THE SYNODAL JOURNEY

DOCUMENTS

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"Being God's people is not a privilege but a gift that we receive, not for ourselves but for everyone. The gift we receive is meant to be given in turn. That is what vocation is: a gift we receive for others, for everyone."

(Pope Francis)

Preface

"The Church of God is convoked in Synod." These words opened the *Preparatory Document* of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod, and initiated the first phase of the synod process in the local, particular Churches and their groupings. Since the solemn opening of the Synod on October 10, 2021, much ground has been covered.

With the publication of the *Instrumentum laboris* last June, the first phase of the synodal process came to an end. This phase unfolded in the consultation of the People of God in the particular Churches, the discernment of the Pastors in the Bishops' Conferences and Hierarchical Structures of the Oriental Churches *sui iuris*, and finally in the Continental Assemblies.

In these three stages we saw and lived the truth spoken by Pope Francis in his address delivered on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops (October 17, 2015): "A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening 'is more than simply hearing'. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth' (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he 'says to the Churches' (Rev 2:7)."

In order to prolong this listening, the General Secretariat of the Synod has decided to publish in one volume the documents that marked the stages of the first phase of the Synod: the *Preparatory Document*, the *Working Document for the Continental Stage*, the *Syntheses of the Continental Assemblies* and the *Instrumentum laboris*. All of these documents were made public by the Secretariat as they were generated throughout the process. The decision to collect them now in one volume is therefore not because the texts are "new", but because they are valuable as a memory of what the Lord has already accomplished in his Church.

These documents are the most verifiable testimony of the listening process that the Church experienced in the first phase of the synodal process. As such, they constitute a patrimony of memory that allows us to reread the action of the Spirit during this blessed time. Therefore, this volume offers itself as a valuable tool to be given first of all to the members of the XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, who are called to continue the discernment of what the Spirit is saying to the Church during this second phase of the synodal process. This text, however, is also a gift to the entire Church so that together, we might bless the Lord as we remember the road traveled.

Had this volume also contained the contributions of the particular Churches along with the summaries of the Bishops' Conferences, the richness of the synodal process that involved the whole Church and everyone in the Church would be more clearly grasped. Each stage of the process would indeed be documented by a set of texts that would faithfully record the level of maturation of a synodal style and form of Church. For this reason, I raise the hope that the Bishops' Conferences and the Hierarchical Structures of the Eastern Churches would also make public both the contributions of

the individual Churches as well as their syntheses. In the logic of the exchange of gifts, such a communication will enrich the Church, making it grow in communion.

This volume offers the texts related to the latest steps of the ecclesial discernment initiated in all the Churches by the basic question formulated in the *Preparatory Document* (par. 2): "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 *Working Document for the Continental Stage and the Syntheses of the Continental Assemblies* formed the basis for the drafting of the *Instrumentum laboris*, on which the Synod Assembly is called to work. None of these texts have a definitive character: if they did, they would not be the fruit of a synodal process, which by its very nature develops through ever deeper passages of listening and discernment.

In this sense, this publication is also an invitation to remember that the celebration of the Assembly constitutes a further moment of discernment in which the function of the Pastors, called to participate in the solicitude for the whole Church, *cum et sub Petro*, is evident. Referring to a body of texts produced during the first phase will help everyone to insert themselves into the ongoing synodal process, mostly because these documents are not the product of a laboratory, that is, theological hypotheses that seek verification in reality, but rather are the fruit of synodal listening involving the whole Church and everyone in the Church. In a certain sense, these documents are the most objective testimony to the experience of synodality that the Church lived during the first phase of the Synod; an experience that demands to be prolonged, at a deeper level, by the Synodal Assembly, convoked around "the Chair of Peter, who 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).

Finally, this publication is a reminder to all that this second phase of the synod does not newly begin the synod process. Rather, this second phase remains one, and only one, phase in the unfolding of all three synod phases. Only provided that there is such unity will the Synod Assembly be—as the Pope stressed again in his October 17, 2015 address— "the point of convergence of this listening process conducted at every level of the Church's life." This same unity is also a necessary condition to activate the hermeneutic of reform evoked by Benedict XVI which, in speaking about the Second Vatican Council, he described as a "renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God" (Dec. 22, 2005, *Address to the Roman Curia*).

Mario Card. Grech
General Secretary
of the General Secretariat of the Synod

"A gift that is also a responsibility. The responsibility of witnessing by our deeds, not just our words, to God's wonderful works, which, once known, help people to acknowledge his existence and to receive his salvation. Election is a gift. The question is this: if I am a Christian, if I believe in Christ, how do I give that gift to others?"

(Pope Francis)

"Synodality is not a chapter in an ecclesiology textbook, much less a fad or a slogan to be bandied about in our meetings. Synodality is an expression of the Church's nature, her form, style and mission."

(Pope Francis)

Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, the first word of the Latin original meaning, "We stand before You, Holy Spirit," which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years, being attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 4 April 636). As we are called to embrace this synodal path of the Synod 2021-2023, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to operate within us so that we may be a community and a people of grace. For the Synod 2021-2023, we propose to use this simplified version, so that any group or liturgical assembly can pray more easily.

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever.
Amen.

Title revised from Latin, to have a proper incipit, different from the *Adsumus Dominus Sancte Spiritus*. The *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* 1984ss., n. 1173, only proposes the use of the *Adsumus* but does not give the text. The German version *Das Zeremoniale für die Bischöfe*, n. 1188, gives a German translation based on the Latin text of the *Acta Synodalia* of the Council, vol. I/1, p. 159.

"Being a synodal Church means being a Church that is the sacrament of Christ's promise that the Spirit will always be with us. We show this by growing in our relationship with the Spirit and the world to come."

