

XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS

For the First Session
(October 2023)



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

The journey so far

A working tool for the second phase of the synodal journey

The structure of the text

A. For a synodal Church. An integral experience

A 1. The characteristic signs of a synodal Church

A 2. A way forward for the synodal Church: conversation in the Spirit

B. Communion, participation, mission. Three priority issues for the synodal Church.

B 1. A communion that radiates: How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?

B 2. Co-responsibility in Mission: How can we better share gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?

B 3. Participation, governance and authority: What processes, structures and institutions in a missionary synodal Church?

WORKSHEETS FOR THE SYNODAL ASSEMBLY

Introduction

Worksheets for B 1. A Communion that radiates

B 1.1 How does the service of charity and commitment to justice and care for our common home nourish communion in a synodal Church?

B 1.2 How can a synodal Church make credible the promise that “love and truth will meet” (Ps 85:11)?

B 1.3 How can a dynamic relationship of gift exchange between the Churches grow?

B 1.4 How can a synodal Church fulfil its mission through a renewed ecumenical commitment?

B 1.5 How can we recognise and gather the richness of cultures and develop dialogue amongst religions in the light of the Gospel?

Worksheets for B 2. Co-responsibility in Mission

B 2.1 How can we walk together towards a shared awareness of the meaning and content of mission?

B 2.2 What should be done so a synodal Church is also an ‘all ministerial’ missionary Church?

B 2.3 How can the Church of our time better fulfil its mission through greater recognition and promotion of the baptismal dignity of women?

B 2.4 How can we properly value ordained Ministry in its relationship with baptismal Ministries in a missionary perspective?

B 2.5 How can we renew and promote the Bishop’s ministry from a missionary synodal perspective?

Worksheets for B 3. Participation, governance and authority

B 3.1 How can we renew the service of authority and the exercise of responsibility in a missionary synodal Church?

B 3.2 How can we develop discernment practices and decision-making processes in an authentically synodal manner, that respects the protagonism of the Spirit?

B 3.3. What structures can be developed to strengthen a missionary synodal Church?

B 3.4 How can we give structure to instances of synodality and collegiality that involve groupings of local Churches?

B 3.5 How can the institution of the Synod be strengthened so that it is an expression of episcopal collegiality within an all-synodal Church?

ABBREVIATIONS

- AA VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* (18 November 1965)
- AG VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Ad gentes* (7 December 1965)
- CA ST. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (1 May 1991)
- CL ST. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988)
- CV FRANCIS, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit* (25 March 2019)
- PD GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD, *For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission. Preparatory Document* (2021)
- DCS GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD, *For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission. "Enlarge the space of your tent (Is 54:2). Working Document for the Continental Stage* (2022)
- DV VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* (18 November 1965)
- EC FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* (15 September 2018)
- EG FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013)
- FT FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti* (3 October 2020)
- GS VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965)
- IL *Instrumentum Laboris*
- LG VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964)
- PE FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (19 March 2022)
- SC VATICAN COUNCIL II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963)
- UR VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* (21 November 1964)

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS

Foreword

“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:5-6).

The journey so far

1. The People of God have been on the move since Pope Francis convened the whole Church in Synod in October 2021. Beginning at their most vital and elementary level, the local Churches across the globe have initiated the consultation of the People of God, starting with the basic question formulated in no. 2 of the *Preparatory Document* (PD): “**How does this ‘journeying together,’ which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?**”. The fruits of the consultation were collected at the diocesan level and then summarised and sent to the Synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Episcopal Conferences. In their turn, each drafted a synthesis that was forwarded to the General Secretariat of the Synod.

2. In order to serve a new stage in the ongoing synodal process, the *Working Document for the Continental Stage* (DCS) was drafted from the reading and analysis of the documents collected. The DCS was returned to the local Churches around the world, inviting them to engage with it and then to meet and enter into dialogue at the seven Continental Assemblies. During this time, the work of the Digital Synod also continued. The aim was to focus on the insights and tensions that resonated most strongly with the experience of the Church on each continent and to identify, from the perspective of each continent, the priorities to be addressed in the first session of the Synodal Assembly (October 2023).

3. **This *Instrumentum Laboris* (IL) was drafted on the basis of all the material gathered during the listening phase, and in particular the final documents of the Continental Assemblies.** Its publication closes the first phase of the Synod, “For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, mission” and opens the second phase, composed of the two sessions¹ (October 2023 and October 2024) in which the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will take place. Its aim will be to continue to animate the synodal process in the ordinary life of the Church, identifying which pathways the Spirit invites us to walk along more decisively as one People of God. The fruit for which we ask at the next Assembly is that the Spirit inspire the Church’s walking together as the People of God in fidelity to the mission that the Lord has entrusted to it. Indeed, the purpose of the synodal process “is not to produce documents, but to open horizons of hope for the fulfilment of the Church’s mission” (DCS, 6).

¹ Henceforth, for the sake of brevity and unless otherwise specified, the expressions “Assembly” and “Synodal Assembly” refer to the October 2023 session, at the service of which this IL is intended.

4. **The journey so far, especially the continental stage, has made it possible to identify and share the particular situations experienced by the Church in different regions of the world.** These include the reality of too many wars that stain our world with blood leading to a call for a renewed commitment to building a just peace, the threat represented by climate change that implies a necessary priority of caring for the common home, the cry to oppose an economic system that produces exploitation, inequality and a throwaway culture, and the desire to resist the homogenising pressure of cultural colonialism that crushes minorities. Situations of persecution to the point of martyrdom and emigration that progressively hollow out communities, threatening their very survival are deeply lamented. The local Churches have spoken of their concern to be equipped to address urgent social realities, from the growing cultural pluralism that now marks the entire planet, to the experience of Christian communities that represent scattered minorities within the country in which they live, to the experience of coming to terms with an ever more advanced, and at times aggressive, secularisation that seems to consider religious experience irrelevant, but where there remains a thirst for the Good News of the Gospel. In many regions, the Churches are deeply affected by the crisis caused by various forms of abuse, including sexual abuse and the abuse of power, conscience and money. These are open wounds, the consequences of which have yet to be fully addressed. To the penitence it owes to victims and survivors for the suffering it has caused, the Church must add a growing and intensified commitment to conversion and reform in order to prevent similar situations from happening again in the future.

5. It is in this context, diverse but with common global features, that the synodal journey takes place. The Synodal Assembly of October 2023 will be asked to listen deeply to the situations in which the Church lives and carries out its mission. What it means to walk together gains its missionary urgency when this question is asked in a particular context with real people and situations in mind. What is at stake is the ability to proclaim the Gospel by walking together with the men and women of our time, wherever they are, and practising the catholicity that emerges from walking together with the Churches that live in conditions of particular suffering (cf. LG 23).

6. To the Synodal Assembly we bring the fruits gathered during the listening phase. First of all, we have experienced the joy expressed in **the sincere and respectful encounter between brothers and sisters in the faith: to meet each other is to encounter the Lord who is in our midst!** Thus, we were able to touch with our own hands the catholicity of the Church, which, in the variety of ages, sexes and social conditions, manifests an extraordinary wealth of charisms and ecclesial vocations, and is the custodian of a treasure trove of differences in languages, cultures, liturgical expressions and theological traditions. In effect, this rich diversity is the gift of each local Church to all the others (cf. LG 13), and the synodal dynamic is a way to appreciate and enhance this rich diversity without flattening it into uniformity. Similarly, we have discovered that there are shared questions, even if synodality is experienced and understood in a variety of ways in different parts of the world on the basis of a common inheritance of the apostolic Tradition. Part of the challenge of synodality is to discern the level at which it is most appropriate to address each question. Equally shared are certain tensions. We should not be frightened by them, nor attempt at any cost to resolve them, but rather engage in ongoing synodal discernment. Only in this way can these tensions become sources of energy and not lapse into destructive polarisations.

7. The first phase renewed our awareness that **our identity and vocation is to become an increasingly synodal Church:** walking together, that is, becoming synodal, is the way to truly become disciples and friends of that Master and Lord who said of himself: “I am the way” (Jn 14:6). Today it is also a deep desire: having experienced it as a gift, **we want to continue to do so, aware**

that this journey will be fulfilled on the last day, when, by the grace of God we will become part of that throng described in Revelation thus: “there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Rev 7:9-10). This text gives us the image of a definitively accomplished synodality, in which perfect communion reigns across all the differences that compose it, differences which are maintained and united in the one mission that remains to be completed: to participate in the liturgy of praise that from all creatures, through Christ, rises to the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

8. To the intercession of these sisters and brothers, who are already living the full communion of saints (cf. LG 50), and especially to that of she who is first in their ranks (cf. LG 63), Mary Mother of the Church, we entrust the work of the Assembly and the continuation of our commitment to a synodal Church. We ask that the Assembly be a time of outpouring of the Spirit, but even more that **grace accompanies us when the time comes to put its fruits into action in the daily life of Christian communities throughout the world.**

A working tool for the second phase of the synodal journey

9. The peculiar features marking Synod 2021-2024 are inevitably reflected in the meaning and dynamics of the Synodal Assembly and, thus, in the structure of the IL that serves it. In particular, the long preparatory phase has already led to the production of a multiplicity of documents: PD, reports of the local Churches, DCS and Final Documents of the Continental Assemblies. In this way, a cycle of mutually informed communication has been established among local Churches and between them and the General Secretariat of the Synod. The present IL does not annul previous documents or absorb all their richness, but is rooted in them and continually refers back to them. In preparation for the Assembly, **the Members of the Synod are asked to keep in mind the previous documents, in particular, the DCS and the Final Documents of the Continental Assemblies of the different continents, as well as the report of the Digital Synod and to use them as tools for their own discernment.** In particular, the Final Documents of the Continental Assemblies are particularly valuable for retaining the concreteness of the different contexts and the challenges posed by each. The common work of the Synodal Assembly cannot disregard these sources for discernment. The many resources collected in the special section of the Synod 2021-2024 website, www.synod.va may also be of help, in particular the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* and the two documents of the International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2018) and *The sensus fidei in the Life of the Church* (2014).

10. Given the abundance of material already available, the IL is designed as a practical aid for the conduct of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023 and thus for its preparation. All the more valid for the IL is the description given to the DCS: “is not a document of the Church’s Magisterium, nor is it the report of a sociological survey; it does not offer the formulation of operational indications, goals and objectives, nor a full elaboration of a theological vision” (no. 8). This is inevitable given that the IL is part of an unfinished process. Nonetheless, the IL takes a step beyond the DCS, drawing from the insights of the first phase and now the work of the Continental Assemblies, **articulating some of the priorities that emerged from listening to the People of God**, but avoids presenting them as assertions or stances. Instead, it expresses them as **questions addressed to the Synodal Assembly.** This body will have the task of discerning the concrete steps which enable the continued growth of a

synodal Church, steps that it will then submit to the Holy Father. Only then will that particular dynamic of listening be completed in which “each has something to learn. Faithful people, College of Bishops, Bishop of Rome: one listening to the other; and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17), to know what He ‘is saying to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7)”². In this light, the purpose of the IL is not to be a first draft of the Final Document of the Synodal Assembly, only to be corrected or amended. Rather, it outlines an initial understanding of the synodal dimension of the Church on the basis of which further discernment can be made. The Members of the Synodal Assembly are the primary recipients of the IL, which is also made public not only for reasons of transparency but as a contribution to the implementation of ecclesial initiatives. In particular, it can encourage participation in the synodal dynamic at the local and regional levels, while waiting for the outcome of the October Assembly. This will provide further material on which the local Churches will be called to pray, reflect, act and make their own contribution.

11. The questions that the IL poses are an expression of the richness of the process from which they were drawn: they bear the imprint of the particular names and faces of those who took part, and they bear witness to the faith experience of the People of God and thus reveal the reality of a transcendent experience. From this point of view, they indicate a horizon towards which we are invited to travel with confidence, deepening the synodal practice of the Church. **The first phase enables us to understand the importance of taking the local Church as a privileged point of reference³, as the theological place where the Baptised experience in practical terms “walking together”.** However, this does not lead to a retreat. No local Church can live outside the relationships that unite it with all others, including that particular relationship with the Church of Rome, which is entrusted with the service of unity through the ministry of its Pastor, who has summoned the whole Church in Synod.

12. This focus on local Churches requires taking into account their variety and diversity of cultures, languages and modes of expression. In particular, the same words — think, for example, of authority and leadership — can have very different resonances and connotations in different linguistic and cultural areas, especially when in some contexts a term is associated with precise theoretical or ideological approaches. The IL strives to avoid divisive language in the hope of furthering better understanding among members of the Synodal Assembly who come from different regions or traditions. The vision of Vatican II is the shared point of reference, starting from the catholicity of the People of God, in virtue of which “each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity [...] without in any way opposing the primacy of the Chair of Peter, which presides over the whole assembly of charity and protects legitimate differences, while at the same time assuring that such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute toward it” (LG 13). This catholicity is realised in the relationship of mutual interiority between the universal Church and the local Churches, in which and from which there “comes into being the one and only Catholic Church” (LG 23). The synodal process first given expression in the local Churches has now reached its second phase in the universal Church, with the unfolding of the two sessions of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

² FRANCIS, *Address at the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015 (cf. PD 15).

³ The expression “local Church” here indicates what the Code of canon law calls the “particular Church”.

The structure of the text

13. This IL is divided into two sections, which correspond to the tasks entrusted to the Continental Assemblies (and thus to the contents of the relevant Final Documents): first of all, Continental Assemblies were invited to undertake a re-reading of the path followed during the first phase, in order to identify what the Church on each continent had learnt from the experience of living the synodal dimension at the service of mission; secondly, the Continental Assemblies were invited to reflect on the DCS and discern the resonances produced in the local churches of the continent, in order to identify the priorities on which to continue the discernment during the Synodal Assembly.

14. **Section A of the IL**, entitled “For a Synodal Church”, attempts to gather the insights of the path travelled so far. Firstly, it **outlines a series of fundamental characteristics or distinguishing marks of a synodal Church. It then articulates the awareness that a synodal Church is also marked by a particular way of proceeding.** According to the outcome of the first phase, conversation in the Spirit is this way of proceeding. The Assembly will be invited to respond to these insights with the aim of clarifying and refining them. **Section B** of this IL, entitled “Communion, mission, participation”⁴, **articulates, in the form of three questions, the priorities that most strongly emerge from the work of all the continents**, thus placing them before the Assembly for discernment. In order to assist the working process of the Synodal Assembly, especially the group work (*Circuli Minores*), five worksheets are proposed for each of the three priorities, allowing them to be approached from different perspectives.

15. The three priorities of section B, developed through the respective worksheets, cover broad topics of great relevance. Many could be the subject of an entire Synod, and some already have been. In a number of cases the interventions of the Magisterium are also numerous and well defined. During the Assembly they cannot be dealt with extensively, nor, above all, should they be considered independently of one another. Instead, they should be addressed starting from their relationship with the real theme of the work, namely a synodal Church. For example, references to the urgency of devoting adequate attention to families and youth do not aim to stimulate a new treatment of family or youth ministry. Their purpose is to help focus on how the implementation of the conclusions of the two previous Ordinary General Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops (2015 and 2018) and of the successive Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations, *Amoris laetitia* and *Christus vivit*, represents an opportunity to walk together as a Church capable of welcoming and accompanying, accepting the necessary changes in rules, structures and procedures. The same applies to many other issues that emerge in the discussion threads.

