place. These include creating networks of pastoral Councils at the level of small and base Christian communities, Parishes and deaneries, right up to the Diocesan pastoral Council. As a model of consultation and listening, it is proposed that Church assemblies be held at all levels, trying to widen consultation to include the contribution of other Churches and ecclesial Communities, of other religions present in the local context and of society, with which the Christian community journeys.

### **The bonds that shape the unity of the Church**

95. The communal horizon of the exchange of gifts, outlined in Part I, inspires the relationship between the Churches. It combines an emphasis on the bonds that shape the unity of the Church with an appreciation of the particularities linked to the context in which each local Church lives, with its history and tradition. Adopting a synodal style enables us to overcome the idea that all Churches must necessarily move at the same pace on every issue. On the contrary, differences in pace can be valued as an expression of legitimate diversity and an opportunity for the exchange of gifts and for mutual enrichment. In order to be realised, this horizon needs to be embodied in concrete structures and practices. Answering the question "*How to be a synodal Church in mission?*" requires identifying and promoting such structures and practices.

96. Eastern hierarchical structures and Episcopal Conferences are fundamental instruments for creating links and sharing experiences between the Churches and for decentralising governance and pastoral planning. "The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal Churches, episcopal conferences are in a position 'to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit' (LG 23). Yet this desire has not been fully realized, since a juridical status of Episcopal Conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated" (EG 32). Seeking how to be a synodal Church in mission requires addressing this question.

97. From all that has been gathered so far, during this synodal process, the following proposals emerge: (a) recognition of Episcopal Conferences as ecclesial subjects endowed with doctrinal authority, assuming socio-cultural diversity within the framework of a multifaceted Church, and favouring the appreciation of liturgical, disciplinary, theological, and spiritual expressions appropriate to different socio-cultural contexts; (b) evaluating the real experience of the functioning of the Episcopal Conferences and the Eastern hierarchical structures, and of the relations between Episcopates and the Holy See, to identify the concrete reforms to be implemented; the *ad limina* visits, which fall under Study Group 7, could be a fitting context for this evaluation; and (c) ensuring that all Dioceses or Eparchies are assigned to an ecclesiastical Province and an Episcopal Conference or Eastern hierarchical Structure (cf. CD 40).

98. Convening Continental Assemblies across all regions was an innovation of the current synodal process and a way of more coherently implementing the conciliar instruction to honour the particularity "of every great socio-cultural area" in search of "a more profound adaptation in the entire area of Christian life" (AG 22). This experience, as well as the journey of the Churches in some regions, raises the question of how we might give synodal and collegial dynamism more appropriate institutional expression, for example, through ecclesial assemblies and Episcopal Conferences. These bodies can be entrusted with the coordinated tasks of continental or regional consultation and decision-making. Discernment methods can also be developed to include diverse ecclesial actors in drafting documents and conducting decision-making and taking processes. Furthermore, it is proposed that discernment should also include spaces for listening and dialogue with civil

institutions, representatives of other religions, non-Catholic organisations and society at large, in forms adapted to the diversity of contexts.

99. The desire that local synodal dialogue should continue and not come to an end and the need for effective inculturation of the faith in specific regions drives us towards a new appreciation of the institution of particular Councils, be they provincial or plenary, whose periodic celebration has been an obligation for a large part of the Church's history. Based on the experience of walking the synodal path, one can think of forms that bring together an assembly of bishops and an ecclesial assembly composed of members of the faithful (priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, laymen and laywomen), delegated by the pastoral Councils of the Dioceses or Eparchies involved, or designated in some other way to reflect the variety of the Church in the region. To aid this, the procedure of *recognitio* of the conclusions of particular Councils should be reformed to favour their timely publication.

### **The service to unity of the Bishop of Rome**

100. Answering the question "*How to be a synodal Church in mission?*" also requires revisiting the dynamic that unites synodality, collegiality, and primacy, so that it can innervate the relationships between the institutions through which it finds concrete expression.