(Pope Francis)

PREPARATORY DOCUMENT

Abbreviations

ITC	INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION
DV	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const. *Dei Verbum* (18 November 1965)
EC	FRANCIS, Ap. Const. *Episcopalis communio* (15 September 2018)
EG	FRANCIS, Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013)
FT	FRANCIS, Enc. Lett. *Fratelli tutti* (3 October 2020)
GS	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Past. Const. *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965)
LG	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const. *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964)
LS	FRANCIS, Enc. Lett. *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015)
UR	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* (21 November 1964)

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"The Synod is also about discussing our problems... So many problems! Yet unless we include the "problem people" of society, those left out, we will never be able to deal with our own problems. This is important: that we let our own problems come out in the dialogue, without trying to hide them or justify them.
Do not be afraid!"

(Pope Francis)

Preparatory Document

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission

1. The Church of God is convoked in Synod. The path entitled "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission" will solemnly open on the 9th – 10th of October 2021 in Rome and on the following 17th of October in each particular Church. One fundamental stage will be the celebration of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in October 2023, which will be followed by the implementation phase that will again involve the particular Churches (cf. EC, arts. 19-21). With this convocation, Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission: "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."[1] This journey, which follows in the wake of the Church's "renewal" proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through Her experience which processes can help Her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open Herself to mission. Our "journeying together" is, in fact, what most effectively enacts and manifests the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God.

2. A basic question prompts and guides us: 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?

Addressing this question together requires listening to the Holy Spirit, who like the wind "blows where it wills; you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes" (Jn 3:8), remaining open to the surprises that the Spirit will certainly prepare for us along the way. Thus, a dynamism is activated that allows us to begin to reap some of the fruits of a synodal conversion, which will progressively mature. These are objectives of great importance for the quality of ecclesial life and for accomplishing the mission of evangelization, in which we all participate by virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation. Here, we will indicate the main objectives, which decline synodality as the form, the style, and the structure of the Church:

- recalling how the Spirit has guided the Church's journey through history and, today, calls us to be, together, witnesses of God's love;
- living a participative and inclusive ecclesial process that offers everyone—especially those who for various reasons find themselves on the margins—the

[1] FRANCIS, Address for the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015).

opportunity to express themselves and to be heard in order to contribute to the edification of the People of God;

- recognizing and appreciating the wealth and the variety of the gifts and charisms that the Spirit liberally bestows for the good of the community and the benefit of the entire human family;
- exploring participatory ways of exercising responsibility in the proclamation of the Gospel and in the effort to build a more beautiful and habitable world;
- examining how responsibility and power are lived in the Church as well as the structures by which they are managed, bringing to light and trying to convert prejudices and distorted practices that are not rooted in the Gospel;
- accrediting the Christian community as a credible subject and reliable partner in paths of social dialogue, healing, reconciliation, inclusion and participation, the reconstruction of democracy, the promotion of fraternity and social friendship;
- regenerating relationships among members of Christian communities as well as between communities and other social groups, e.g., communities of believers of other denominations and religions, civil society organizations, popular movements, etc.;
- fostering the appreciation and appropriation of the fruits of recent synodal experiences on the universal, regional, national, and local levels.

3. This Preparatory Document is at the service of the synodal journey, especially as a tool to facilitate the first phase of listening to and consulting the People of God in the particular Churches (October 2021 - April 2022), in the hope of helping to set in motion the ideas, energy, and creativity of all those who will take part in the journey, and to make it easier to share the fruits of their efforts. With this aim: 1) it begins by outlining some prominent characteristics of the contemporary context; 2) it synthetically illustrates the fundamental theological references for a correct understanding and practice of synodality; 3) it offers some biblical thoughts that can nourish meditation and prayerful reflection along the way; 4) it illustrates some perspectives from which to reread the experiences of lived synodality; 5) it shows some ways of articulating this work of rereading in prayer and sharing. To concretely accompany the organization of the work, a methodological *Handbook*, annexed to this Preparatory Document and available on the dedicated hosting website, is proposed[2]. The site offers some resources for deepening the theme of synodality, as a support to this Preparatory Document; among these, we would like to highlight two that are mentioned several times below: the *Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, given by Pope Francis on the 17th of October 2015, and the document *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, prepared by the International Theological Commission and published in 2018.

[2] Cf. www.synod.va

1. The Call to Journey Together

4. The synodal journey unfolds within a historical context marked by epochal changes in society and by a crucial transition in the life of the Church, which cannot be ignored: it is within the folds of the complexity of this context, in its tensions and contradictions, that we are called to "scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel" (GS, no. 4). Some elements of the global scenario most closely connected to the theme of the Synod are outlined here; but the picture will need to be enriched and completed at the local level.

5. A global tragedy such as the COVID-19 pandemic "momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person's problems are the problems of all. Once more we realized that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together" (FT, no. 32). At the same time, the pandemic has also made the already existing inequalities and inequities explode: humanity seems increasingly shaken by processes of massification and fragmentation; the tragic condition faced by migrants in all regions of the world shows how high and strong the barriers dividing the single human family still are. The Encyclicals *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* document the depth of the fault lines that run through humanity, and we can refer to these analyses to start listening to the cry of the poor and of the earth and to recognize the seeds of hope and of the future that the Spirit continues to sow even in our time: "The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home" (LS, no. 13).