16. The commitment asked of the Assembly and its Members will be to **sustain a dynamic equilibrium between maintaining an overview**, which characterises the work outlined in section A, **and the identification of practical steps to be taken** in a concrete and timely fashion, work which is the focus of section B. On this will depend the fruitfulness of the discernment of the Synodal Assembly whose task will be to open the whole Church to welcome the voice of the Holy Spirit. An inspiration for this work might come from reflection on the articulation of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which “consists of two parts”, different in character and focus, but becoming “a unified whole” (GS, footnote 1).

⁴ Section B will offer the reasons for the inversion of the order with respect to the subtitle of the Synod: cf. infra no. 44.

A. For a Synodal Church

An integral experience

“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 of them is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12: 4-7).

17. One common trait unites the narratives of the stages of the first phase: it is the surprise expressed by participants who were able to share the synodal journey in a way that exceeded their expectations. For those who take part, **the synodal process offers an opportunity for an encounter in faith that makes the bond with the Lord, fraternity between people and love for the Church**, not only on an individual level, but involving and energising the entire community. The experience is that of a horizon of hope opening up for the Church, a clear sign of the presence and action of the Spirit that guides it through history on its path towards the Kingdom (cf. LG 5): “[T]he **protagonist of the Synod is the Holy Spirit**”⁵. In this way, the more intensely the invitation to journey together has been accepted, the more the Synod has become a path on which the People of God proceed with enthusiasm, but without naivety. In fact, problems, resistances, difficulties and tensions are not concealed or hidden but identified and named thanks to a context of authentic dialogue that makes it possible to speak and listen with freedom and sincerity. Issues that are often posed in an adversarial manner, or for which the life of the Church today lacks a place of acceptance and discernment, can be addressed in an evangelical way within the synodal process.

18. A term as abstract or theoretical as synodality has thus begun to be embodied in a concrete experience. From listening to the People of God a progressive appropriation and understanding of synodality “from within” emerges, which does not derive from the enunciation of a principle, a theory or a formula, but develops from a readiness to enter into a dynamic of constructive, respectful and prayerful speaking, listening and dialogue. At the root of this process is the acceptance, both personal and communal, of something that is both a gift and a challenge: to be a Church of sisters and brothers in Christ who listen to one another and who, in so doing, are gradually transformed by the Spirit.

A 1. The characteristic signs of a synodal Church

19. Within this integral understanding, an awareness emerges of certain characteristics or distinctive signs of a synodal Church. These are shared convictions on which to dwell and reflect together as we undertake a journey that will continue to clarify and refine them, starting from the work of the Synodal Assembly will undertake.

20. This is what emerges with great force from all the continents: an awareness that **a synodal Church is founded on the recognition of a common dignity deriving from Baptism, which makes all who receive it sons and daughters of God, members of the family of God, and therefore brothers and sisters in Christ, inhabited by the one Spirit and sent to fulfil a common mission**. In Paul’s language, “we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all

⁵ FRANCIS, *Moment of reflection for the beginning of the synodal path*, 9 October 2021.

made to drink of one Spirit” (1Cor 12:13). Baptism thus creates a true co-responsibility among all the members of the Church, which is manifested in the participation of all, with the charisms of each, in the mission of the Church and the building up of the ecclesial community. **A synodal Church cannot be understood other than within the horizon of communion, which is always also a mission** to proclaim and incarnate the Gospel in every dimension of human existence. Communion and mission are nourished in the common participation in the Eucharist that makes the Church a body “joined and knitted together” (Eph 4:16) in Christ, able to walk together towards the Kingdom.

21. Rooted in this awareness is the desire for **a Church that is also increasingly synodal in its institutions, structures and procedures**, so as to constitute a space in which common baptismal dignity and co-responsibility for mission are not only affirmed, but exercised, and practised. In this space, the exercise of authority in the Church is appreciated as a gift, with the desire that it be increasingly configured as “a true service, and in Holy Scripture it is significantly call ‘*diakonia*’ or ministry” (LG 24), following the model of Jesus, who stooped to wash the feet of his disciples (cf. Jn 13:1-11).

22. **“A synodal Church is a listening Church”**⁶: this awareness is the fruit of the experience of the synodal journey, which is a listening to the Spirit through listening to the Word and listening to each other as individuals and among ecclesial communities, from the local level to the continental and universal levels. For many, the great surprise was the experience of being listened to by the community, in some cases for the first time, thus receiving a recognition of their unique human worth that testifies to the Father’s love for each of his sons and daughters. The experience of listening and being listened to in this way serves not only a practical function but also has a theological and ecclesial depth because it follows the example of how Jesus listened to the people he met. This style of listening is necessary to mark and transform all the relationships that the Christian community establishes among its members as well as with other faith communities and with society as a whole, especially towards those whose voice is most often ignored.

23. As a Church committed to listening, **a synodal Church desires to be humble, and knows that it must ask forgiveness and has much to learn**. Some reports noted that the synodal path is necessarily a penitential one, recognising that we have not always lived the constitutive synodal dimension of the ecclesial community. The face of the Church today bears the signs of serious crises of mistrust and lack of credibility. In many contexts, crises related to sexual abuse, and abuse of power, money and conscience have pushed the Church to a demanding examination of conscience so that “moved by the Holy Spirit” the Church “may never cease to renew herself” (LG 9), in a journey of repentance and conversion that opens paths of reconciliation, healing and justice.

24. **A synodal Church is a Church of encounter and dialogue**. On the path we have travelled, this aspect of synodality emerges with particular strength in relation to other Churches and ecclesial Communities, to which we are united by the bond of one Baptism. The Spirit, who is “the principle of the Church’s unity” (UR 2), is at work in these Churches and ecclesial Communities, and invites us to embark on paths of mutual knowledge, sharing and building a common life. At the local level, the importance of what is already being done together with members of other Churches and ecclesial Communities emerges strongly, especially as a common witness in socio-cultural contexts that are hostile to the point of persecution—this is the ecumenism of martyrdom—and in the face of the ecological emergency. Everywhere, in tune with the Magisterium of the Second Vatican Council, the

⁶ FRANCIS, *Address at the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

profound desire to deepen the ecumenical journey also emerges: an authentically synodal Church cannot but involve all those who share the one Baptism.

25. **A synodal Church** is called to practice the culture of encounter and dialogue with the believers of other religions and with the cultures and societies in which it is embedded, but above all among the many differences that run through the Church itself. This Church **is not afraid of the variety it bears, but values it without forcing it into uniformity**. The synodal process has been an opportunity to begin to learn what it means to live unity in diversity, a fundamental point to continue exploring, trusting that the path will become clearer as we move forward. Therefore, **a synodal Church promotes the passage from “I” to “we”**. It is a space within which a call resonates to be members of a body that values diversity but is made one by the Spirit. It is the Spirit that impels us to listen to the Lord and respond to him as a people at the service of the one mission of proclaiming to all the nations the salvation offered by God in Christ Jesus. This happens in a great diversity of contexts: no one is asked to leave their own context, but rather to understand it and enter into it more deeply. Returning to this vision after the experience of the first phase, synodality appears first and foremost as a dynamism animating concrete local communities. Moving to the more universal level, this momentum embraces all the dimensions and realities of the Church, in a movement of authentic catholicity.

26. Lived in a diversity of contexts and cultures, synodality proves to be a constitutive dimension of the Church since its origin, even if it is still in the process of being realised. Indeed, it presses to be implemented ever more fully, expressing a radical call to conversion, change, prayer and action that is for all. In this sense, **a synodal Church is open, welcoming and embraces all**. There is no border that this movement of the Spirit does not feel compelled to cross, to draw all into its dynamism. The radical nature of Christianity is not the prerogative of a few specific vocations, but the call to build a community that lives and bears witness to a different way of understanding the relationship between the daughters and sons of God, one that embodies the truth of love, one that is based on gift and gratuitousness. The radical call is, therefore, to build together, synodally, an attractive and concrete Church: an outgoing Church, in which all feel welcome.

27. At the same time, **a synodal Church confronts honestly and fearlessly the call to a deeper understanding of the relationship between love and truth** according to St Paul’s invitation: “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love” (Eph 4:15-16). To authentically include everyone, it is necessary to enter into the mystery of Christ allowing oneself to be formed and transformed by the way he lived the relationship between love and truth.

28. **Characteristic of a synodal Church is the ability to manage tensions without being crushed by them**, experiencing them as a drive to deepen how communion, mission and participation are lived and understood. Synodality is a privileged path of conversion, because it reconstitutes the Church in unity: it heals her wounds and reconciles her memory, welcomes the differences she bears and redeems her from festering divisions, thus enabling her to embody more fully her vocation to be “in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG 1). Authentic listening and the ability to find ways to continue walking together beyond fragmentation and polarisation are indispensable for the Church to remain alive and vital and to be a powerful sign for the cultures of our time.

29. **Trying to walk together also brings us into contact with the healthy restlessness of incompleteness**, with the awareness that there are still many things whose weight we are not able to carry or bear (cf. Jn 16:12). This is not a problem to be solved, but rather a gift to be cultivated. We are faced with the inexhaustible and holy mystery of God and must remain open to its surprises as we walk through history towards the Kingdom. This also applies to the questions that the synodal process has brought to light. As a first step they require listening and attention, without rushing to offer immediate solutions.

30. Carrying the weight of these questions should not be the personal burden of those who occupy certain roles, with the risk of being crushed by them, but a task for the entire community, whose relational and sacramental life is often the most effective immediate response. This is why **a synodal Church unceasingly nourishes itself at the source of the mystery it celebrates in the liturgy**, “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed” and “the font from which all her power flows” (SC 10), particularly in the Eucharist.

31. Once the People of God are freed from the anxiety of inadequacy, the inevitable incompleteness of a synodal Church and the readiness of its members to accept their own vulnerabilities become the space for the action of the Spirit, who invites us to recognise the signs of his presence. This is why **a synodal Church is also a Church of discernment**, in the wealth of meanings that this term takes on within the different spiritual traditions. The first phase enabled the People of God to begin to experience discernment through the practice of conversation in the Spirit. As we listen attentively to each other’s lived experiences, we grow in mutual respect and begin to discern the movements of God’s Spirit in the lives of others and in our own. In this way, we begin to pay more attention to “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (Rev 2:7), in the commitment and hope of becoming a Church increasingly capable of making prophetic decisions that are the fruit of the Spirit’s guidance.

A 2. A way forward for the synodal Church: conversation in the Spirit

32. Through the course of the first phase of the Synod and across all the continents there has been recognition of the fruitfulness of the method referred to here as “conversation in the Spirit” or “synodal method” (cf. figure on p. 16).

33. In its etymological sense, the term “conversation” does not indicate a generic exchange of ideas, but a dynamic in which the word spoken and heard generates familiarity, enabling the participants to draw closer to one another. The specification “in the Spirit” identifies the authentic protagonist: the desire of those conversing tends towards listening to His voice, which in prayer opens itself to the free action of the One who, like the wind, blows where He wills (cf. Jn 3:8). Gradually the conversation between brothers and sisters in faith opens the space for a ‘hearing together’, that is, a listening together to the voice of the Spirit. It is not conversation in the Spirit if there is not a step forward in a precise, often unexpected direction that points to concrete action.

34. In the local Churches, **conversation in the Spirit has been accepted and sometimes “discovered” as providing the atmosphere that makes possible the sharing of life experiences and the space for discernment in a synodal Church**. In the Final Documents of the Continental Assemblies, it is described as a Pentecostal moment, as an opportunity to experience being Church and to move from listening to our brothers and sisters in Christ to listening to the Spirit, who is the authentic protagonist, and being sent forth in mission by Him. At the same time, through this method, the grace of the Word and the Eucharist becomes a felt, actualised and transforming reality, which

attests to and realises the initiative by which the Lord Jesus makes himself present and active in the Church. Christ sends us out on mission and gathers us around himself to give thanks and glory to the Father in the Holy Spirit. Hence from all continents comes the request that this method may increasingly animate and inform the daily life of the Churches.

35. Conversation in the Spirit is part of a long tradition of ecclesial discernment, which has produced a plurality of methods and approaches. Its precise missionary value should be emphasised. This spiritual practice enables us to move from the “I” to the “we”: it does not lose sight of or erase the personal dimension of the “I”, but recognises it and inserts it into the community dimension. In this way, enabling participants to speak and listen becomes an expression of liturgy and prayer, within which the Lord makes himself present and draws us towards ever more authentic forms of communion and discernment.

36. In the New Testament, there are numerous examples of this mode of conversation. **A paradigmatic account is provided by the account of the encounter of the Risen Lord with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus** (cf. Lk 24:13-35, and the explanation given in CV 237). As their experience demonstrates, conversation in the Spirit builds communion and brings missionary dynamism. The two, in fact, return to the community they had left to share the Easter proclamation that the Lord is risen.

37. In its concrete reality **conversation in the Spirit can be described as a shared prayer with a view to communal discernment** for which participants prepare themselves by personal reflection and meditation. They give each other the gift of a meditated word nourished by prayer, not an opinion improvised on the spot. **The dynamic between the participants articulates three fundamental steps. The first is devoted to each person taking the floor**, starting from his or her own experience reread in prayer during the period of preparation. Others listen in the knowledge that each one has a valuable contribution to offer and refrain from debates or discussions.

38. Silence and prayer help to prepare for the next step, in which each person is invited to open up within his or herself a space for others and for the Other. Once again, each person takes the floor: not to react to or counter what they have heard, reaffirming their own position, but to express what from their listening has touched them most deeply and what they feel challenged by most strongly. **The interior traces that result from one’s listening to sisters and brothers are the language with which the Holy Spirit makes his own voice resound.** The more each participant has been nourished by meditation on the Word and the Sacraments, growing in familiarity with the Lord, the more he or she will be able to recognise the sound of His voice (cf. Jn 10:14.27), assisted also by the accompaniment of the Magisterium and theology. Likewise, the more intentionally and carefully participants attend to the voice of the Spirit the more they will grow in a shared sense of mission.

39. The third step, again in an atmosphere of prayer and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is **to identify the key points that have emerged and to build a consensus on the fruits of the joint work**, which each person feels is faithful to the process and by which he or she can therefore feel represented. It is not enough to draw up a report listing the most often mentioned points. Rather, discernment is needed, which also pays attention to marginal and prophetic voices and does not overlook the significance of the points on which disagreement emerges. The Lord is the cornerstone that will allow the “construction” to stand and the Spirit, the master of harmony, will help to move from cacophony to symphony.

40. The journey leads to a prayer of praise to God and gratitude for the experience. “When we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord’s greatest and most beautiful gifts. **Whenever we encounter another person in love, we**

learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God” (EG 272). This, in a nutshell, is the gift received by those who allow themselves to be involved in a conversation in the Spirit.

41. In concrete situations, it is never possible to follow this pattern slavishly. Rather it must always be adapted. Sometimes it is necessary to give priority to each one taking the floor and listening to the others; in other circumstances to bringing out the links between the different perspectives, in search of what makes “our hearts burn within us” (cf. Lk 24:32); in others still, to the explication of a consensus and working together to identify the direction in which one feels called by the Spirit to move. But, beyond the appropriate concrete adaptations, the intention and dynamism that unite the three steps are and remain characteristic of the way of proceeding of a synodal Church.

42. Bearing in mind the significance of conversation in the Spirit to animate the lived experience of the synodal Church, **formation in this method, and in particular of facilitators capable of accompanying communities in practising it, is perceived as a priority at all levels of ecclesial life** and for all the Baptised, starting with ordained Ministers in a spirit of co-responsibility and openness to different ecclesial vocations. Formation for conversation in the Spirit is formation to be a synodal Church.