101. The current Synodal Process has shown the truth of the conciliar affirmation that "within the ecclesiastical communion, there are lawfully particular churches which enjoy their own proper traditions, while the primacy of the see of Peter remains intact, which presides over the universal communion of charity and safeguards legitimate differences while taking care that what is particular not only does no harm to unity but rather is conducive to it" (cf. LG 13). By virtue of this function, the Bishop of Rome, as visible principle of the unity of the whole Church (cf. LG 23), is the guarantor of synodality. He calls the whole Church to synodal action by convoking, presiding over and confirming the results of the Synods of Bishops; it should be his care to ensure that the Church grows in a synodal style and form.

102. Reflection on the forms of exercise of the Petrine ministry should also be conducted from the perspective of "sound decentralisation" (EG 16), as urged by Pope Francis and requested by many Episcopal Conferences. According to the formulation provided by the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (19 March 2022), this entails leaving "to the competence of Bishops the authority to resolve, in the exercise of "their proper task as teachers" and pastors, those issues with which they are familiar and that do not affect the Church's unity of doctrine, discipline and communion, always acting with that spirit of co-responsibility which is the fruit and expression of the specific *mysterium communionis* that is the Church." (PE II, 2).

103. To proceed, we could follow the line of the recent *Motu Proprio Competentias quasdam decernere* (15 February 2022), which assigns "certain areas of competence with regard to the provisions of the Codes intended to safeguard unity of discipline in the universal Church, and executive power in the local Churches and ecclesial institutions on the basis of "the ecclesial dynamic of communion" (Prologue).

104. Moreover, the drafting of canonical norms can also be a place to exercise a synodal style. The generation of rules does not imply merely the exercise of a power endowed by authority but should be considered true ecclesial discernment. Even if it alone enjoys all the prerogatives to legislate, in doing so, the authority could and should act with a synodal method to promulgate a norm that is the fruit of listening in the Spirit to a need for justice.

105. The already mentioned Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* has shaped the Roman Curia's service to the Bishop of Rome and the College of Bishops in a synodal and missionary way. To support transparency and accountability, periodic evaluation of its work should be undertaken and entrusted to an independent body (such as the Council of Cardinals and/or a council of bishops elected by the Synod). Study Group 8 is dedicated to examining the role of the Pontifical Representatives from a synodal missionary perspective and exploring ways of evaluating their work.

106. The synodal Assembly of October 2023 indicated the need to proceed to an evaluation of the fruits of the First Session (cf. SR 20j). This evaluation cannot ignore the development enacted by the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, which transforms the Synod from an occasional event to an ecclesial process that extends in space and time. Among the places to practise synodality and collegiality at the level of the whole Church, the Synod of Bishops certainly stands out. Instituted by Paul VI as an Assembly of Bishops convoked to participate, in a conciliar manner, in the care of the Roman Pontiff for the whole Church, it is now, in the form of the process by stages, the sphere where the dynamic relationship between synodality, collegiality, and primacy is realised and can be fostered. The entire holy People of God, the bishops who have been entrusted with its individual portions, and the Bishop of Rome as the principle of unity of the Church participate fully in the Synodal Process, each according to their own function. This participation is made manifest by the synodal Assembly gathered around the Bishop of Rome, which, in its composition, shows forth the variety and universality of the Church as "the sacrament of unity, the holy people drawn into an ordered whole under the bishops" (SC 26).

107. Among the most significant fruits of the 2021-2024 Synod is the intensity of the ecumenical impulse and the promise that marks it. It may also be useful to address the question of the exercise of the Petrine ministry in this light, opening it up "to a new situation" (UUS 95). The recent document *The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and Synodality in Ecumenical Dialogues and Responses to the Encyclical Ut Unum Sint*, issued by the Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity, offers insights for further study. This theme is part of the work of Study Group 10, which is dedicated to the reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices.

108. The richness offered by the participation of fraternal delegates from other Churches and Ecclesial Communities in the First Session invites us to deepen our understanding and appreciation of how synodality is practised by our ecumenical partners, both in the East and the West. Ecumenical dialogue is fundamental to fostering an understanding of synodality and the unity of the Church. Above all, it drives us to imagine authentically ecumenical synodal practices, including forms of consultation and discernment on shared and urgent concerns. At the root of this possibility is the fact that we are united in the one Baptism, from which flow the identity of the People of God and the dynamism of communion, participation, and mission.