6. This situation, which, despite great differences, unites the entire human family, challenges the Church's ability to accompany individuals and communities to reread experiences of mourning and suffering that have unmasked many false certainties, and to cultivate hope and faith in the goodness of the Creator and his creation. However, we cannot hide from the fact that the Church herself must face the lack of faith and the corruption even within herself. In particular, we cannot forget the suffering experienced by minors and vulnerable people "due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons."[3] We are continually challenged "as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit."[4] For too long the cry of the victims has been a cry that the Church has not been able to hear sufficiently. These are deep wounds that are difficult to heal, for which forgiveness can never be asked for enough and which constitute obstacles, sometimes imposing ones, to advancing in the direction of "journeying together." The whole Church is called to deal with the weight of a culture imbued with clericalism that she inherits from her history, and with those forms of exercising authority on which the different types of abuse (power, economic, conscience, sexual) are grafted.

[3] FRANCIS, *Letter to the People of God* (20 August 2018), introduction.
[4] *Ibid.*, no. 2.

It is impossible to think of "a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God's People:"[5] together let us ask the Lord for "the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageously to combat them."[6]

7. In spite of our infidelities, the Spirit continues to act in history and to show his life-giving power. It is precisely in the furrows dug by the sufferings of every kind endured by the human family and by the People of God that new languages of faith and new paths are flourishing, : capable not only of interpreting events from a theological point of view but also of finding in trials the reasons for refounding the path of Christian and ecclesial life. It is a reason for great hope that more than a few Churches have already begun more or less structured meetings and consultation processes with the People of God. Where they have been marked by a synodal style, the sense of Church has flourished and the participation of all has given new impetus to ecclesial life. The desire of young people to be protagonists within the Church and the request for a greater appreciation of women and spaces for participation in the mission of the Church, already signaled by the Synodal Assemblies of 2018 and 2019, are also confirmed. The recent institution of the lay ministry of Catechist and the opening of access to those of Lector and Acolyte to women also move in this direction.

8. We cannot ignore the variety of conditions in which Christian communities live in the different regions of the world. Alongside countries where the Church welcomes the majority of the population and represents a cultural reference point for the whole of society, there are others where Catholics are a minority; in some of these countries, Catholics, together with other Christians, experience forms of persecution, including some very violent ones, and not infrequently martyrdom. If, on the one hand, a secularized mentality tends to expel religion from the public space, on the other hand, religious fundamentalism, without respect for the liberties of others, feeds forms of intolerance and violence that are also reflected in the Christian community and in its relations with society. Christians not infrequently adopt the same attitudes, even fomenting divisions and opposition, including within the Church. It is equally necessary to consider the reverberation, within the Church and in its relations with society, of the fractures caused by reasons of ethnicity, race, caste, or other forms of social stratification or cultural and structural violence, which run through the latter. These situations have a profound impact on the meaning of the expression "journeying together" and on the concrete possibilities of doing so.

9. Within this context, synodality represents the main road for the Church, called to renew herself under the action of the Spirit and by listening to the Word. The ability to imagine a different future for the Church and her institutions, in keeping with the

[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*

mission she has received, depends largely on the decision to initiate processes of listening, dialogue, and community discernment, in which each and every person can participate and contribute. At the same time, the decision to "journey together" is a prophetic sign for the human family, which needs a shared project capable of pursuing the good of all. A Church capable of communion and fraternity, of participation and subsidiarity, in fidelity to what she proclaims, will be able to stand beside the poor and the least and lend them her own voice. In order to "journey together," we need to let ourselves be educated by the Spirit to a truly synodal mentality, entering with courage and freedom of heart into a conversion process that is indispensable for the "continual reformation of which [the Church] always has need, in so far as she is a human institution" (UR, no. 6; cf. EG, no. 26).

II. A Constitutively Synodal Church

10. "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium. What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word 'synod'," [7] which is "is an ancient and venerable word in the Tradition of the Church, whose meaning draws on the deepest themes of Revelation." [8] It is "the Lord Jesus who presents Himself as 'the way, the truth, and the life' (*Jn* 14:6)," and "Christians, His followers, were originally called 'followers of the Way' (cf. *Acts* 9:2; 19,9.23; 22,4; 24,14.22)." [9] Synodality, in this perspective, is much more than the celebration of ecclesial meetings and Bishops' assemblies, or a matter of simple internal administration within the Church; it is "the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission." [10] Thus are intertwined the main axes of a synodal Church that the title of the Synod proposes: communion, participation, and mission. In this chapter, we will briefly illustrate some fundamental theological references on which this perspective is based.

11. In the first millennium, "journeying together"—that is, practicing synodality—was the ordinary way in which the Church, understood as "People united in the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," [11] acted. To those who were creating divisions in the ecclesial body, the Church Fathers opposed the communion of the Churches scattered throughout the world, described by St. Augustine as "*concordissima fidei conspiratio*," [12] that is, the agreement in faith of all the Baptized. Here are the roots of the broad development of a synodal praxis at all levels of the Church's life—local, provincial, and universal—that reached its highest manifestation

[7] FRANCIS, *Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops.*
[8] ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2 March 2018), no. 3.
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] *Ibid.*, no. 6.
[11] FRANCIS, *Letter to the People of God* (20 August 2018), introduction.
[12] *Ibid.*, no. 2.

in the Ecumenical Council. Within this ecclesial horizon, inspired by the principle of the participation of all in the life of the Church, St. John Chrysostom was able to say that "Church and Synod are synonymous."[13] Even in the second millennium, when the Church emphasized more strongly the hierarchical function, this way of proceeding did not cease: if, alongside the celebration of ecumenical councils, and that of diocesan and provincial synods is well attested, when it came to defining dogmatic truths, the Popes wished to consult the Bishops in order to know the faith of the whole Church, by appealing to the authority of the *sensus fidei* of the entire People of God, which is "infallible '*in credendo*'" (EG, no. 119).