The conversation in the Spirit

A dynamic of discernment in the synodal Church



Silence, prayer and listening to the Word of God

PERSONAL PREPARATION

By entrusting oneself to the Father, conversing in prayer with the Lord Jesus and listening to the Holy Spirit, each one prepares his or her own contribution to the question about which he or she is called to discern.

«Taking the word and listening»

Each person takes turns speaking from his or her own experience and prayer, and listens carefully to the contribution of others.



Silence and Prayer

«Making space for others and the Other»

From what the others have said, each one shares what has resonated most with him or her or what has aroused the most resistance in him or her, allowing himself or herself to be guided by the Holy Spirit: "When, listening, did my heart burn within me?"



Silence and Prayer

«Building together»

Together we dialogue on the basis of what emerged earlier in order to discern and gather the fruit of the conversation in the Spirit: to recognize intuitions and convergences; to identify discordances, obstacles and new questions; to allow prophetic voices to emerge.

It is important that everyone can feel represented by the outcome of the work.

"To what steps is the Holy Spirit calling us together?"



Final prayer of thanksgiving

B. Communion, mission, participation

Three priority issues for a synodal Church

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Rom 12: 4-5).

43. Among the fruits of the first phase, and in particular of the Continental Assemblies, which came to the fore thanks to the way of proceeding just outlined, three priorities were identified that are now proposed to the Synodal Assembly of October 2023 for discernment. These are challenges with which the whole Church must measure itself in order to take a step forward and grow in its own synodal being at all levels and from a plurality of perspectives. They need to be addressed from the point of view of theology and canon law, as well as from that of pastoral care and spirituality. They call into question the way Dioceses plan as well as the daily choices and lifestyle of each member of the People of God. They are also authentically synodal because addressing them requires walking together as a people, with all its members. The three priorities will be illustrated in connection with the three key words of the Synod: communion, mission, participation. While this is done for the sake of simplicity and clarity of presentation, it risks presenting the three key words as three “pillars” independent of one another. Instead, in the life of the synodal Church, communion, mission and participation are articulated, nourishing and supporting each other. They must always be understood with this integration in mind.

44. The different order in which the three terms appear, with mission taking the central place, is also rooted in the awareness of the links that unite that developed during the first phase. In particular, **communion and mission are interwoven and mirror each other**, as already taught by Saint John Paul II: “Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion” (CL 32, taken up in PE I,4). We are invited to move beyond a dualist understanding in which the relationships within the ecclesial community are the domain of communion, while mission concerns the momentum *ad extra*. The first phase has instead highlighted how communion is the condition for the credibility of proclamation, an insight which recalls that of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*⁷. At the same time there is a growing awareness that the orientation for mission is the only evangelically founded criterion for the internal organisation of the Christian community, the distribution of roles and tasks, and the management of its institutions and structures. **It is in relationship with communion and mission that participation can be understood, and for this reason, it can only be addressed after the other two**. On the one hand, it gives them the concrete expression: attention to procedures, rules, structures and institutions allows the mission to be consolidated over time and frees communion from mere emotional spontaneity. On the other hand, it receives a meaning, orientation and dynamism that allows it to escape the risk of turning into a frenzy of individual rights claims that inevitably cause fragmentation rather than unity.

⁷ For example, at 128, the *Final Document* states: “[It] is not enough to have structures, if authentic relationships are not developed within them; it is actually the quality of these relationships that evangelizes”.

45. To accompany the preparation and structure of the work of the Assembly, five worksheets have been prepared to address each priority, to be found at the end of this section. Each of these constitutes an entry point to the priority in question which in this way can be approached from different but complementary perspectives related to different aspects of the life of the Church that have emerged through the work of the Continental Assemblies. In this case the three paragraphs that follow, to which the three groups of worksheets in the appendix correspond, should not be read as parallel and non-communicating columns. Rather, they are beams of light that illuminate the same reality, that is the synodal life of the Church, from different vantage points, continually intertwining and invoking one another, inviting us to growth.

B 1. A communion that radiates: How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?

46. Communion is not a sociological coming together as members of an identity group but is above all a gift of the Triune God, and at the same time a task, which is never exhausted, of building the “we” of the People of God. As the Continental Assemblies experienced, communion interweaves a vertical dimension, that *Lumen gentium* calls “union with God,” and a horizontal one, “the unity of all humanity”, in a strong eschatological dynamism. Communion is a journey in which we are called to grow, “until all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

47. We receive an anticipation of that moment in the liturgy, the place where the Church on its earthly journey experiences communion, nourishes it and builds it up. If the liturgy is in fact the “outstanding means whereby the Faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church” (SC 2) then it is to the liturgy that we must look in order to understand the synodal life of the Church. First and foremost, **it is through shared liturgical action, and in particular the eucharistic celebration, that the Church experiences radical unity, expressed in the same prayer** but in a diversity of languages and rites: a fundamental point in a synodal key. From this point of view, the multiplicity of rites in the one Catholic Church is an authentic blessing, to be protected and promoted, as was also experienced during the liturgies of the Continental Assemblies.

48. A synodal assembly cannot be understood as representative and legislative, analogous to a parliamentary structure with its dynamics of majority building. Rather, we are called to understand it by analogy with the liturgical assembly. Ancient tradition tells us that when a synod is celebrated it begins with the invocation of the Holy Spirit, continues with the profession of faith, and arrives at shared determinations to ensure or re-establish ecclesial communion. In a synodal assembly Christ becomes present and acts, transforms history and daily events, and gives the Spirit to guide the Church to find a consensus on how to walk together towards the Kingdom and to help all of humanity to move towards greater unity. Walking together while listening to the Word and our brothers and sisters, that is, in seeking God’s will and mutual agreement, leads to thanksgiving to the Father through the Son in the one Spirit. In a synodal assembly, those who gather in the name of Christ listen to his Word, listen to each other, discern in docility to the Spirit, proclaim what they have heard and recognise it as light for the journey of the Church.

49. In this perspective, synodal life is not a strategy for organising the Church, but the experience of being able to find a unity that embraces diversity without erasing it, because it is founded on union with God in the confession of the same faith. This dynamism possesses an impelling force that

continually seeks to widen the scope of communion, but which must come to terms with the contradictions, limits and wounds of history.

50. The first priority issue that emerged from the synodal process is rooted precisely in this point. In the concreteness of our historical reality, preserving and promoting communion requires taking on the incompleteness of being able to live unity in diversity (cf. 1 Cor 12). History produces divisions, which cause wounds that need to be healed and require pathways to be forged for reconciliation. In this context, **in the name of the Gospel, which bonds need to be strengthened in order to overcome trenches and fences, and which shelters and protections need to be built, and to protect whom? Which divisions are unproductive? When does graduality make the path to complete communion possible?** These seem like theoretical questions, but they are rooted in the concrete daily life of Christian communities consulted in the first phase. Indeed, they concern the question of whether there are limits to our willingness to welcome people and groups, how to engage in dialogue with cultures and religions without compromising our identity, and our determination to be the voice of those on the margins and reaffirm that no one should be left behind. The five Worksheets referring to this priority try to explore these questions from five complementary perspectives.

B 2. Co-responsibility in Mission: How can we better share gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?

51. “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature” (AG 2). Mission constitutes the dynamic horizon from which we are to think about the synodal Church, to which it imparts a drive towards the “ecstasy” that consists in “coming out of ourselves and seeking the good of others, even to the sacrifice of our lives” (CV 163; cf. also FT 88). Mission allows one to receive the experience of Pentecost: having received the Holy Spirit, Peter and the Eleven stand and take the word to announce the crucified and risen Jesus to all those living in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:14-36). Synodal life is rooted in the same dynamism. There are many testimonies that describe the lived experience of the first stage in these terms, and even more numerous are those that link synodality and mission in an inseparable manner.

52. In a Church that defines itself as a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity (cf. LG 1), the discourse on mission focuses on the lucidity of the sign and the efficacy of the instrument, without which any proclamation lacks credibility. Mission is not the marketing of a religious product, but the construction of a community in which relationships are a manifestation of God’s love and therefore whose very life becomes a proclamation. In the *Acts of the Apostles*, Peter’s discourse is immediately followed by the account of the life of the primitive community, in which everything became an occasion for communion (cf. 2:42-47), which made the community attractive.

53. In this line, **the first question regarding mission asks what the members of the Christian community are really willing to hold in common, starting from the irreducible uniqueness of each member**, by virtue of their direct relationship with Christ in Baptism and as a dwelling place of the Spirit. This makes the contribution of each of the Baptized precious and indispensable. One of the reasons for the sense of wonder noted during the first phase is related to this possibility of contribution: “Can I really offer something?”. At the same time, each person is invited to acknowledge his or her own incompleteness, and therefore the awareness that in the fullness of mission everyone is needed. In this sense, mission also has a constitutively synodal dimension.

54. For this reason, the second priority identified by a Church that discovers itself as missionary and synodal concerns the manner in which it is able to solicit the contribution of all, each with their gifts and roles, valuing the diversity of charisms and integrating the relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts⁸. The perspective of mission places charisms and ministries within the horizon of what is common, and in this way safeguards their fruitfulness, which is compromised when they become prerogatives that legitimise forms of exclusion. **A missionary synodal Church has a duty to ask itself how it can recognise and value the contribution that each Baptised person can offer in mission**, going out of himself/herself and participating together with others in something greater. “[T]o make an active contribution to the common good of humanity” (CA 34) is an inalienable component of the dignity of the person, even within the Christian community. The first contribution everyone can make is towards discerning the signs of the times (cf. GS 4), in order to maintain awareness of our common mission in tune with the breath of the Spirit. All points of view have something to contribute to this discernment, starting with that of the poor and excluded: walking together with them does not only mean responding to and taking on their needs and sufferings, but also respecting their protagonism and learning from them. This is the way to recognise their equal dignity, escaping the traps of welfarism and anticipating as far as possible the logic of the new heavens and new earth towards which we are on our way.

55. The Worksheets linked to this priority try to concretise this basic question with respect to topics such as the recognition of the variety of vocations, charisms and ministries, the promotion of the baptismal dignity of women, the role of the ordained Ministry and in particular the ministry of the Bishop within the missionary synodal Church.

B 3. Participation, governance and authority: What processes, structures and institutions in a missionary synodal Church?

56. “The words ‘communion’ and ‘mission’ can risk remaining somewhat abstract, unless we cultivate an ecclesial praxis that expresses the concreteness of synodality at every step of our journey and activity, encouraging real involvement on the part of each and all”⁹. These words of the Holy Father help us place participation in relation to the other two themes. Participation adds anthropological density to the concrete character of the procedural dimension. It expresses concern for the flourishing of human beings, that is, the humanising of relationships at the heart of the project of communion and the commitment to mission. It safeguards the uniqueness of each person’s face, urging that the transition to the “we” does not absorb the “I” into the anonymity of an indistinct collectivity. It guards against falling into the abstractness of rights or reducing persons to subservient instruments for the organization’s performance. Participation is essentially an expression of creativity, a way of nurturing the relationships of hospitality, welcome and human well-being that lie at the heart of mission and communion.

57. From the vision of integral participation presented above emerges the third priority also addressed at the meetings of the continental stage: **the question of authority, its meaning and the style of its exercise within a synodal Church. In particular, does authority arise as a form of power derived from the models offered by the world, or is it rooted in service?** “It will not be so among you” (Mt 20:26; cf. Mk 10:43), says the Lord, who after washing the disciples’ feet admonishes them: “For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:15). In its origin, the

⁸ Cf. CONGREGATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Letter *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, 15 May 2016, 13-18.

⁹ FRANCIS, *Moment of Reflection for the beginning of the synodal journey*, 9 October 2021.

term “authority” indicates the capacity to enable others to grow, and therefore it is a service to the uniqueness of each person, supporting creativity rather than being a form of control that blocks it, and a service to the creation of personal freedom and not a binding that restrains it. Linked to this question is a second one, charged with the concern for concreteness and continuity over time: **how can we imbue our structures and institutions with the dynamism of the missionary synodal Church?**

58. From this focus derives a further, equally concrete, theme which aims precisely at sustaining the dynamic of participation over time. The theme of formation appears across all the documents of the first phase. As repeatedly emphasized in the reports of Continental Assemblies and, before them the reports of the local Churches, **institutions and structures alone are not enough to make the Church synodal. A synodal culture and spirituality are needed animated by a desire for conversion and sustained by adequate formation.** The need for formation is not limited to the updating of content, but has an integral scope, affecting all the abilities and dispositions of the person, including mission orientation, the ability to relate and build community, willingness to listen spiritually, and familiarity with personal and community discernment. Also necessary are patience, perseverance, confidence and freedom in speaking the truth (*parrhesia*).

59. Formation is the indispensable means to make the synodal way of proceeding a pastoral model for the Church’s life and action. **We need integral formation, initial and ongoing, for all members of the People of God.** No Baptised person can feel extraneous to this commitment and it is therefore necessary to structure adequate proposals for formation in the synodal way addressed to all the Faithful. In particular, then, the more one is called to serve the Church, the more one must feel the urgency of formation: Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Consecrated men and women, and all those who exercise a ministry need formation to renew the ways of exercising authority and decision-making processes in a synodal key, and to learn how to accompany community discernment and conversation in the Spirit. Candidates for ordained Ministry must be trained in a synodal style and mentality. The promotion of a culture of synodality implies the renewal of the current seminary curriculum and the formation of teachers and professors of theology, so that there is a clearer and more decisive orientation towards formation for a life of communion, mission and participation. Formation for a more genuinely synodal spirituality is at the heart of the renewal of the Church.

60. Numerous contributions highlight the need for a similar effort **to renew the language used by the Church** in its liturgy, preaching, catechesis, sacred art, as well as in all forms of communication addressed to the Faithful and the wider public, including through new or traditional forms of media. Without demeaning or debasing the depth of the mystery that the Church proclaims or the richness of its tradition, the renewal of language must instead aim to make these riches accessible and attractive to the men and women of our time, rather than an obstacle that keeps them at a distance. The inspiration of the freshness of the language of the Gospel, the capacity for inculturation that the history of the Church exhibits, and the promising experiences already underway, even in the digital environment, invite us to proceed with confidence and resolution in a task of crucial importance for the effectiveness of the proclamation of the Gospel, which is the goal to which a missionary synodal Church aspires.

Rome, 29th May, 2023

Memorial of the Blessed Virgin, Mary, Mother of the Church

XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

WORKSHEETS FOR THE SYNODAL ASSEMBLY

(FIRST SESSION – OCTOBER 2023)

WORKSHEETS FOR THE SYNODAL ASSEMBLY

Introduction

If the entire IL “is designed as a practical aid at the service of the conduct of the Synodal Assembly of October 2023 and thus for its preparation” (no. 10), this is particularly true for the Worksheets presented here. They have been prepared to facilitate discernment on the three “priorities that most strongly emerge from the work of all the continents” (no. 14), with a view to identifying the concrete steps to which we feel called by the Holy Spirit in order to grow as a synodal Church. Therefore, the presentation of the Worksheets, the explanation of their structure and the instructions for how to use them need to be contextualised within the wider work of the Assembly.

The dynamics of the Assembly

The Assembly will deal with the questions posed by the IL by alternating plenary sessions (*Congregationes Generales*) and group work (*Circuli Minores*), as foreseen by Art. 14 of EC.