### **Conclusion – The Synodal Church in the World**

109. Everything in this world is connected and is marked by a restless longing for the other. Everything is a call to a relationship and a witness to the fact that, ultimately, no-one and no thing is self-sufficient. The whole world, when contemplated in the light of Christian Revelation, is a sacramental sign of a presence that both transcends and animates it, leading to encounter with God, which will ultimately be fulfilled in the convivial sociality of differences, fully realized at the eschatological banquet prepared by God on his holy mountain.

110. Transformed by the proclamation of the Resurrection, the Church seeks to become a place where Isaiah's vision is breathed and lived so as to be "refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat" (Is. 25:4). In this way, the Church opens its heart to the Kingdom. When the members of the Church allow themselves to be led by the Spirit of the Lord to horizons that they had not previously glimpsed, they experience immeasurable joy. In its beauty, humility, and simplicity, this is the ongoing conversion of the way of being the Church that the synodal process invites us to undertake.

111. The Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* presents us with the call to recognise ourselves as sisters and brothers in the Risen Christ, proposing this less as a status and more as a way of life. The Encyclical emphasises the contrast between the time in which we live and the vision of conviviality prepared by God. The veil of mourning, the shroud and tears named by Isaiah are present, too, in our own times. They are often the result of our increasing isolation from one another, the growing violence and polarisation of our world, and our uprootedness from the sources of life. The questions that the *Instrumentum Laboris* asks are: how to be a synodal Church in mission; how to engage in deep listening and dialogue; how to be co-responsible in the light of the dynamism of our personal and communal baptismal vocation; how to transform structures and processes so that all may participate and share the charisms that the Spirit pours out on each for the common good; how to exercise power and authority as service. Each of these questions is a service to the Church and, through its action, to the

possibility of healing the deepest wounds of our time.

112. The prophet Isaiah ends his oracle with a hymn of praise to be taken up in chorus: “this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Is. 25:9). As the People of God let us join in this praise, as pilgrims of hope let us continue to advance along the synodal path towards those who still await the proclamation of the Good News of salvation!

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[1] Unless otherwise indicated, or where it is clear from the context that this is not the case, in the text of the *Instrumentum laboris* the term "Church" indicates "the one and unique Catholic Church" (LG 23), while the plural "Churches" indicates the local Churches in which and from which it exists.

[2] Here, as below, the quotations from the Episcopal Conferences and their continental groupings come from the summaries sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod after the consultation of the local Churches that took place between the end of 2023 and mid-2024.

[3] Circulated by the General Secretariat of the Synod on 11 December 2023 and available at [www.synod.va](http://www.synod.va) .

[4] In this regard, please refer to the document *How to be Synodal Church in Mission? Five Perspectives to Deepen Theologically in view of the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, released by the General Secretariat of the Synod on 14 March 2024 and available at [www.synod.va](http://www.synod.va) .

[5] In this regard, please refer to the document *Study Groups on issues that emerged in the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to be studied in depth in collaboration with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia. Outline of Work*, also circulated on 14 March 2024 and available at [www.synod.va](http://www.synod.va) .

[6] The themes emerging in the Summary Report of the First Session and assigned to the ten Study Groups are:

1. Some aspects of relations between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church (SR 6).
2. Listening to the cry of the poor (SR 4 and 16).
3. Mission in the digital environment (SR 17).
4. The revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a missionary synodal perspective (SR 11).
5. Some theological and canonical matters regarding specific ministerial forms (SR 8 and 9).
6. The revision, in a synodal and missionary perspective, of the documents governing the relations between Bishops, Religious and Groupings of Churches (SR 10).
7. Some aspects of the figure and ministry of the Bishop (criteria for selecting candidates to the episcopate, judicial function of the Bishop, nature and conduct of *ad limina Apostolorum* visits) from a missionary synodal perspective (SR 12 and 13).
8. The Role of the Pontifical Representatives in a missionary synodal perspective (SR 13).

9. Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for a shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues (SR 15).

10. The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices (SR 7).

[7] The term 'synod' in the traditions of the Eastern and Western Churches refers to institutions and events that have taken different forms over time, involving a plurality of subjects. In their variety, what all these forms have in common is the fact of gathering together to dialogue, discern and decide.

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