12. The Second Vatican Council is anchored in this dynamic of Tradition. It emphasizes that "God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness." (LG, no. 9). The members of the People of God are united by Baptism, and "if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the Faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ" (LG, no. 32). Therefore, all the Baptized, participants in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions by "exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries,"[14] are active subjects of evangelization, both individually and as the entire People of God.

13. The Council emphasized how, by virtue of the anointing of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism, the totality of the Faithful "cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole Peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when 'from the Bishops down to the last of the lay Faithful' they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals" (LG, no. 12). It is the Spirit who guides the faithful "to all truth" (*Jn* 16:13). Through action of the Spirit, "this tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church" so that the People of God may grow "in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (cf. *Lk* 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth" (DV, no. 8). In fact, this People, gathered together by its Pastors, adheres to the sacred deposit of the Word of God entrusted to the Church, perseveres constantly in the teaching of the Apostles, in fraternal communion, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer, "so that holding to, practicing, and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the Bishops and Faithful a single common effort" (DV, no. 10).

[13] *Ibid.*
[14] ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no. 6.

14. The Pastors, established by God as "authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church,"[15] should not be afraid to listen to the Flock entrusted to them. The consultation of the People of God does not imply the assumption within the Church of the dynamics of democracy based on the principle of majority, because there is, at the basis of participation in every synodal process, a shared passion for the common mission of evangelization and not the representation of conflicting interests. In other words, this is an ecclesial process that can only take place "at the heart of a hierarchically structured community."[16] It is in the fruitful bond between the *sensus fidei* of the People of God and the magisterial function of the Pastors that the unanimous consensus of the whole Church in the same faith is realized. Every synodal process, in which the Bishops are called to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church, not by themselves but by listening to the People of God, who "shares also in Christ's prophetic office" (LG, no. 12), is an evident form of that "journeying together" which makes the Church grow. St. Benedict emphasizes how "the Lord often reveals the most prudent course to be followed"[17] to those who do not occupy important positions in the community (in that case, the youngest); thus, the Bishops should take care to reach out to everyone, so that, in the orderly unfolding of the synodal journey, what the apostle Paul recommends to the communities may be realized: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good" (1 *Thess* 5:19-21).

15. The meaning of the journey to which we are all called is above all that of discovering the face and form of a synodal Church, in which "everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth' (Jn 14:17), in order to know what He 'says to the Churches' (*Rev* 2:7)."[18] The Bishop of Rome, as the principle and foundation of the Church's unity, asks all the Bishops and all the particular Churches, in which and from which the one and only Catholic Church exists (cf. LG, no. 23), to enter with confidence and courage into the path of synodality. In this "journeying together," we ask the Spirit to help us discover how communion, which brings together in unity the variety of gifts, charisms, and ministries, is for the mission: a synodal Church is a Church "going forth," a missionary Church "whose doors are open" (EG, no. 46). This includes the call to deepen relationships with other Churches and Christian communities, with which we are united by the one Baptism. The perspective of "journeying together," then, is even broader, and embraces all humankind, whose "joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties" we share (GS, no. 1). A synodal Church is a prophetic sign, above all for a community of nations incapable of proposing a shared project, through which to pursue the good of all: practicing synodality is today for the Church the most evident way to be "the universal sacrament of salvation" (LG, no. 48), "a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (LG, no. 1).

[15] FRANCIS, *Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops.*
[16] ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no. 69.
[17] BENEDICT, *Rule*, 3.3.
[18] FRANCIS, *Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops.*

III. Listening to the Scriptures

16. The Spirit of God, who illuminates and vivifies this "journeying together" of the Churches, is the same Spirit who works in the mission of Jesus, promised to the Apostles and to the generations of disciples who hear God's Word and put it into practice. The Spirit, according to the Lord's promise, does not limit himself to confirming the continuity of the Gospel of Jesus, but will illuminate the ever-new depths of his Revelation and inspire the decisions necessary to sustain the Church's journey (cf. *Jn* 14:25–26; 15:26–27; 16:12–15). It is, therefore, appropriate that our journey of building a synodal Church be inspired by two "images" from Scripture. One emerges in the representation of the "community scene" that constantly accompanies the journey of evangelization; the other refers to the experience of the Spirit in which Peter and the early community recognize the risk of placing unjustified limits on faith sharing. The synodal experience of journeying together, following the Lord and in obedience to the Spirit, will be able to receive decisive inspiration from meditation on these two traits of revelation.

Jesus, the Crowd, the Apostles

17. An original scene appears, in its fundamental structure, as the constant of the way in which Jesus reveals himself throughout the Gospel, as he announces the coming of the Kingdom of God. Essentially, three actors (plus one) are involved. The first, of course, is *Jesus*, the absolute protagonist who takes the initiative, sowing the words and signs of the coming of the Kingdom without "showing partiality" (cf. *Acts* 10:34). In various ways, Jesus pays special attention to those who are "separated" from God and those "abandoned" by the community (the sinners and the poor, in gospel language). Through his words and actions, he offers liberation from evil and conversion to hope, in the name of God the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Even in the diversity of the Lord's calls, their receptive responses, the common trait is that faith always emerges as a valuing of people: their plea is heard, their difficulty is helped, their availability is appreciated, their dignity is confirmed by God's gaze and restored to the community's recognition.

18. In fact, the work of evangelization and the message of salvation would not be comprehensible without Jesus' constant openness to the widest possible audience, which the Gospels refer to as the *crowd*, that is, all the people who follow him along the path, and at times even pursue him in the hope of a sign and a word of salvation: this is the second actor on the scene of Revelation. The proclamation of the Gospel is not addressed only to an enlightened or chosen few. Jesus' interlocutor is the "people" of ordinary life, the "everyone" of the human condition, whom he puts directly in contact with God's gift and the call to salvation. In a way that surprises and sometimes scandalizes the witnesses, Jesus accepts as interlocutors all those who emerge from the crowd: he listens to the impassioned remonstrances of the Canaanite woman (cf. *Mt* 15:21–28), who cannot accept being excluded from the blessing he brings; he allows himself to dialogue with the Samaritan woman (cf. *Jn* 4:1–42), despite her condition as a socially and religiously compromised woman; he solicits the free and grateful act of faith of the man born blind (cf. *Jn* 9), whom official religion had dismissed as outside the perimeter of grace.