In particular, the Assembly will proceed by addressing the different topics in the order in which the IL proposes them. It will begin by working on Section A, “For a Synodal Church. An integral experience” (nos. 17-42), with the aim of focusing with greater clarity on the fundamental characteristics of a synodal Church, starting from the experience of walking together lived by the People of God in these two years and gathered in the documents produced during the first phase through to the discernment of the Pastors. The Assembly is asked to conduct its work in an integral manner considering the experience of the People of God as a whole in all its complexity.

The Assembly will then proceed to address the three priority issues that emerged from the consultation phase as presented in Section B of the IL (nos. 43-60). Each of these priorities is the subject of one of the three parts into which Section B is divided, “in connection with the three key words of the Synod: communion, mission, participation” (no. 43). The order in which these three terms appear is inverted as explained in no. 44. This order is maintained in the Worksheets, which are also divided into three parts, each of which takes up the title of the corresponding part of Section B, thus highlighting the unifying theme:

- “B 1. A communion that radiates: How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?” (nos. 46-50);
- “B 2. Co-responsibility in Mission: How can we better share gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?” (nos. 51-55);
- “B 3. Participation, governance and authority: What processes, structures and institutions are needed in a missionary synodal Church?” (nos. 56-60).

Five Worksheets correspond to each of the three priorities, each one constituting “an entry point to the priority in question which in this way can be approached from different but complementary

perspectives related to different aspects of the life of the Church that have emerged through the work of the Continental Assemblies” (no. 45).

The structuring of the work in successive steps does not reduce the dynamism that binds the two Sections. The experience of the People of God addressed with the integrating perspective of Section A continues to represent the horizon within which to place the various questions posed in Section B, which remain rooted in that experience. The Assembly will be asked to “sustain a dynamic equilibrium between maintaining an overview [...] and the identification of the steps to be taken” (no. 16). The latter gives depth to and makes concrete the former, and receive in return perspective and cohesion against the risk of dispersion in detail.

Finally, the last segment of the work of the Assembly will be dedicated to gathering the fruits of the process, that is, discerning the paths we will continue to walk together. The Assembly will consider ways to continue reading the experience of the People of God, including through promoting the necessary in-depth theological and canonical studies in preparation for the second session of the synodal Assembly in October 2024.

The Assembly will continue to use the method of conversation in the Spirit (cf. nos. 32-42) that has characterised the entire synodal process, adapting it where necessary. Through its direct experience of this method (cf. figure on p. 26), the Assembly will then be able to reflect with greater insight on ways to incorporate it more readily into the ordinary life of the Church as a shared way to discern the will of God.

How to use the Worksheets

The Worksheets are designed as a working tool to address the three priority issues set out in Section B during the October 2023 Assembly. They are, therefore, not chapters of a book to be read in succession, nor are they short and more or less complete essays on a topic. They are “to be done” and not “to be read” in the sense that they offer an outline for prayer and personal reflection in preparation for group and plenary discussion. Similarly, they can be used for in-depth thematic meetings in a synodal style at all levels of Church life. They are not meant to be dealt with in succession: each should be kept together with the part of Section B of the IL to which it corresponds but can be dealt with independently of all the others.

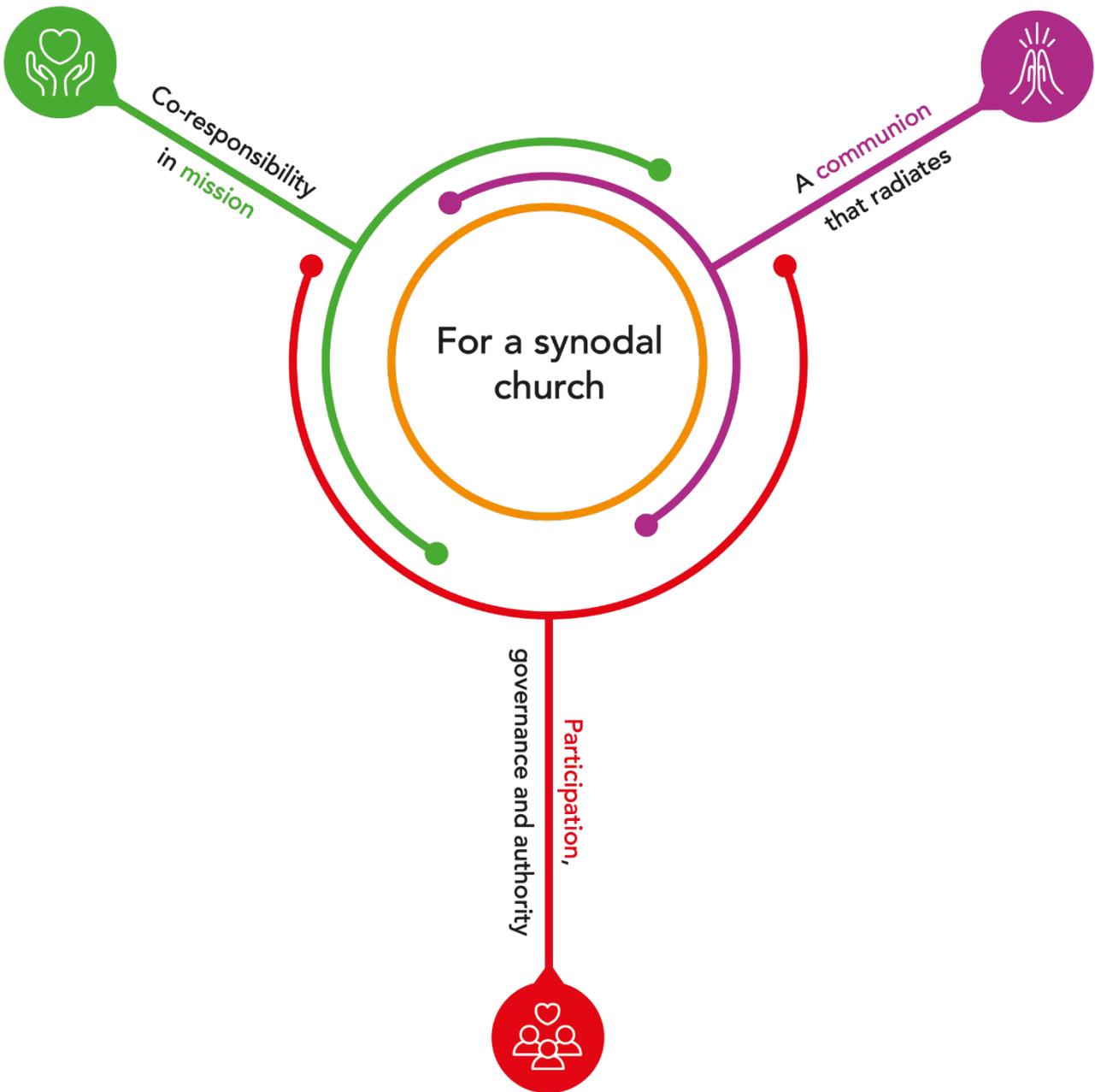
All the Worksheets follow the same structure: they begin with a brief contextualisation of the question given in the title, each framed by what emerged in the first phase. They then present a question for discernment. Finally, they offer some insights, which outline various perspectives (theological, pastoral, canonical, etc.), dimensions and levels (Parish, Diocese, etc.). Above all, they recall the particularity of the faces of the members of the People of God, their charisms and ministries, and the questions they expressed during the listening phase. The plenty of each Worksheet’s stimuli results from seeking to remain faithful to the richness and variety of the material gathered from the consultation, but they are not meant to be considered as a questionnaire which requires an answer to every question. Some insights will prove particularly stimulating in certain regions of the world, others in different regions. Each person is invited to choose the ones that they feel best enable the riches of their own Church context to be shared with others. This will be their contribution to the common task.

Each Worksheet focuses on the topic indicated by the title, taking for granted the frame of reference represented by the IL, whose contents are neither repeated nor explicitly cited in each instance. However, they represent the basis for the work, together with all the documents produced during the consultation phase: “In preparation for the Assembly, the Members of the Synod are asked to keep in mind the previous documents, in particular, the DCS and the Final Documents of the Continental Assemblies of the different continents, as well as the report of the Digital Synod and to use them as tools for their own discernment” (no. 9). It is therefore not a question of starting from scratch, but of continuing a journey already underway. For this reason, as well as for obvious reasons of space, the Worksheets do not offer a systematic treatment of each topic, nor do they address matters in depth. The fact that the synodal process has highlighted some points as priorities does not mean that other issues are less important. On the basis of the consultation of the People of God, the questions proposed in the Worksheets represent points of entry to address the basic question that drives and guides the entire process: “How does this ‘journeying together,’ which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?” (PD 2).

There are obvious points of contact and some overlaps between the Worksheets. This is not a matter of repetition. In drafting, it was understood that the Worksheets are designed to be used independently of each other. Moreover, this highlights the rich network of interconnections between the topics covered.

Some of the questions that emerged from the consultation of the People of God concern issues on which there is already magisterial and theological teaching to be considered. To give just two examples, we can note the acceptance of remarried divorcees, dealt with in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, or the inculturation of the liturgy, the subject of the Instruction *Varietates legitimae* (1994) of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. The fact that questions continue to emerge on issues like these should not be hastily dismissed, rather, it calls for discernment, and the Synodal Assembly is a privileged forum for so doing. In particular, the obstacles, real or perceived, that have prevented the steps indicated by previous documents from being realised should be considered and reflections offered on how they can be removed. For example, if the block stems from a general lack of information, then improved communication will be needed. If, on the other hand, the problem stems from the difficulty of grasping the implications of the documents in ordinary situations or an inability of persons to recognise themselves in what is proposed, a synodal journey of effective reception by the People of God could be the appropriate response. Another instance could be the reappearance of a question which emerges as a sign of a changed reality or situations where there is a need for an “overflow” of Grace. This requires further reflection on the Deposit of Faith and the living Tradition of the Church.

It will be difficult for the work of the first session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to produce conclusive guidelines on many of these topics. This is why the Holy Father has decided that the Synodal Assembly will be held in two sessions. The main objective of the first session will be to outline paths of in-depth study to be carried out in a synodal style, indicating the relevant actors to be involved and ways to ensure a fruitful process in service to the discernment to be completed in the second session in October 2024. Proposals on how we can grow as a synodal Church will then be presented to the Holy Father.



B 1. A Communion that radiates

How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?

B 1.1 How does the service of charity and commitment to justice and care for our common home nourish communion in a synodal Church?

The Continental Assemblies indicate various directions for our growth as a missionary synodal Church:

- a) In a synodal Church, the poor, in the primary sense of those living in conditions of material poverty and social exclusion, occupy a central place. They are recipients of care, but above all, they are bearers of Good News that the whole community needs to hear. The Church has something to learn and receive from them (cf. Lk 6:20, EG 198). A synodal Church recognises and values their central role.
- b) Caring for our common home calls for shared action. The solution to many problems, such as climate change, calls for the commitment of the whole human family. Working together to care for our common home already provides a context for encounter and collaboration with members of other Churches and ecclesial Communities, with believers of other religions and with people of goodwill. This commitment requires us to act simultaneously on a plurality of levels: catechesis and pastoral work, promotion of better lifestyles, and management of the Church's assets (real estate and financial).
- c) Migratory movements are a sign of our time, and "migrants are a 'paradigm' able to shed light on our times"¹⁰. Their presence constitutes a particular call to the Catholic Faithful to walk together. They represent an invitation to create links with Churches in the migrants' countries of origin, representing also a chance to experience the variety of the Church, including importantly through the diaspora of the Eastern Catholic Churches.
- d) A synodal Church can offer a prophetic witness to a fragmented and polarised world, especially when its members are committed to walking together with others for the building of the common good. In places marked by deep conflict, this requires the ability to be agents of reconciliation and artisans of peace.
- e) "Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor" (EG 187). This implies a willingness to take a stand alongside the most marginalised in public debate, lending a voice to their cause and denouncing situations of injustice and discrimination whilst seeking to avoid complicity with those responsible for injustice.

Question for discernment

Walking together means not leaving anyone behind and remaining alongside those who struggle the most. How are we building a synodal Church capable of promoting the belonging and participation of the least within the Church and in society?

¹⁰ XV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, Final Document*, 27 October 2018, 25.

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) Works of justice and mercy are a form of participation in Christ's mission. Every Baptised person is therefore called to engage in this area. How can this awareness be awakened, cultivated and strengthened in Christian communities?
- 2) The inequalities that mark the contemporary world are also present in the Church, separating, for example, the Churches of rich and poor countries and the communities of the richest and poorest areas of the same country. How can we overcome these inequalities, walking together as local Churches so that we experience a genuine sharing of gifts?
- 3) Along the synodal path, what efforts have been made to welcome the voice of the poorest and to integrate their contribution? What have we learned about how to support the belonging and participation of the most marginalised? What needs to happen to enable their greater involvement in our walking together and how do we let their voices question our way of doing things when it is insufficiently inclusive of them?
- 4) How can welcoming migrants become an opportunity to walk with people from another culture, especially when we share the same faith? What provision is made for migrant communities in local pastoral care? How is the diaspora of the Eastern Catholic Churches valued and how can their presence become an opportunity to experience unity in diversity? How can links be created between the Churches in countries of departure and arrival?
- 5) Does the Christian community know how to accompany society as a whole in building the common good, or does it seek to defend only its own vested interests? Is the Christian community able to bear witness to the possibility of concord beyond political polarisations? How does it equip itself through prayer and formation for these tasks? Working for the common good requires forming alliances and coalitions. What criteria of discernment should we use? How does the community accompany its members who are engaged in politics?
- 6) What experience do we have of walking together with others beyond the Catholic Church (individuals, groups and movements) in care for our common home? What have we learnt? What progress is being made to coordinate the different levels of action necessary for effective care of our common home?
- 7) Walking together with the poor and marginalised requires a willingness to listen. Should the Church recognise a specific ministry of listening and accompaniment for those who take on this service? How can a synodal Church form and support those offering such accompaniment? How can we give ecclesial recognition to those bearing an authentic vocation to contribute to a just society and care for our common home?

B 1.2 How can a synodal Church make credible the promise that “love and truth will meet” (Ps 85:11)?

Understanding the real and concrete meaning of the Christian call to encounter the Lord through welcome and accompaniment emerged as a core concern during the first phase of the synodal journey.

The DCS chose the biblical image of a widening tent (cf. Is 54:2) to express the call to be a simultaneously well-rooted and open community. The Continental Assemblies, speaking from their diverse contexts, proposed other resonant images that capture the dimension of the welcome core to the Church’s mission. Asia offered the image of the person who takes off his or her shoes to cross the threshold as a sign of the humility with which we prepare to meet God and our neighbour. Oceania proposed the image of the boat and Africa suggested the image of the Church as the family of God, capable of offering belonging and welcome to all its members in all their variety.

In this diversity, we can trace a unity of purpose. Everywhere the Church is searching for ways to renew its mission to be a welcoming and hospitable community, to encounter Christ in those it welcomes and to be a sign of his presence and a credible proclamation of the Gospel in the lives of all. There is a profound need to imitate the Lord and Master in the ability to live out a seeming paradox “to proclaim with courage his authentic teaching and at the same time offering a witness of radical inclusion and acceptance” (DCS 30).

On this point, the synodal path has been an opportunity to engage in a profound encounter, with humility and sincerity. It has surprised some to discover that the synodal style allows the questions that arise from this encounter to be placed in a missionary perspective. These encounters did not lead to paralysis but nourished the hope that the Synod will be a catalyst for this renewal of mission and will prompt us to mend the relational fabric of the Church.