19. Some follow Jesus more explicitly, experiencing the fidelity of discipleship, while others are invited to return to their ordinary lives: yet all testify to the power of the faith that has saved them (cf. *Mt* 15:28). Among those who follow Jesus, the figure of the *apostles*, whom he himself calls from the beginning, having given them the task of mediating authoritatively the crowd's relationship with Revelation and with the coming of God's Kingdom, clearly becomes prominent. The third actor's entrance on the scene occurs not thanks to a cure or a conversion, but because it coincides with Jesus' call. The election of the apostles is not the privilege of an exclusive position of power and separation but the grace of an inclusive ministry of blessing and fellowship. Thanks to the gift of the Spirit of the Risen Lord, they are to guard the place of Jesus, without replacing him: not to put filters on his presence, but to make it easy to encounter him.

20. Jesus, the crowd in its diversity, the apostles: this is the imagery and the mystery that must be constantly contemplated and explored in depth so that the Church may increasingly become what she is. None of the three actors can leave the scene. If Jesus is absent, and someone else takes his place, the Church then becomes a contract between the apostles and the crowd and whose dialogue will end up following the plot of the political game. Without the apostles, authorized by Jesus and instructed by the Spirit, the relationship with the evangelical truth is broken, and the crowd, whether it accepts or rejects Jesus, remains exposed to a myth or an ideology about him. Without the crowd, the apostles' relationship with Jesus becomes corrupted into a sectarian and self-referential form of religion, and evangelization, which emanates from the direct self-revelation that God addresses personally to all, offering His salvation, loses its light.

21. Then, there is the "extra" actor, the antagonist, who brings to the scene the diabolical separation of the other three. Faced with the perturbing prospect of the cross, there are disciples who leave and mood-changing crowds. The insidiousness that divides—and, thus, thwarts a common path—manifests itself indifferently in the forms of religious rigor, of moral injunction that presents itself as more demanding than that of Jesus, and of the seduction of a worldly political wisdom that claims to be more effective than a discernment of spirits. In order to escape the deceptions of the "fourth actor," continuous conversion is necessary. Emblematic in this regard is the episode of the centurion Cornelius (cf. *Acts* 10), the antecedent of that "Council" of Jerusalem (cf. *Acts* 15) which constitutes a crucial reference point for a synodal Church.

A Double Dynamic of Conversion: Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10)

22. The episode narrates, first of all, the conversion of Cornelius, who even receives a sort of annunciation. Cornelius is a pagan, presumably Roman, a centurion (a low-ranking officer) in the army of occupation, who practices a profession based on violence and abuse. Yet, he is dedicated to prayer and almsgiving, that is, he cultivates a relationship with God and cares for his neighbor. It is precisely in his home that the angel surprisingly enters, calls him by name, and exhorts him to send—the verb of mission! —his servants to Jaffa to call—the verb of vocation! —Peter. The narrative then becomes that of the conversion of the latter, who, on that same day, received a vision in which a voice ordered him to kill and eat animals, some of which were unclean. His response

is decisive: "By no means, Lord" (*Acts* 10:14). He recognizes that it is the Lord who is speaking to him, but he emphatically refuses, because that order demolishes precepts of the Torah that are inalienable for his religious identity, and which express a way of understanding election as a difference that entails separation and exclusion from other peoples.

23. The apostle remains deeply disturbed and, while he is wondering about the meaning of what has happened, men sent by Cornelius arrive and the Spirit indicates to him that they are his envoys. Peter responds to them with words that recall those of Jesus in the Garden: "I am the one you are looking for" (*Acts* 10:21). This is a true and proper conversion, the painful and immensely fruitful passage of leaving one's own cultural and religious categories: Peter accepts to eat with pagans the food he had always considered forbidden, recognizing it as an instrument of life and communion with God and with others. It is in the encounter with people, welcoming them, journeying with them, and entering their homes, that he realizes the meaning of his vision: no human being is unworthy in the eyes of God, and the difference established by election does not imply exclusive preference but service and witnessing of a universal breadth.

24. Both Cornelius and Peter involve other people in their journey of conversion, making them companions in their journey. The apostolic action accomplishes God's will by creating community, breaking down barriers, and promoting encounters. The word plays a central role in the encounter between the two protagonists. Cornelius begins by sharing his experience. Peter listens to him and then speaks, reporting in turn what has happened to him and testifying to the closeness of the Lord, who goes out to meet people individually to free them from what makes them prisoners of evil and mortifies humanity (cf. *Acts* 10:38). This form of communicating is similar to the one Peter will adopt in Jerusalem when the circumcised believers criticize him, accusing him of having broken the traditional norms, on which all their attention seems to be focused, while disregarding the outpouring of the Spirit: "You entered the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them!" (*Acts* 11:3). At that moment of conflict, Peter reports what happened to him and his reactions of bewilderment, incomprehension, and resistance. Precisely this will help his interlocutors, initially aggressive and refractory, to listen and accept what has happened. Scripture will help to interpret the meaning, just as it also will at the "Council" of Jerusalem, in a process of discernment that consists of listening together to the Spirit.