The desire to offer genuine welcome is a sentiment expressed by synod participants across diverse contexts:

- a) the final documents of the Continental Assemblies often mention those who do not feel accepted in the Church, such as the divorced and remarried, people in polygamous marriages, or LGBTQ+ Catholics;
- b) they also note how racial, tribal, ethnic, class or caste-based discrimination, also present in the People of God, leads some to feel less important or welcome in the community;
- c) there are widespread reports of a variety of practical and cultural barriers that exclude persons with disabilities, which must be overcome;
- d) concern also emerges that the poorest to whom the Good News is primarily addressed are too often on the margins of Christian communities (for example, migrants and refugees, street children, homeless persons, victims of human trafficking, and others);
- e) the documents of the Continental Assemblies note that it is necessary to maintain the link between synodal conversion and care for survivors of abuse and those marginalised within the Church. The Continental Assemblies place great emphasis on learning to exercise justice as a form of care for those who have been wounded by members of the Church, especially victims and survivors of all forms of abuse.
- f) listening to the most neglected voices is identified as the way to grow in the love and justice to which the Gospel calls us.

Question for discernment

What steps can a synodal Church take to imitate ever more closely its Master and Lord, who walks with all in unconditional love and proclaims the fullness of the Gospel truth?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) What is the attitude with which we approach the world? Do we know to recognise what is good and, at the same time, commit ourselves to prophetically denounce all that violates the dignity of persons, human communities and creation?
- 2) How can we speak in a prophetic voice to expose what is evil without further fragmenting our communities? How can we become a Church that deals honestly with its conflicts and is not afraid to safeguard spaces for disagreement?
- 3) How can we restore proximity and caring relationships as the core of the Church's mission, "walking with people instead of talking about them or solely at them"?
- 4) In the spirit of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, how can we walk together with young people? How can a "preferential option for young people" be at the centre of our pastoral strategies and synodal life?
- 5) How can we continue to take meaningful and concrete steps to offer justice to victims and survivors of sexual abuse and spiritual, economic, power and conscience abuse by persons who were carrying out a ministry or ecclesial responsibility?
- 6) How can we create spaces where those who feel hurt by the Church and unwelcomed by the community feel recognised, received, free to ask questions and not judged? In the light of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, what concrete steps are needed to welcome those who feel excluded from the Church because of their status or sexuality (for example, remarried divorcees, people in polygamous marriages, LGBTQ+ people, etc.)?
- 7) How can we be more open and welcoming towards migrants and refugees, ethnic and cultural minorities, and indigenous communities who have long been part of the Church but are often on the margins? How can the Church better embrace their presence as a gift?
- 8) What physical and cultural barriers do we need to break down so that people with disabilities can feel that they are full members of the community?
- 9) How can we enhance the contribution of older people to the life of the Christian community and society?

B 1.3 How can a dynamic relationship of gift exchange between the Churches grow?

The communion to which the Church is called is a dynamic relationship of gift exchange, which bears witness to a transcendent unity in diversity. One of the most significant gifts of the synodal journey so far is the rediscovery of the richness of our diversity and depth of our interconnectedness. Diversity and interconnectedness do not threaten but rather provide the context for a more profound reception of our unity of creation, calling and destiny.

The synod process has been experienced in a lively and enthusiastic manner at the local level of the Church, especially when there have been opportunities for conversation in the Spirit. The DCS has sought to capture this vitality while emphasising the extraordinary convergence of issues and themes that have emerged across contexts. During the Continental Assemblies, aspects of the life of the Church in very different contexts were discovered as a precious gift. At the same time, continents entered into a deeper relationship with the diversity that characterises their various regions. These include differences between neighbours within continents as well as diverse expressions of catholicity in places where Latin and Eastern Catholic Churches share the same territory, often as a result of waves of Catholic migration and the formation of communities in diaspora. As one Continental Assembly observed, we have experienced ourselves very concretely as “communities of communities”, noting the gifts and tensions this can generate.

These encounters have led to shared observations and clear requests:

- a) It is desired that we might better hear and recognise the different traditions of specific regions and Churches in an ecclesial and theological conversation often dominated by Latin/Western voices. The dignity of the Baptised is recognised as a key point in many contexts, similarly for many members of Eastern Catholic Churches in particular, the Paschal Mystery celebrated in the Sacraments of Christian Initiation remains the focus of reflection on Christian identity and the synodal Church.
- b) the Eastern Catholic Churches have a long and distinguished experience of synodality, shared with the Orthodox Churches, a tradition they wish attention to be given to in the discussions and discernment of this synodal process.
- c) likewise, there are specific and particular realities that Eastern Christians in diaspora face in new contexts, together with their Orthodox brothers and sisters. It is desired that the Eastern Catholic Churches in the diaspora are able to preserve their identity and be recognised as more than ethnic communities, i.e. as Churches *sui iuris* with rich spiritual, theological and liturgical traditions that contribute to the mission of the Church today in a global context.

Question for discernment

How can each local Church, the subject of mission in its context, enhance, promote and integrate the exchange of gifts with the other local Churches within the horizon of the one Catholic Church? How can the local Churches be helped to promote the catholicity of the Church in a harmonious relationship between unity and diversity, preserving the specificity of each one?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) How do we increase awareness that the Church, both one and catholic, is already, and has been from the beginning, the bearer of a rich and multiform diversity
- 2) By what gestures could all local Churches show hospitality towards each other to benefit from the mutual exchange of ecclesial gifts and manifest ecclesial communion in the areas of liturgy, spirituality, pastoral care and theological reflection? In particular, how can we facilitate an exchange of experiences and visions of synodality between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church?
- 3) How could the Latin Church develop greater openness to the spiritual, theological, and liturgical traditions of the Eastern Catholic Churches?
- 4) How can the Oriental Catholic Churches in diaspora preserve their identity and be recognised as more than just ethnic communities?
- 5) Some Churches live in very precarious situations. How can the other Churches take on their suffering and provide for their needs, putting into practice the teachings of the Apostle Paul who asked the communities in Greece to generously support the Church of Jerusalem: “Let your abundance make up for their neediness, so that their abundance may also make up for your neediness, and so that there may be equality” (2 Cor 8:14)? What role can global institutions and those of the Holy See dedicated to the service of charity play in this regard?
- 6) How can we take into account and value the contributions and experiences of the local Churches in the teaching of the Magisterium and ecclesiastical norms at the universal level?
- 7) In an increasingly globalised and interconnected world, how to develop the fabric of relations between local Churches of the same region and also of different continents? How can increasing human mobility and thus the presence of migrant communities become an opportunity for building links between Churches and exchanging gifts? How can tensions and misunderstandings that may arise between believers of different cultures and traditions be handled constructively?
- 8) How can the Church’s global institutions, starting with those reporting to the Holy See and the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, foster the circulation of gifts between the Churches?
- 9) How can the exchange of experiences and gifts be made active and fruitful not only between the different local Churches, but also between the different vocations, charisms and spiritualities within the People of God, including institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, lay associations and movements, and new communities? How is it possible to ensure the participation of communities of contemplative life in this exchange?

B 1.4 How can a synodal Church fulfil its mission through a renewed ecumenical commitment?

“The path of synodality, which the Catholic Church is on, is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical path is synodal”¹¹. Synodality is a common challenge that concerns all believers in Christ, just as ecumenism is first and foremost a common path (*syn-odos*) travelled together with other Christians. Synodality and ecumenism are two paths to walk together, with a common goal: a better Christian witness. This can take the form of coexistence in an “ecumenism of life” at different levels, including through inter-Church marriages, and also through the ultimate act of giving one’s life as a witness to faith in Christ in the ecumenism of martyrdom.

There are several ecumenical implications of the commitment to build a synodal Church:

- a) Through one Baptism all Christians participate in the *sensus fidei* (supernatural sense of the faith; cf. LG 12), which is why in a synodal Church all the Baptised must be listened to attentively;
- b) The ecumenical journey is an “exchange of gifts” and one of the gifts that Catholics can receive from other Christians is precisely their synodal experience (cf. EG 246). The rediscovery of synodality as a constitutive dimension of the Church is one fruit of ecumenical dialogue, especially with the Orthodox;
- c) The ecumenical movement as a laboratory of synodality. In particular the methodology of dialogue and consensus-building experienced at various levels in the ecumenical movement could be a source of inspiration;
- d) Synodality is part of the “continuous reform” of the Church, as it is principally through its internal reform, in which synodality plays an essential role, that the Catholic Church draws closer to other Christians (UR 4.6);
- e) There is a reciprocal relationship between the synodal ordering of the Catholic Church and the credibility of its ecumenical commitment;
- f) A certain synodality between the Churches is experienced whenever Christians from different communities come together in the name of Jesus Christ for common prayer, action and common witness, as well as regular consultations and participation in each other's synodal processes.

All the Final Documents of the Continental Assemblies highlight the close relationship between synodality and ecumenism, and some devote entire chapters to it. Indeed, both synodality and ecumenism are rooted in the baptismal dignity of the entire People of God. Together they invite renewed commitment to the vision of a missionary synodal Church. They are processes of listening and dialogue and invite us to grow in a communion that is not uniformity but unity in legitimate diversity. They highlight the need for a spirit of co-responsibility, since our decisions and actions at different levels affect all members of the Body of Christ. They are spiritual processes of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation in a dialogue of conversion that can lead to a healing of memory.

¹¹ FRANCIS, *Address to His Holiness Mar Awa III Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East*, 19 November 2022.

Question for discernment

How can the experience and fruits of the ecumenical journey help to build a more synodal Catholic Church; how can synodality help the Catholic Church to better respond to Jesus' prayer: "that they may all be one ... that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21)?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) This Synod is an opportunity to learn from other Churches and ecclesial Communities and to "reap what the Spirit has sown in them as a gift for us too" (EG 246). What can Catholics (re)learn from the synodal experience of other Christians and the ecumenical movement?
- 2) How can we promote the active participation of the whole People of God in the ecumenical movement? In particular, how can we engage the important contribution of those in consecrated life, inter-Church couples and families, young people, ecclesial movements and ecumenical communities?
- 3) In which areas is a "healing of memory" necessary with regard to the relationship with other Churches and ecclesial Communities? How can we build a "new memory" together?
- 4) How can our "walking together" with Christians of all traditions be improved? How could a common commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (325-2025) provide such an opportunity?
- 5) "The episcopal ministry of unity is closely linked to synodality"¹². How is the Bishop, as the "visible principle and foundation of unity" (LG 23), called to promote ecumenism in a synodal manner in his local Church?
- 6) How can the ongoing synodal process contribute to "finding a form of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing the essential nature of its mission, is open to a new situation"¹³?
- 7) How can the Eastern Catholic Churches help, support and stimulate the Latin Church in the common synodal and ecumenical commitment? How can the Latin Church support and promote the identity of the Eastern Catholic Faithful in the diaspora?
- 8) How can Pope Francis' ecumenical motto "Walk together, work together, pray together"¹⁴ inspire a renewed commitment to Christian unity in a synodal manner?

¹² PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, *The Bishop and Christian Unity: an Ecumenical Vademecum*, 5 June 2020, 4.

¹³ SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, 25 May 1995, 95; quoted in EG 32 and EC 10.

¹⁴ FRANCIS, *Address at the Ecumenical Prayer*, WCC Ecumenical Centre (Geneva), 21 June 2018.

B 1.5 How can we recognise and gather the richness of cultures and develop dialogue amongst religions in the light of the Gospel?

Listening to people requires knowing how to listen to the cultures in which they are embedded, in the knowledge that every culture remains in continuous evolution. A synodal Church needs to learn how to better articulate the Gospel within local cultures and contexts, through a discernment that proceeds from the assurance that the Spirit gives the Church such a breadth that it can welcome any culture without exception. Proof of this is the fact that the local Churches are already characterised by great diversity, which is a blessing. Within them different nationalities and ethnic groups and believers from Eastern and Western traditions coexist. This richness is not always easy to live with and can become a source of division and conflict.

In addition, our own time is marked by the overwhelming pervasiveness of a new culture, that of digital environments and new media. As the Digital Synod initiative shows, the Church is already present there through the activity of many Christians, especially the young. However, what continues to be lacking is a fuller awareness of the potential this environment offers for evangelisation or a reflection, particularly in anthropological terms, on the challenges it poses.

In the work of the preparatory phase, various tensions emerged. These need not overwhelm us but can be engaged as sources of dynamism:

a) in the relationship between the Gospel and local cultures, with different experiences and positions. Some see the adoption of the traditions of the universal Church as an imposition on local cultures or even a form of colonialism. Others believe that the Spirit acts in every culture, making it already capable of giving expression to the truths of the Christian faith. Others again hold that Christians cannot adopt or adapt pre-Christian cultural practices.

b) in the relationship between Christianity and other religions. While there are very fruitful experiences of dialogue and engagement with believers of other religions, in some regions difficulties, limitations, and indications of mistrust emerge and even conflict and direct or indirect persecution. The Church wishes to build bridges for the promotion of peace, reconciliation, justice and freedom, but there are also situations that require us to exercise great patience and hope that things can change;

c) in the relationship between the Church, on the one hand, and Western culture and forms of cultural colonisation, on the other. There are forces at work in the world that oppose the mission of the Church, based on philosophical, economic and political ideologies that are founded on assumptions that inimical to the faith. Not everyone perceives these tensions in the same way, for example, with regard to the phenomenon of secularisation, which some see as a threat and others as an opportunity. Sometimes this tension is interpreted in a reductionist way as the clash between those who desire change and those who fear it;

d) in the relationship between indigeneous communities and Western models of missionary action. Many Catholic missionaries have shown great dedication and generosity in sharing their faith, but in some cases, their actions have hindered the possibility of local cultures offering their original contribution to the building up of the Church;

e) in the relationship between the Christian community and young people, many of whom feel excluded by the language adopted in Church contexts, which can seem incomprehensible to them.

These tensions must first be addressed through discernment at the local level, and there are no pre-packaged solutions. The Continental Assemblies have emphasised a number of personal and

community dispositions that can be of help: an attitude of humility and respect; the ability to listen and promote authentic conversation in the Spirit; a readiness to change, to embrace the Paschal dynamic of death and resurrection also with respect to the concrete forms that the life of the Church takes; training in cultural discernment when local sensibilities and spirituality appear to be at odds, and in the accompaniment of people from different cultures.

Question for discernment

How can we proclaim the Gospel effectively in different contexts and cultures, in order to foster the encounter with Christ for the men and women of our time? What bonds can we establish with the adherents of other religions to build a culture of encounter and dialogue.

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) What tools do local Churches use to read the cultures in which they are embedded? How can they, in the light of the Gospel, respect and value the cultures of the different local contexts? What opportunities can they create to re-read the teachings of the Church in the light of local cultures?
- 2) What spaces are available for minority and migrant cultures to find expression in the local Churches?
- 3) Various Dioceses, Episcopal Conferences, and Continental Assemblies have expressed the wish to be able to re-articulate community life and especially the liturgy in accordance with local cultures. What synodal dynamic can we put in place to meet this desire?
- 4) How can formation in cultural discernment be promoted? How do we foster, educate and give recognition to the charisms and vocations of “translators”, i.e. those who help build bridges between religions, cultures and people?
- 5) What gestures of reconciliation and peace with other religions do we feel called to make? How do the Churches deal constructively with prejudices, tensions and conflicts? How can we bear witness to the Gospel in countries where the Church is in the minority, without weakening our witness to the faith, but without needlessly exposing Christians to threats and persecution?
- 6) How can the Church engage Western culture and other cultures, including within the Church, in a manner that is frank, prophetic and constructive, and avoiding all forms of colonialism?
- 7) For some, secularised society is a threat to be opposed, for others a fact to be accepted, and for still others a source of inspiration and an opportunity. How can the Churches remain in dialogue with the world without becoming worldly?
- 8) How can we create opportunities for discernment within digital environments? What forms of collaboration and what structures do we need to create for the purposes of evangelisation in an environment that lacks a territorial dimension?