IV. Synodality in Action: Pathways for Consulting the People of God

25. Enlightened by the Word and grounded in Tradition, the synodal path is rooted in the concrete life of the People of God. In fact, it presents a peculiarity that is also an extraordinary resource: its object—synodality—is also its method. In other words, it constitutes a sort of construction site or pilot experience that makes it possible to immediately begin reaping the fruits of the dynamic that progressive synodal conversion introduces into the Christian community. On the other hand, it can only refer to the experiences of synodality lived, at different levels and with different degrees of intensity: valuable elements for discernment on the direction in which to continue to move are offered by their strengths and achievements, and also by their limitations and difficulties. Of course, here, reference is made to the experiences activated by the present synodal journey, but also to all those in which forms of "journeying together" are already being experienced in ordinary life, even if the term synodality is not known or used.

The Fundamental Question

26. The fundamental question that guides this consultation of the People of God, as mentioned at the beginning, is the following:

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together:" How is this "journeying together" happening today in your particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?

In order to respond, you are invited to:

a) ask yourselves what experiences in your particular Church the fundamental question calls to mind;

b) reread these experiences in greater depth: What joys did they provoke? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered? What wounds have they brought to light? What insights have they elicited?

c) gather the fruits to share: Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound? What is he asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are opening up for our particular Church?

Different Articulations of Synodality

27. In the prayer, reflection, and sharing prompted by the fundamental question, it is opportune to keep in mind three levels on which synodality is articulated as a "constitutive dimension of the Church."[19]

- the level of the style with which the Church ordinarily lives and works, which expresses its nature as the People of God that journeys together and gathers in assembly summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. This style is realized through "the community listening to

[19] ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no. 70.

the Word and celebrating the Eucharist, the brotherhood of communion and the co-responsibility and participation of the whole People of God in its life and mission, on all levels and distinguishing between various ministries and roles;"[20]

- the level of ecclesial structures and processes, determined also from the theological and canonical point of view, in which the synodal nature of the Church is expressed in an institutional way at the local, regional, and universal levels;
- the level of synodal processes and events in which the Church is convoked by the competent authority, according to specific procedures determined by the ecclesiastical discipline.

Although distinct from a logical point of view, these three levels refer one to the other and must be held together in a coherent way, otherwise a counter-testimony is transmitted, and the Church's credibility is undermined. In fact, if it is not embodied in structures and processes, the style of synodality easily degrades from the level of intentions and desires to that of rhetoric, while processes and events, if they are not animated by an adequate style, turn out to be empty formalities.

28. Furthermore, in re-reading experiences, it is necessary to keep in mind that "journeying together" can be understood from two different perspectives, which are strongly interconnected. The first perspective looks at the internal life of the particular Churches, at the relationships between their constituent parts (first and foremost between the Faithful and their Pastors, also through the participatory bodies envisaged by the canonical discipline, including the diocesan synod) and the communities into which they are divided (especially parishes). It then considers the relationships between the Bishops and with the Bishop of Rome, also through the intermediate bodies of synodality (Synods of Bishops of the Patriarchal and Major Archdiocesan Churches, Councils of Hierarchs and Assemblies of Hierarchs of the Churches *sui iuris*, and Episcopal Conferences, with their national, international, and continental expressions). It then extends to the ways in which each particular Church integrates within itself the contribution of the various forms of monastic, religious, and consecrated life, of lay associations and movements, of ecclesial and ecclesiastical institutions of various kinds (schools, hospitals, universities, foundations, charitable and assistance organizations, etc.). Finally, this perspective also embraces relationships and common initiatives with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations, with whom we share the gift of the same Baptism.

29. The second perspective considers how the People of God journeys together with the entire human family. Thus, our gaze will focus on the state of relations, dialogue, and possible common initiatives with believers of other religions, with people who are distant from the faith, as well as with specific social environments and groups, with their institutions (the world of politics, culture, economics, finance, labor, trade unions, and business associations, non-governmental and civil society organizations, popular movements, minorities of various kinds, the poor and the excluded, etc.).

[20] *Ibid.*

Ten Thematic Nuclei to be Explored

30. In order to help highlight the experiences and contribute in a richer way to the consultation, we indicate below ten thematic nuclei that articulate different facets of "lived synodality." They should be adapted to the different local contexts and, from time to time, integrated, explained, simplified, and deepened, with particular attention paid to those who have more difficulty in participating and responding: the *Handbook* that accompanies this Preparatory Document offers tools, itineraries, and suggestions so that the different groups of questions can concretely inspire moments of prayer, formation, reflection, and exchange.

I. THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS

In the Church and in society, we are side by side on the same road. In your local Church, who are the ones "journeying together"? When we say: "our Church," who is part of it? Who is asking us to journey together? Who are the road companions, including those outside the ecclesial perimeter? What persons or groups are left on the margins, expressly or in fact?

II. LISTENING

Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices. To whom does our particular Church "need to listen to"? How are the Laity, especially young people and women, listened to? How do we integrate the contribution of Consecrated Men and Women? What space is there for the voice of minorities, the discarded, and the excluded? Do we identify prejudices and stereotypes that hinder our listening? How do we listen to the social and cultural context in which we live?

III. SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, integrating freedom, truth, and charity. How do we promote a free and authentic style of communication within the community and its organizations, without duplicity and opportunism? And in relation to the society of which we are a part? When and how do we manage to say what is important to us? How does the relationship with the media system (not only Catholic media) work? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

IV. CELEBRATING

"Journeying together" is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. How do prayer and liturgical celebration inspire and direct our "journeying together"? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the Faithful in the liturgy and the exercise of the sanctifying function? What space is given to the exercise of the ministries of the reader and acolyte?

V. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

Synodality is at the service of the Church's mission, in which all her members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is each Baptized person called to be a protagonist in the mission? How does the community support its members committed to service in society (social and political commitment, in scientific research and teaching, in the promotion of social justice, in the protection of human rights, and in caring for the Common home, etc.)? How do you help them to live out these commitments in a logic of mission? How is discernment about mission-related choices made, and who participates in it? How are the different traditions that constitute the patrimony of many Churches, especially the Oriental ones, integrated and adapted, with respect to the synodal style, in view of an effective Christian witness? How does collaboration work in territories where different sui iuris Churches are present?

VI. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Dialogue is a path of perseverance that also includes silences and sufferings, but which is capable of gathering the experience of persons and peoples. What are the places and modes of dialogue within our particular Church? How are divergences of vision, the conflicts, the difficulties addressed? How do we promote collaboration with neighboring Dioceses, with and among religious communities in the area, with and among lay associations and movements, etc.? What experiences of dialogue and shared commitment do we have with believers of other religions and with non-believers? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the world of politics, economics, culture, civil society, the poor…?

VII. WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one Baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relations do we have with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations? What areas do they concern? What fruits have we drawn from this "journeying together"? What are the difficulties?

VIII. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How do we identify the goals to be pursued, the way to achieve them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority exercised within our particular Church? What are the practices of teamwork and co-responsibility? How are lay ministries and the assumption of responsibility by the Faithful promoted? How do synodal bodies function at the level of the particular Church? Are they a fruitful experience?

IX. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit. By what procedures and methods do we discern together and make decisions? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchically structured communities? How do we articulate the consultative phase with the deliberative one, the process of *decision-making* with the moment of *decision-taking*? How and with what tools do we promote transparency and accountability?

X. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

The spirituality of journeying together is called to become an educational principle for the formation of the human person and of the Christian, of the families, and of the communities. How do we form people, especially those who hold roles of responsibility within the Christian community, to make them more capable of "journeying together," listening to one another and engaging in dialogue? What formation do we offer for discernment and the exercise of authority? What tools help us to read the dynamics of the culture in which we are immersed and their impact on our style of Church?

To Contribute to the Consultation

31. The purpose of the first phase of the synodal journey is to foster a broad consultation process in order to gather the wealth of the experiences of lived synodality, in its different articulations and facets, involving the Pastors and the Faithful of the particular Churches at all the different levels, through the most appropriate means according to the specific local realities: the consultation, coordinated by the Bishop, is addressed "to the Priests, Deacons and lay Faithful of their Churches, both individually and in associations, without overlooking the valuable contribution that consecrated men and women can offer" (EC, no. 7). The contribution of the participatory bodies of the particular Churches is specifically requested, especially that of the Presbyteral Council and the Pastoral Council, from which "a synodal Church [can truly] begin to take shape".[21] Equally valuable will be the contribution of other ecclesial entities to which the Preparatory Document will be sent, as well as that of those who wish to send their own contribution directly. Finally, it will be of fundamental importance that the voice of the poor and excluded also find a place, not only that of those who have some role or responsibility within the particular Churches.

32. The synthesis that each particular Church will elaborate at the end of this work of listening and discernment will constitute its contribution to the journey of the universal Church. To make the subsequent phases of the journey easier and more sustainable, it is important to condense the fruits of prayer and reflection into a maximum of ten pages. If necessary to contextualize and explain them better, other texts can be attached to support or integrate them. We recall that the purpose of the Synod, and therefore of this consultation, is not to produce documents, but "to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands."[22]

[21] FRANCIS, *Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops.*
[22] FRANCIS, *Address at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People* (3 October 2018).

"Today how much we miss the prayer of adoration; so many people have lost not only the habit but also the very notion of what it means to worship God!"

(Pope Francis)

"Enlarge the space for your tent"

(Is 54:2)

WORKING DOCUMENT FOR THE CONTINENTAL STAGE

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Introduction

1. The Synod is on: one year after the opening of the synodal journey, we can enthusiastically affirm this! During this first part of the consultative phase, millions of people all over the world have been involved in the Synod's activities: some by participating in the meetings at the local level, some by collaborating in the animation and coordination of the activities at the different levels, and some by offering the support of their prayers: "*We also express our gratitude to the contemplative nuns who accompanied their people in prayer and continue to pray for the fruits of the Synod of Synodality*" (EC Peru). All of these people who got involved are the real protagonists of the Synod!

2. They set in motion urged on by a desire to respond to the basic question guiding 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?" (Preparatory Document, no. 2).

3. Along the way they experienced the joy of meeting as brothers and sisters in Christ, sharing what resonated within them from listening to the Word, and reflecting together on the future of the Church based on the impetus of the Preparatory Document (PD). This has nourished the desire for an increasingly synodal Church: synodality has ceased to be an abstract concept for them and has become a concrete experience; they have tasted its flavor and want to continue to do so. "'*Through this process we have discovered that synodality is a way of being Church – in fact, it is the way of being Church'. 'The Holy Spirit is asking us to be more synodal'*" (EC England and Wales).

4. Their experience has been translated into words, in the contributions that the different communities and groups have sent to the Dioceses. These submissions were synthesized and transmitted to the Episcopal Conferences, and in turn, from the outline contained in the PD, the Episcopal Conferences drafted a report that was sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod.

5. Globally, participation exceeded all expectations. In all, the Synod Secretariat received contributions from 112 out of 114 Episcopal Conferences and from all the 15 Oriental Catholic Churches, plus reflections from 17 out of 23 dicasteries of the Roman Curia besides those from religious superiors (USG/UISG), from institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, and from associations and lay movements of the faithful. In addition, over a thousand contributions arrived from individuals and groups as well as insights gathered through social media thanks to the initiative of the "Digital Synod." These materials were distributed to a group of experts: bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, lay men and lay women, from all continents and with very diverse disciplinary expertise. After reading the reports,

these experts met for almost two weeks together with the writing group, composed of the General Relator, the Secretary General of the Synod, the Undersecretaries and various officials of the Synod Secretariat, plus members of the Coordinating Committee. This group was finally joined by the members of the General Council. Together they worked in an atmosphere of prayer and discernment to share the fruits of their reading in preparation for the drafting of this Document for the Continental Stage (DCS).