B 2. Co-responsibility in Mission

How can we better share gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?

B 2.1 How can we walk together towards a shared awareness of the meaning and content of mission?

It is the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel and make Christ present, through the gift of the Spirit. This task belongs to all the Baptised (cf. EG 120): synodality is constitutively missionary and mission itself is synodal action. We are continually invited to grow in our response to this call, renewing in a synodal manner the way the Church carries out its mission. In the reflections of the Continental Assemblies, this mission articulates a multiplicity of dimensions that are to be harmonised and not opposed to each other in the integral perspective promoted by *Evangelii nuntiandi* and taken up by *Evangelii gaudium*. For example:

- a) a heartfelt call for the renewal of the liturgical life of the local Church as a place of proclamation through Word and Sacrament, emphasising the quality of preaching and the language of the liturgy. The latter requires a proper balance between the Church's unity, also expressed in the unity of its rite, and legitimate diversities, which a proper inculturation takes into account¹⁵;
- b) emphasis is placed on the desire for a Church that is poor and close to those who suffer, capable of evangelising through proximity and charity. Following in the Lord's footsteps, this witness goes as far as martyrdom and expresses the "Samaritan" vocation of the Church. With reference to situations in which the Church causes wounds and those in which she herself is wounded, unless those involved are properly cared for, these situations become a stumbling block for the Church's witness to God's love and the truth of the Gospel;
- c) a key to prophetically opposing new and destructive colonialisms is the opening of places of unconditional service in imitation of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve (cf. Mk 10:45). These are places where basic human needs can be met, where people feel welcomed and not judged, free to ask questions about the reasons for our hope (cf. 1 Pt 3:15), and free to leave and return. For a synodal Church, mission is always building with others rather than for others;
- d) in the digital environment, the Church is discovering an opportunity for evangelisation. It recognises that building networks of relationships in this space makes it possible for people, especially young people, to experience new ways of walking together. The Digital Synod initiative draws the Church's attention to the reality of the human being as a being who communicates, even in the media networks shaping our contemporary world;

The desire to grow in a commitment to mission is not hindered by awareness of the Christian communities' limits nor the recognition of their failures. On the contrary, the movement to going out of oneself in faith, hope and charity is a way to address this incompleteness. However, alongside the affirmation of this desire, the Continental Assemblies also voice the lack of clarity and shared understanding of the meaning, scope and content of the Church's mission or the criteria for articulating its diverse expressions. This hampers our walking together and can divide us. Hence a demand for new modes of formation and places of encounter and dialogue, in a synodal key, between the different perspectives, spiritualities and sensitivities that make up the richness of the Church.

¹⁵ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, Instruction *Varietates legitimae*, 25 January 1994.

Question for discernment

How prepared and equipped is the Church today to proclaim the Gospel with conviction, freedom of spirit and effectiveness? How does the perspective of a synodal Church transform the understanding of mission and enable its different dimensions to be articulated? How does the experience of accomplishing mission together enrich the understanding of synodality?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) The community's liturgical life is the source of its mission. How can its renewal be sustained in a synodal way by enhancing ministries, charisms and vocations and offering spaces of welcome and belonging?
- 2) How can preaching, catechesis and pastoral work promote a shared awareness of the meaning and content of mission? How can it convey that mission constitutes a real and concrete call for every Baptised person?
- 3) The syntheses of the Episcopal Conferences and the Continental Assemblies repeatedly call for a "preferential option" for young people and families, which recognises them as subjects and not objects of pastoral care. How could this missionary synodal renewal of the Church take shape, including by implementing the conclusions of the Synods of 2014-15 and 2018?
- 4) For the vast majority of the People of God, mission is accomplished by "engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God" (LG 31; cf. also AA 2). How can we raise awareness that professional, social, and political commitment and voluntary work are areas in which mission is exercised? How can we better accompany and support those who carry out this mission, especially in hostile and challenging environments?
- 5) The Church's social doctrine is often considered the prerogative of experts and theologians and disconnected from the daily life of communities. How can we encourage its re-appropriation by the People of God as a resource for mission?
- 6) The digital environment now shapes the life of society. How can the Church carry out its mission more effectively in this space? How should proclamation, accompaniment and care be rethought for this environment? How can we recognise those carrying out missionary commitment within it and create new formation paths for them? How can we encourage the pioneering activity of young people who are especially co-responsible for the Church's mission in this space?
- 7) In many areas carrying out mission requires collaborating with a diversity of people and organisations of different inspirations, including the Faithful of other Churches and ecclesial Communities, members of other religions, and women and men of goodwill. What do we learn from "walking together" with them, and how can we better equip ourselves to do it?

B 2.2 What should be done so a synodal Church is also an ‘all ministerial’ missionary Church?

All Continental Assemblies discuss ministries in the Church, often in rich and thought-provoking terms. The synodal process offers a positive vision of ministries, placing ordained Ministry within broader ecclesial ministeriality without creating oppositions. However, the Continental Assemblies also note an urgent need to discern the emerging charisms and the appropriate forms of exercising baptismal Ministries (instituted, extraordinary and *de facto*) within the People of God which participates in Christ’s prophetic, priestly and royal function. This worksheet focuses on these ministries, while the relationship to ordained Ministry and the tasks of the Bishops in a synodal Church finds space in others. In particular:

a) There is a clear call to overcome a vision that reserves any active function in the Church to ordained Ministers alone (Bishops, Priests, Deacons), reducing the participation of the Baptised to a subordinated collaboration. Without diminishing appreciation for the Sacrament of Orders, ministries in a synodal horizon are understood from a ministerial conception of the entire Church. A serene reception of the Second Vatican Council emerges, with recognition of baptismal dignity as the foundation of everyone’s participation in the life of the Church. Baptismal dignity is readily linked to a common Priesthood as the root of the baptismal ministries, and the necessary relationship between common and ministerial Priesthood is reaffirmed since they are “interrelated” with each one “in its own special way” being a “participation in the one Priesthood of Christ” (LG 10).

b) it is emphasised that the most fruitful place to realise the participation of all in the Christ’s Priesthood, simultaneously valuing baptismal Ministries and the particularity of ordained Ministry, is the local Church. Here we are called to discern which charisms and ministries are useful for the good of all in a particular social, cultural and ecclesial context. There is a need to give new impetus and more incisive competence to the special participation of the Laity in evangelisation in the various spheres of social, cultural, economic and political life, assuming their own responsibilities, as well as enhancing the contribution of Consecrated men and women, with their different charisms, within the life of the local Church.

c) The experience of walking together in the local Church makes it possible to imagine new ministries at the service of a synodal Church. So often, referring to the text, vision and language of LG 10-12, the Continental Assemblies ask for greater recognition of baptismal Ministries and that this be better expressed through enacting forms of subsidiarity between the different levels of the Church. In this vein, many of these questions on baptismal Ministries could be answered through more in-depth synodal work in the local Churches, where, based on the principle of differentiated participation in the triple office (*tria munera*) of Christ, it is easier to keep clear the complementarity between common Priesthood and the ministerial Priesthood, thus identifying with discernment the baptismal Ministries needed by the community.

d) an all-ministerial Church is not necessarily wholly a Church of instituted Ministries. Many ministries flow legitimately from the baptismal vocation, including spontaneous ministries and other recognised ministries that are not instituted and others that, by virtue of being instituted, receive a specific formation, mission and stability. Growing as a synodal Church involves the commitment to discern together which ministries should be created or promoted in the light of the signs of the times in service to the world.

Question for discernment

How can we move towards a meaningful and effective co-responsibility in the Church, in which there is a fuller realisation of the vocations, charisms and ministries of all the Baptised in a missionary key? What can we do to ensure that a more synodal Church is also an “all ministerial Church”?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) How should we celebrate Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist so that they are occasions for witnessing and promoting the participation and co-responsibility of all as active subjects in the life and mission of the Church? How can we renew an understanding of ministry not limited to ordained Ministry alone?
- 2) How can we discern the baptismal Ministries necessary for mission in a local Church, whether instituted or not? What spaces are available for experimentation at the local level? What value should be attributed to these Ministries? Under what conditions can they be received and recognized by the entire Church?
- 3) What can we learn from other Churches and ecclesial Communities regarding ministeriality and ministries?
- 4) Co-responsibility is manifested and realised primarily in the participation of all in mission. How can the specific contribution of those bearing different charisms and vocations be enhanced so as to best serve the harmony of community commitment and ecclesial life, especially in the local Churches? These charisms and vocations may range from individual skills and competencies, including professional ones, to the foundational inspiration of congregations and Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, movements, associations, etc.
- 5) How can we create spaces and moments of effective participation in co-responsible mission with the Faithful who, for various reasons, are on the margins of community life but who, according to the logic of the Gospel, offer an irreplaceable contribution? (Here we include the elderly and those who are sick, people with disabilities, those living in poverty, people without access to formal education, etc.)?
- 6) Many people commit to building a just society and caring for our common home as a response to an authentic vocation and a life choice, foregoing better-paid and established secure professional alternatives. How can we recognise this commitment in ways that make clear that this is not only a personal act but an actualisation of the Church’s care for the world?

B 2.3 How can the Church of our time better fulfil its mission through greater recognition and promotion of the baptismal dignity of women?

In Baptism, the Christian enters into a new bond with Christ and, in Him and through Him, with all the Baptised, with all humanity and with the whole of creation. Sons and daughters of the one Father, anointed by the same Spirit, by virtue of sharing the same bond with Christ, the Baptised are given to one another as members of a single body enjoying equal dignity (cf. Gal 3:26-28). The listening phase reaffirmed the awareness of this reality, indicating that it must find ever more concrete realisation in the life of the Church, including through relationships of mutuality, reciprocity and complementarity between men and women. In particular:

a) the Continental Assemblies were unanimous in calling for attention to the experience, status and role of women, notwithstanding the different perspectives present within each continent. They celebrate the faith, participation and witness of so many Lay and Consecrated women worldwide, often present as evangelists and first teachers in the ways of faith, ministering in remote places and challenging contexts, and at the “prophetic margins”;

b) the Continental Assemblies also call for deeper reflection on the ecclesial relational failures, which are also structural failures affecting the lives of women in the Church, inviting us into a process of ongoing conversion seeking to grow more fully into that identity given us in Baptism. Priorities for the Synodal Assembly include addressing the joys and tensions, and the opportunities for conversion and renewal, in how we live relationships between men and women in the Church, and namely the relationships: between ordained Ministers, Consecrated men and women, and Lay men and women;

c) during the first phase of the Synod, questions of women’s participation and recognition, of mutually supportive relationships between men and women and the desire for a greater presence of women in positions of responsibility and governance emerged as crucial elements in the search for more synodal ways to live the Church’s mission. The women who participated in the first phase expressed a clear desire that society and the Church be places of growth, active participation and healthy belonging for all women. They ask the Church to be at their side to accompany and promote the realisation of this. A synodal Church must address these questions together, seeking responses that offer greater recognition of women’s baptismal dignity and rejection of all forms of discrimination and exclusion faced by women in the Church and society;

d) finally, the Continental Assemblies highlight the plurality of women’s experiences, points of view and perspectives and ask that this diversity be recognised in the Synodal Assembly’s work, avoiding treating women as a homogeneous group or an abstract or ideological subject of debate.

Question for discernment

What concrete steps can the Church take to renew and reform its procedures, institutional arrangements and structures to enable greater recognition and participation of women, including in governance, decision-making processes and in the taking of decisions, in a spirit of communion and with a view to mission?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) Women play a major role in transmitting the faith in families, Parishes, consecrated life, associations and movements and lay institutions, and as teachers and catechists. How can we better recognise, support, and accompany their already considerable contribution? How can we enhance it in order to learn to be an increasingly synodal Church?
- 2) The charisms of women are already present and at work in the Church today. What can we do to discern and support them and to learn what the Spirit wants to teach us through them?
- 3) All Continental Assemblies call for the issue of women's participation in governance, decision-making, mission and ministries at all levels of the Church, to be addressed, and for this participation to be given the support of appropriate structures so that this does not remain just a general aspiration.
 - a) How can women be included in these areas in greater numbers and new ways?
 - b) How, in consecrated life, can women be better represented in the Church's governance and decision-making processes, better protected from abuse in all ecclesial contexts, and, where relevant, more fairly remunerated for their work?
 - c) How can women contribute to governance, helping to promote greater accountability and transparency and strengthen trust in the Church?
 - d) How can we deepen reflection on women's contribution to theological reflection and the accompaniment of communities? How can we give space and recognition to this contribution in the formal processes of discernment at every level of the Church?
 - e) What new ministries could be created to provide the means and opportunities for women's effective participation in discernment and decision-making bodies? How can co-responsibility in decision-making processes be increased between lay and consecrated women and clergy in remote places and in challenging social contexts where women are frequently the main agents of pastoral care and evangelisation? The contributions received during the first phase note that tensions with the ordained Ministers arise where the dynamics of co-responsibility and shared decision-making processes are absent.
- 4) Most of the Continental Assemblies and the syntheses of several Episcopal Conferences call for the question of women's inclusion in the diaconate to be considered. Is it possible to envisage this, and in what way?
- 5) How can men and women better cooperate in pastoral ministry and exercising related responsibilities?

B 2.4 How can we properly value ordained Ministry in its relationship with baptismal Ministries in a missionary perspective?

The Final Documents of the Continental Assemblies express a strong desire for the Synod to reflect on the relationship between ordained and baptismal Ministries, emphasising the difficulty of doing so in the ordinary life of communities. In the light of the teaching of Vatican II, the synodal process offers a valuable opportunity to focus on the relationship between the exercise of baptismal dignity (in the wealth of vocations, charisms and ministries rooted in Baptism) and the ordained Ministry, seen as a gift and an inalienable task at the service of the People of God. In particular:

a) In the footsteps of the Second Vatican Council, the necessary relationship between the common Priesthood and the ministerial Priesthood is reaffirmed. They are “interrelated” because each one “in its own special way is a participation in the one Priesthood of Christ” (LG 10). There is no opposition or competition or ground for claims between the two. Their complementarity should be recognised;

b) The Continental Assemblies express a clear appreciation for the gift of the ministerial Priesthood and, at the same time, a deep desire for its renewal in a synodal perspective. They also point out the difficulty of involving some Priests in the synodal process and note the widespread concern for instances where Priests struggle to face the challenges of our time, are far from the life and needs of the people or are focused on the liturgical-sacramental sphere only. They also express concern for the loneliness experienced by many Priests and emphasise their need for care, friendship and support;

c) Vatican Council II teaches that “the divinely established ecclesiastical ministry is exercised on different levels by those who from antiquity have been called Bishops, Priests and Deacons” (LG 28). From the Continental Assemblies emerges the request that the ordained Ministry, in the diversity of tasks, be for all a living witness of communion and service in the logic of evangelical gratuity. They also express the desire for Bishops, Priests and Deacons to exercise their ministry of guidance and unity in a synodal style. This included specific aspirations to recognise and enhance the gifts and charisms present in the community, to encourage and accompany processes for the communal embrace of mission, and to seek decisions in line with the Gospel and through listening to the Holy Spirit. Also requested is a renewal of seminary programmes so as to be more synodally oriented and more in contact with the whole People of God;

d) In reflecting on ordained Ministry at the service of the baptismal life, the first phase of the Synod presents clericalism as a force that isolates, separates and thus weakens and dissipates the energies of a healthy and wholly ministerial Church. It indicates that formation is the privileged way to overcome it effectively. Clericalism is not viewed as the prerogative of ordained Ministers alone but is present in different ways in all the components of the People of God;

e) Many regions report that trust in ordained Ministers, in those who perform ecclesial duties, in ecclesial institutions and the Church as a whole has been undermined by the consequences of the “scandal of abuse by members of the clergy or by people holding ecclesial office: first and foremost, abuse of minors and vulnerable persons, but also abuse of other kinds (spiritual, sexual, economic, of authority, of conscience). This is an open wound that continues to inflict pain on victims and survivors, on their families, and on their communities” (DCS, no. 20).

Question for discernment

How can we promote in the Church both a culture and concrete forms of co-responsibility such that the relationship between baptismal Ministries and ordained Ministry is fruitful? If the Church is wholly ministerial, how can we understand the specific gifts of ordained Ministers within the one People of God from a missionary perspective?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) How does the ministry of Priests, “consecrated to preach the Gospel, shepherd the faithful and celebrate divine worship” (LG 28), relate to baptismal Ministries? How does the triple office of the ordained Ministry relate to the Church as a prophetic, priestly and royal People?
- 2) In the local Church Priests with their Bishops “constitute one Priesthood” (LG 28). How can we help strengthen this unity between the Bishop and his Priests for more effective service to the People of God entrusted to the Bishop’s care?
- 3) The Church is enriched by the ministry of so many Priests who belong to Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. How can their ministry, characterised by the charism of the Institute to which they belong, promote a more synodal Church?
- 4) How is the ministry of the permanent diaconate to be understood within a missionary synodal Church?
- 5) What guidelines could be adopted for the reform of seminary curricula and teaching programmes in colleges and schools of theology in order to promote the synodal character of the Church? How can the formation of Priests engage more closely with the life and pastoral realities of the People of God they are called to serve?
- 6) What paths of formation should be adopted in the Church to foster an understanding of ministeries that is not reduced to ordained Ministry but at the same time enhances it?
- 7) Can we discern together how a clerical mindset, whether in Clergy or Laity, inhibits the full expression of both the vocation of ordained Ministries in the Church as well as that of other members of the People of God? How can we find ways to overcome this together?
- 8) Can Lay people perform the role of community leaders, particularly in places where the number of ordained Ministers is very low? What implications does this have for the understanding of ordained Ministry?
- 9) As some continents propose, could a reflection be opened concerning the discipline on access to the Priesthood for married men, at least in some areas?
- 10) How can an understanding of ordained Ministry and the formation of candidates that is more rooted in the vision of the missionary synodal Church contribute to efforts to prevent the recurrence of sexual abuse and other forms of abuse?

B 2.5 How can we renew and promote the Bishop's ministry from a missionary synodal perspective?

The ministry of the Bishop is rooted in Scripture and has developed in Tradition in faithfulness to the will of Christ. Faithful to this tradition, the Second Vatican Council proposed a rich teaching on the episcopacy “The Bishops, the successors of the Apostles, who along with the successor of Peter, the vicar of Christ and visible head of the whole Church, govern the house of the living God” (LG 18). The chapter of *Lumen gentium* on the hierarchical constitution of the Church affirms the sacramentality of the episcopate. On this basis it develops the theme of collegiality (LG 22/23) and of episcopal ministry as the exercise of the three offices (*tria munera*, LG 24-27). The Synod of Bishops was subsequently established as body that would enable the Bishops to participate with the Bishop of Rome in care for the whole Church. The invitation to live the synodal dimension with greater intensity calls for a renewed deepening of the episcopal ministry in order to place it more solidly in a synodal framework. In particular:

a) the College of Bishops, together with the Roman Pontiff who is its head and never without him, is subject of “supreme and full power over the universal Church” (LG 22). This College participates in the synodal process when each Bishop initiates, guides and concludes the consultation of the People of God entrusted to him and when assembled Bishops exercise the charism of discernment in various assemblies: Synods or Councils of Hierarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches, Episcopal Conferences, in continental Assemblies, and especially in the Synodal Assembly;

b) To the Bishops, successors of the Apostles, who have undertaken “the service of the community, presiding in the place of God over the flock whose shepherds they are” (LG 20), the Continental Assemblies ask for a synodal conversion. If Vatican II recalls that the “duty which the Lord committed to the shepherds of his people is a true service” (LG 24), the synodal process asks them to live a radical trust in the action of the Spirit in the life of their communities, without fear that the participation of everyone need be a threat to their ministry of community leadership. Rather, it urges them to truly be a principle of unity in their Church, calling all (Priests and Deacons, Consecrated men and women, Lay men and women) to walk together as the People of God and promoting a synodal style of Church;

c) The consultation of the People of God has highlighted how becoming a more synodal Church also implies a broader involvement of all in discernment, which requires a rethinking of decision-making processes. Consequently, there is need for adequate governance structures which respond to the demand for greater transparency and accountability, which will impact the way the Bishop's ministry is exercised. This has also brought to the fore resistance, fear and a sense of disorientation. In particular, while some call for greater involvement of all the Faithful and thus a “less exclusive” exercise of the Bishops' role, others have expressed doubts and fear the risk of drift if left to the processes of political democracy;

d) There is an equally strong awareness that all authority in the Church proceeds from Christ and is guided by the Holy Spirit. A diversity of charisms without authority becomes anarchy, just as the rigour of authority without the richness of charisms, ministries and vocations becomes dictatorship. The Church is, at the same time, synodal and hierarchical, which is why a synodal exercise of episcopal authority suggests one that accompanies and safeguards unity. Episcopal ministry is properly reconceived and realised through the practice of synodality, which brings into unity the diverse gifts, charisms, ministries and vocations to which the Spirit gives rise in the Church;

e) To proceed with the renewal of the episcopal ministry within a more fully synodal Church requires cultural and structural changes, a lot of mutual trust and above all, trust in the Lord's guidance. This is why the Continental Assemblies hope that the dynamic of conversation in the Spirit can enter into the daily life of the Church and animate meetings, councils, and decision-making bodies, favouring the building of a sense of mutual trust and the formation of an effective consensus;

f) The ministry of the Bishop also includes belonging to the college of Bishops and consequently exercising co-responsibility for the whole Church. This exercise is also part of the perspective of the synodal Church, "in the spirit of a 'healthy decentralization'", with a view "to leave 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; cf. EG 16; DV 7).

Question for discernment

How do we understand the vocation and mission of the Bishop in a synodal missionary perspective? What renewal of the vision and exercise of episcopal ministry is needed for a synodal Church characterised by co-responsibility?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

1) "[B]ishops in an eminent and visible way sustain the roles of Christ Himself as Teacher, Shepherd and High Priest" (LG 21). What relationship does this ministry have with that of the Presbyters, "consecrated to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful and to celebrate divine worship" (LG 28)? What relationship does this triple office of ordained Ministers have with the Church as a prophetic, priestly and royal People?

2) How does the exercise of the episcopal ministry solicit consultation, collaboration, and participation in the decision-making processes of the People of God?

3) On the basis of what criteria can a Bishop evaluate himself and be evaluated in the performance of his service in a synodal style?

4) When might a Bishop feel obliged to take a decision that differs from the considered advice offered by the consultative bodies? What would be the basis for such a decision?

5) What is the nature of the relationship between the "supernatural sense of the faith" (cf. LG 12) and the Bishop's magisterial service? How can we better understand and articulate the relationship between the synodal Church and the Bishop's ministry? Should Bishops discern together with or separately from the other members of the People of God? Do both options (together and separately) have a place in a synodal Church?

6) How can we ensure the care and balance of the three offices (sanctifying, teaching, governing) in the life and ministry of the Bishop? To what extent do current models of episcopal life and ministry enable the Bishop to be a person of prayer, a teacher of the faith, and a wise and effective administrator, and keep the three roles in creative and missionary tension? How can the profile of the Bishop and the discernment process be revised to identify candidates in a synodal perspective?

7) How should the role of the Bishop of Rome and the exercise of his primacy evolve in a synodal Church?

B 3. Participation, governance and authority

What processes, structures and institutions are needed in a missionary synodal Church?

B 3.1 How can we renew the service of authority and the exercise of responsibility in a missionary synodal Church?

A synodal Church is called to uphold both the right of all to participate in the life and mission of the Church by virtue of Baptism, and the service of authority and exercise of responsibility that is entrusted to some. The synodal journey is an opportunity to discern the ways in which this can be done that are appropriate to our times. The first phase made it possible to gather some ideas to aid this reflection:

a) authority, responsibility and governance roles—sometimes succinctly referred to by the English term leadership—take a variety of forms within the Church. Authority in consecrated life, in movements and associations, in Church-related institutions (such as universities, foundations, schools, etc.) is different from that which derives from the Sacrament of Orders; spiritual authority linked to a charism is different from that linked to ministerial service. The differences between these forms must be safeguarded, without forgetting that they all have in common the fact that they are a service in the Church;

b) in particular, they all share the call to be configured to the example of the Master, who said of himself: “I am among you as one who serves” (Lk 22:27). “For the disciples of Jesus, yesterday, today and always, the only authority is the authority of service”¹⁶. These are the fundamental coordinates by which grow in the exercise of authority and responsibility, in all their forms and at all levels of Church life. It is the perspective of that missionary conversion which “aims to renew her [the Church] as a mirror of Christ’s own mission of love” (PE I, 2).

c) in this line, the documents of the first phase express some characteristics of the exercise of authority and responsibility in a missionary synodal Church: an attitude of service and not of power or control; transparency, encouragement and the flourishing of the person; a capacity for and competence of vision, discernment, inclusion, collaboration and delegation. Above all, the ability and willingness to listen is emphasised. This is why there is an insistence on the need for special formation specifically in these skills and competences for those in positions of responsibility and authority, as well as on more participatory selection procedures, especially with regard to the selection of Bishops.

d) a transparent and accountable approach is fundamental to an authentically evangelical exercise of authority and responsibility. However, it also arouses fears and resistance. That is why it is important to address, with an attitude of discernment, the most recent findings of management and leadership sciences. Moreover, conversation in the Spirit is identified as a way of managing decision-making and consensus-building that builds trust and fosters an exercise of authority appropriate to a synodal Church.

¹⁶ FRANCIS, *Address at the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17th October, 2015.

e) the Continental Assemblies also point to experiences in which power and decision-making processes have been appropriated by some in positions of authority and responsibility. They link these experiences to the culture of clericalism and the different forms of abuse (sexual, financial, spiritual and of power), which erode the credibility of the Church and compromise the effectiveness of its mission, particularly in those cultures where respect for authority is an important value.

Question for Discernment

How can authority and responsibility be understood and exercised such that it serves the participation of the whole People of God? What renewal of vision, and forms of concrete exercise of authority, responsibility and governance, are needed in order to grow as a missionary synodal Church?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) Is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning the participation of all in the life and mission of the Church effectively incorporated into the consciousness and practice of the local Churches, particularly by Pastors and those who exercise functions of responsibility? What can foster a more profound awareness and appreciation of this teaching in the fulfilment of the Church's mission?
- 2) In the Church there are roles of authority and responsibility not linked to the Sacrament of Orders, which are exercised at the service of communion and mission in Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, in associations and lay movements, in ecclesial movements and new communities, etc. How can these forms of authority be appropriately promoted and how can they be exercised in relationship with the ministerial authority of the Pastors within a synodal Church?
- 3) What elements are necessary in forming Church leaders for the exercise of authority? How can formation in the method of authentic and insightful conversation in the Spirit be encouraged?
- 4) How can seminaries and houses of formation be reformed so that they form candidates for ordained Ministry who will develop a manner of exercising authority that is appropriate to a synodal Church? How should the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* and its related documents be rethought at the national level? How should curricula in theology schools be reoriented?
- 5) What forms of clericalism persist in the Christian community? A perception of distance between the lay Faithful and their Pastors persists: what can help to overcome it? What forms of exercising authority and responsibility should be superseded as they are not appropriate for a properly constituted synodal Church?
- 6) To what extent does the shortage of Priests in some regions provide an incentive to question the relationship between ordained Ministry, governance and the assumption of responsibilities in the Christian community?
- 7) What can we learn about the exercise of authority and responsibility from other Churches and ecclesial Communities?
- 8) In every age, the exercise of authority and responsibility within the Church is influenced by the prevailing management models and imagery of power in society. How can we become aware of this

and exercise an evangelical discernment of the prevailing practices of exercising authority, in the Church and in society?

B 3.2 How can we develop discernment practices and decision-making processes in an authentically synodal manner, that respects the protagonism of the Spirit?

As a synodal Church, we are called to discern together the steps we should take to fulfil the mission of evangelisation, emphasising the right of all to participate in the life and mission of the Church and drawing forth the irreplaceable contribution of all the Baptised. Underlying all discernment is the desire to do the Lord's will and to grow in closeness to Him through prayer, meditation on the Word and participation in sacramental life, which enables us to choose as He would choose. Regarding the place of discernment in a missionary synodal Church:

- a) the Continental Assemblies express a desire for shared decision-making processes capable of integrating the contribution of the whole People of God, particularly those with relevant expertise, as well as involving those who for various reasons remain on the margins of community life, such as women, young people, minorities, the poor and the excluded. This desire is often expressed together with dissatisfaction with forms of exercising authority in which decisions are taken without consultation;
- b) the Continental Assemblies also note the fears of those who see a competition between the synodal and hierarchical dimensions that are both constitutive of the Church. However, signs of the opposite are also emerging. In one example, the experience of a relevant authority taking a decision within a synodal process made the community more ready to accept its legitimacy. A second example is the growing awareness that the lack of healthy exchange within a community weakens the role of authority, sometimes reducing it to a mere assertion of power. In the third example, in a region where the number of Priests is very low, ecclesial responsibilities have been entrusted to lay Faithful who exercise them in a constructive and non-oppositional manner;
- c) the widespread adoption of the method of conversation in the Spirit during the consultation phase allowed many to experience elements of community discernment and participatory consensus-building in a manner that did not hide conflicts or create polarisations;
- d) those who perform tasks of governance and responsibility are called to initiate, facilitate and accompany processes of community discernment that include listening to the People of God. In particular, the Bishop's authority has a fundamental role to play in animating and validating the synodal character of these processes and in confirming the faithfulness of the conclusions that emerge during the process. In particular, it is the responsibility of the Pastors to verify the relationship between the aspirations of their communities and the "sacred deposit of the Word of God entrusted to the Church" (DV 10), a relationship that allows those aspirations to be considered a genuine expression of the People of God's sense of faith;
- e) adopting the perspective of community discernment challenges the Church at all levels and in all its organisational forms. In addition to Parish and diocesan structures, this also concerns the decision-making processes of associations, movements and Lay-led groups, where they have recourse to institutional mechanisms that routinely involve practices such as voting. It calls into question the way in which the decision-making bodies of Church-related institutions (schools, universities, foundations, hospitals, reception and social action centres, etc.) identify and formulate operational guidelines. Finally, it challenges Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in ways that connect the specificities of their charisms and their own constitutions (cf. DCS 81);

f) Adopting decision-making processes that make stable use of community discernment requires a conversion that is personal, communal, cultural and institutional, as well as an investment in formation.

Question for discernment

How can we imagine decision-making processes that are more participatory, which give space for listening and community discernment supported by authority understood as a service of unity?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) What space do we make in our decision-making processes to listen to the Word of God? How do we make room for the protagonism of the Holy Spirit concretely and not just in words?
- 2) How can conversation in the Spirit, which opens up the dynamism of community discernment, contribute to the renewal of decision-making processes in the Church? How can it be drawn more centrally into the formal life of the Church and so become an ordinary practice? What changes in canon law are needed to facilitate this?
- 3) How can we promote the ministry of the facilitator of community discernment processes, ensuring that those who carry it out receive adequate formation and accompaniment? How can we form ordained Ministers to accompany processes of community discernment?
- 4) How can we foster the participation of women, young people, minorities, and marginalised voices in discernment and decision-making processes?
- 5) How can a clearer account of the relationship between the entirety of the decision-making process and the specific moment of decision-taking help us to better identify the responsibilities of the different actors at each stage? How do we understand the relationship between decision-taking and discernment in common?
- 6) How can and must Consecrated men and women participate in the decision-making processes of the local Churches? What can we learn from their experience and their different spiritualities regarding discernment and decision-making processes? What can we learn from associations, movements and Lay-led groups?
- 7) How can we deal constructively with cases in which those in authority feel they cannot confirm the conclusions reached by a community discernment process, taking a decision in a different direction? What kind of restitution should that authority offer to those who participated in the process?
- 8) What can we learn from the ways that our societies and cultures manage participatory processes? What cultural models, where adopted by the Church, prove, by contrast, an obstacle to building a more synodal Church?
- 9) What can we learn and receive from the experience of other Churches and ecclesial Communities, and from that of other religions? What stimuli from indigenous, minority and oppressed cultures can help us to rethink our decision-making processes? What insights can be gained from experiences in the digital environment?

B 3.3. What structures can be developed to strengthen a missionary synodal Church?

The Continental Assemblies express a strong desire that the synodal way of proceeding, experienced in the current journey, should penetrate into the daily life of the Church at all levels, either by the renewal of existing structures—such as diocesan and Parish Pastoral Councils, Economic Affairs Councils, diocesan or eparchial Synods—or by the establishment of new ones. While not meaning to diminish the importance of renewed relationships within the People of God, work on structures is indispensable to strengthen changes over time. In particular:

a) in order not to remain merely a paper exercise or to be wholly dependent on the goodwill of individuals, co-responsibility in the mission deriving from Baptism must take on concrete structural forms. Adequate institutional frameworks are therefore necessary, along with spaces in which community discernment can be practised on a regular basis. This should not be read as a demand for a redistribution of power, but the need for the effective exercise of co-responsibility that flows from Baptism. This latter confers rights and duties on each person, which each one must be able to exercise according to his or her charisms and ministries;

b) this requires that structures and institutions function with adequate procedures that are transparent, mission-focused and open to participation; procedures that make room for women, young people, minorities, the poor and marginalised. This is true for the participatory bodies already mentioned, the role of each of which must be reaffirmed and strengthened. It is also true for: decision-making bodies of associations, movements and new communities; governing bodies of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (in a manner appropriate to the particular charism of each); the many and diverse institutions, often also subject to civil law, through which missionary action and the service of the Christian community is realized, such as schools, hospitals, universities, mass media, reception and social action centres, cultural centres, foundations, etc;

c) The call to reform structures, institutions and functioning mechanisms with a view to transparency is particularly strong in those contexts most marked by the abuse crisis (sexual, economic, spiritual, psychological, institutional, conscience, power, jurisdiction). Inadequate handling of abuse cases is often part of the problem, calling into question the mechanisms, procedures and overall functioning of ecclesial structures and institutions, as well as the mindset of people working within them. The search for transparency and co-responsibility also raises fears and resistance; this is why it is necessary to deepen dialogue, creating opportunities for sharing and dialogue at all levels;

d) the method of conversation in the Spirit has proven to be particularly valuable for rebuilding trust in those contexts where, for various reasons, a climate of mistrust has developed between the various members of the People of God. A journey of conversion and reform, which listens to the voice of the Spirit, demands structures and institutions capable of accompanying and supporting this journey. At the same time, however, the Continental Assemblies strongly expressed the conviction that structures alone are not enough, but that a change of mindset is also needed, hence the need to invest in formation;

e) Moreover, it also seems advisable to take action in the area of canon law by: rebalancing the relationship between the principle of authority, which is strongly affirmed in the current legislation, and the principle of participation; strengthening the synodal orientation of already existing institutions; creating new institutions, where this appears necessary for the needs of community life; supervising the effective application of current legislation.

Question for discernment

A synodal Church needs to live co-responsibility and transparency: how can this awareness form the basis for the reform of institutions, structures and procedures, so as to strengthen change over time?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

- 1) How should canonical structures and pastoral procedures change to foster co-responsibility and transparency? Are the structures we have adequate to ensure participation or do we need new ones?
- 2) How can Canon Law contribute to the renewal of structures and institutions? What changes seem necessary or opportune?
- 3) What obstacles (mental, theological, practical, organisational, financial, cultural) stand in the way of transforming the participatory bodies currently provided for in canon law into bodies of effective community discernment? What reforms are needed so that they can effectively, creatively and vibrantly support the mission? How can they be made more open to the presence and contribution of women, young people, the poor, migrants, members of minorities and those who for various reasons find themselves on the margins of community life?
- 4) How does the perspective of a synodal Church challenge the structures and procedures of consecrated life, the different forms of lay association, and the functioning of Church-related institutions?
- 5) In which areas of institutional life is there a greater need for transparency (economic and financial reporting, selection of candidates for positions of responsibility, appointments, etc.)? What tools can we use to achieve this?
- 6) The prospect of transparency and openness to joint consultation and discernment processes also raises fears. How do they manifest themselves? What are those who express concerns afraid of? How can these fears be addressed and overcome?
- 7) To what extent is it possible to distinguish between the members of an institution and the institution itself? Is the responsibility for mishandling cases of abuse individual or systemic? How can a synodal perspective contribute to creating a culture which prevents abuse of all kinds?
- 8) What can we learn from the way in which public institutions and public and civil law strive to respond to the need for transparency and accountability in society (separation of powers, independent supervisory bodies, obligations to make public certain procedures, limits on the duration of appointments, etc.)?
- 9) What can we learn from the experience of other Churches and ecclesial Communities regarding the functioning of structures and institutions in a synodal style?

B 3.4 How can we give structure to instances of synodality and collegiality that involve groupings of local churches?

The first phase of the synodal process highlighted the role played by synodal and collegial bodies that brought together various local Churches: Eastern Hierarchical Structures and, in the Latin Church, the Episcopal Conferences (cf. PE I,7). The Documents drawn up during the various stages emphasise how the consultation of the People of God in the local Churches and the subsequent stages of discernment were a true experience of listening to the Spirit through listening to one another. From this rich experience we can draw insights to help build an increasingly synodal Church:

a) the synodal process can become “a dynamism of communion that inspires all ecclesial decisions”¹⁷ because it truly involves all subjects—the People of God, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome—each according to their own function. The orderly unfolding of this synod’s stages dispelled the fear that the consultation of the People of God would lead to a weakening of the Pastors’ ministry. On the contrary, the consultation was possible because it was initiated by each Bishop, as the “visible principle and foundation of unity” (LG 23) in his Church. Subsequently, in the Eastern Hierarchical Structures and in the Episcopal Conferences, the Pastors carried out an act of collegial discernment weighing the contributions coming from the local Churches. Thus, the synodal process has promoted a real exercise of episcopal collegiality in a fully synodal Church;

b) the issue of exercising synodality and collegiality in instances involving groups of local Churches that share spiritual, liturgical and disciplinary traditions, geographical contiguity and cultural proximity, starting with the Episcopal Conferences, demands renewed theological and canonical reflection. Though these bodies, “the *communio Episcoporum* has found expression in service to the *communio Ecclesiae* grounded in the *communio fidelium*” (PE I,7).

c) one reason for facing this challenge emerges in *Evangelii gaudium*: “It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound ‘decentralization’” (no. 16). On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops, the Holy Father specified that synodality is not only exercised at the level of the local Churches and at the level of the universal Church, but also at the level of groupings of Churches, such as Provinces and Ecclesiastical Regions, Particular Councils and especially Episcopal Conferences: “We need to reflect on how better to bring about, through these bodies, intermediary instances of collegiality, perhaps by integrating and updating certain aspects of the ancient ecclesiastical organization”¹⁸.

Question for Discernment

In light of the synodal experience so far, how can synodality find better expression in and through institutions involving groups of local Churches, such as the Synods of Bishops and the Councils of Hierarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches, Episcopal Conferences and Continental Assemblies, so that they are seen as “subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority” (EG 32) in a missionary perspective?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

¹⁷ FRANCIS, *Address at the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

1) The synodal dynamic of listening to the Spirit through listening to one another is the most practical and compelling way to translate episcopal collegiality into action in a fully synodal Church. Building on the experience of the synodal process:

a) how can we make listening to the People of God the ordinary and habitual way of conducting decision-making processes in the Church at all levels of its life?

b) How can we implement listening to the People of God in the local Churches? In particular, how can participatory bodies be enhanced so that they are effective places of listening and ecclesial discernment?

c) How can we re-think decision-making processes at the level of the Episcopal bodies of the Eastern Catholic Churches and Episcopal Conferences based on listening to the People of God in the local Churches?

d) How can engagement at the continental level be integrated into Canon Law?

2) Since consulting the local Churches is an effective way to listen to the People of God, the Pastors' discernment takes on the character of a collegial act that can authoritatively confirm what the Spirit has spoken to the Church through the People of God's sense of faith:

a) What degree of doctrinal authority can be attributed to the discernment of Episcopal Conferences? How do the Eastern Catholic Churches regulate their episcopal bodies?

b) What degree of doctrinal authority can be attributed to the discernment of a Continental Assembly? Or of the bodies that bring together Episcopal Conferences on a continental or otherwise international scale?

c) Which role does the Bishop of Rome fulfil in regards of these processes involving groupings of Churches? In which ways can he exercise it?

3) What elements of the ancient ecclesiastical order should be integrated and updated to make the Eastern Hierarchical Structures, Episcopal Conferences and Continental Assemblies effective instances of synodality and collegiality?

4) The Second Vatican Council states that the whole Church and all its parts benefit from the mutual sharing of their respective gifts (cf. LG 13):

a) What value can the deliberations of a Plenary Council, a Particular Council, a Diocesan Synod have for other Churches?

b) What insights can the Latin Church draw from the rich synodal experience of the Eastern Catholic Churches?

c) To what extent might the convergence of several groups of local Churches (Particular Councils, Episcopal Conferences, etc.) on the same issue commit the Bishop of Rome to address it at the level of the universal Church?

d) How is the service of unity entrusted to the Bishop of Rome to be exercised when local institutions may adopt different approaches? What room is there for a variety of approaches between different regions?

5) What can we learn from the experience of other Churches and ecclesial Communities concerning the groupings of local Churches for the exercise of collegiality and synodality?

B 3.5 How can the institution of the Synod be strengthened so that it is an expression of episcopal collegiality within an all-synodal Church?

With the Motu Proprio *Apostolica sollicitudo* (15 September 1965) St. Paul VI established the Synod as “a permanent Council of Bishops for the universal Church”. He thus accepted the request of the conciliar assembly to ensure the participation of the Bishops in care for the whole Church, specifying that “this Synod [...] like all human institutions, can be improved upon with the passing of time”. With the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* (15 September 2018) Pope Francis contributed to this hoped-for “perfecting”, transforming the Synod from an event configured as an assembly of Bishops to a listening process unfolding in stages (cf. Art. 4), in which the whole Church and everyone in the Church—People of God, College of Bishops, Bishop of Rome—participate more fully.

a) The Synod 2021-2024 is clearly demonstrating that the synodal process is the most appropriate context for the integrated exercise of primacy, collegiality and synodality as inalienable elements of a Church in which each subject performs its particular function to the best of its ability and in synergy with others;

b) It is the responsibility of the Bishop of Rome to convene the Church in Synod, calling an Assembly for the universal Church, as well as to initiate, accompany and conclude the related synodal process. This prerogative belongs to him as the “visible principle and foundation of unity both of the bishops and of the multitude of the faithful” (LG 23);

c) Since “The individual Bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular Churches ... in and from these particular Churches there exists the one unique catholic Church” (LG 23), it is the responsibility of each diocesan Bishop to initiate, accompany and conclude the consultation of the People of God in his Church. In light of the care that Bishops have for the universal Church (cf. LG 23), it is also their responsibility to cooperate in those supra-diocesan bodies that provide for the exercise of synodality and collegiality. In this way, they perform the function of ecclesial discernment proper to the episcopal ministry;

d) although these bodies do not bring together the entire College of Bishops, the discernment that Pastors carry out through them takes on a collegial character due to the very purpose of the act. Indeed, the Assemblies of Bishops within the synodal process have the task of scrutinising the results of the consultations carried out in the local Churches, in which the sense of faith of the People of God is manifested. How could a non-collegial act discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church through the consultation of the People of God who “cannot be mistaken in belief” (LG12)?;

e) The synodal experience to date has demonstrated that an effective exercise of collegiality can be developed in a synodal Church. While discernment is an act that primarily “belongs to those who preside over the Church” (LG 12), it has gained depth and relevance in relation to the issues to be examined thanks to the contribution of the People of God who took part in the Continental Assemblies.

Question for discernment

In light of the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between the Church’s synodality, episcopal collegiality and Petrine primacy, how should the institution of the Synod be perfected so that it becomes a secure and guaranteed space for the exercise of synodality that ensures the full

participation of all—the People of God, the College of Bishops and the Bishop of Rome—while respecting their specific functions? How should we evaluate the experiment of extending participation to a group of non-bishops in the first session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops? (October 2023)

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

1) The synodal process introduces into the Church “a dynamism of communion which inspires all ecclesial decisions”¹⁹:

- a) How can this dynamism become the standard way of proceeding at all levels of Church life?
- b) How does the principle of authority fit into the synodal process?
- c) How does the synodal process affect our understanding of authority in the Church at different levels, including that of the Bishop of Rome?

2) The first phase of the synodal process implements a movement from the particular to the universal, with the consultation of the People of God in the local Churches and the subsequent acts of discernment first in the Eastern Hierarchical Structures and Episcopal Conferences, and then in the Continental Assemblies:

- a) how can we ensure that the consultation truly captures the manifestation of the sense of faith of the People of God living in a given Church?
- b) How can the Eastern Hierarchical Structures, Episcopal Conferences and Continental Assemblies strengthen the “fruitful bond between the *sensus fidei* of the People of God and the magisterial function of the Pastors” (PD 14)?
- c) How desirable is the presence of qualified members of the People of God in the Assemblies of the Episcopal Conferences as well as in the Continental Assemblies?
- d) What role might be played by ecclesial bodies permanently composed of more than just Bishops, such as the recently established Ecclesial Conference for the Amazon Region?

3) In the Assembly of Bishops convened in Rome, the second phase of the synodal path expresses the universality of the Church that listens to what the Spirit has said to the People of God:

- a) How does this Episcopal Assembly fit into the synod process?
- b) How does it achieve continuity with the first phase of the synodal process? Is the presence of qualified witnesses to the first phase of the synodal process sufficient to guarantee it?
- c) If the Assemblies of Episcopal Conferences and Continental Assemblies carry out acts of discernment, how is this further act of discernment characterised and what value does it have?

¹⁹ FRANCIS, *Address at the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

4) The third phase involves the movement to return the results of the Synod Assembly to the local Churches for implementation: how can we help to fully realise the “mutual interiority” between the universal and local dimensions of the one Church?