6. The quotations that punctuate the DCS try to give an idea of the richness of the materials received, letting the voices of the People of God from all parts of the world speak as much as possible on their own terms and find resonance. They are not to be interpreted as endorsing the positions of any particular area of the globe, nor as simply representing geographical variety, although care has been taken to ensure a certain balance in terms of source provenance. Rather, these quotes were chosen because they express in a particularly powerful, beautiful or precise way sentiments expressed more generally in many reports. However, it is clear that no single document could condense the depth of faith, vitality of hope and energy of charity that overflow from the contributions received. Behind them one glimpses the power and richness of the experience that the different Churches have had by setting out and opening themselves to the diversity of voices that have taken the floor. Enabling this encounter and dialogue is the meaning of the synodal journey, whose ultimate purpose is not to produce documents but to open horizons of hope for the fulfilment of the Church's mission.

7. It is within this journey, which is far from reaching its conclusion, that this DCS is situated and finds its meaning. In view of the Continental Stage of the synodal journey, the Document organizes around a small number of nuclei the hopes and concerns of the People of God from across the globe. In this way, it provides an opportunity for the local Churches to listen to each other's voices in view of the Continental Assemblies in 2023. Their task will be to draw up a list of priorities, upon which the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will be held from 4 to 29 October 2023, will carry out their discernment.

8. Clarifying the DCS's function also allows us to focus on what it is not: it is not a conclusive document, because the process is far from being finished; it 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. Nonetheless it is theological in the sense that it is loaded with the exquisitely theological treasure contained in the experience of listening to the voice of the Spirit enacted by the People of God, allowing its *sensus fidei* to emerge. But it is also a theological document in the sense that it is orientated to the service of the Church's mission: to proclaim Christ who died and rose again for the salvation of the world.

9. To avoid misunderstandings in its reading, it is essential to keep in mind the

particular nature of the DCS, as well as its structure. The Document opens with a chapter that offers more than a simple account of 'what happened', presenting a narrative of the synodality experienced so far, with the consultation of the People of God in the local Churches and the discernment of the Pastors in the Episcopal Conferences: it profiles the synodal experience, presents the difficulties encountered and the most significant fruits gathered, identifying the cornerstones of what constitutes an authentic collective experience of the Christian faith. In this way it does not provide a definition of synodality in the strict sense – for this you can refer to the PD or the materials listed on the Synod website (www.synod.va) – but expresses the shared sense of the experience of synodality lived by those who took part. What emerges is a profound re-appropriation of the common dignity of all the baptized. This is the authentic pillar of a synodal Church and the theological foundation of a unity which is capable of resisting the push toward homogenization. This enables us to continue to promote and make good use of the variety of charisms that the Spirit with unpredictable abundance pours out on the faithful.

10. The second chapter presents a biblical icon, the image of the tent with which chapter 54 of the book of Isaiah opens. This image and narrative represents a key to an interpretation of the contents within the DCS in the light of the Word, placing them in the arc of God's promise that becomes a vocation for his People and his Church: "*Enlarge the space of your tent*!"

11. This tent is a space of *communion*, a place of *participation*, and a foundation for *mission*. In turn, the third chapter articulates the key words of the synodal journey connecting them with the fruits of listening to the People of God. It does so by gathering them around five generative tensions that are intertwined with one another:

1) listening as openness to welcome: this starts from a desire for radical inclusion – no one is excluded – to be understood in a perspective of communion with sisters and brothers and with our common Father; listening appears here not as an instrumental action, but as the assumption of the basic attitude of a God who listens to his People, as the following of a Lord whom the Gospels constantly present to us in the act of listening to the people who come to him along the roads of the Holy Land; in this sense listening is already mission and proclamation;
2) our outgoing drive toward mission. This is a mission that Catholics recognize as needing to be carried out with brothers and sisters of other confessions and in dialogue with believers of other religions, transforming human actions of care into authentically spiritual experiences that proclaim the face of a God who cares to the point of giving his own life so that we may have it in abundance;
3) carrying out the mission requires assuming a style based on participation, this corresponds to the full assumption of co-responsibility of all the baptized for the one mission of the Church arising from the common baptismal dignity;
4) the construction of concrete possibilities for living communion, participation and mission through structures and institutions inhabited by people properly formed and sustained by a living spirituality;

5) the liturgy, especially the Eucharistic liturgy, the source and summit of Christian life, which brings the community together, making communion tangible, enables the exercise of participation, and nourishes the momentum toward mission with the Word and the Sacraments.

12. Finally, the fourth chapter offers a glimpse toward the future by appealing to two levels both of which are indispensable for proceeding along the path: the spiritual level that seeks to orientate us towards a horizon of missionary synodal conversion, and the methodological one that traces our next steps for the Continental Stage.

13. The DCS will be understandable and useful only if it is read with the eyes of the disciple, who recognizes it as a testimony to the path of conversion toward a synodal Church. This means a Church that learns from listening how to renew its evangelizing mission in the light of the signs of the times, to continue offering humanity a way of being and living in which all can feel included as protagonists. Along this path, the lamp to our steps is the Word of God, which offers the light with which to reread, interpret and express the experience that has been lived.

14. Together we pray:

Lord, you have gathered all your People in Synod.

We give you thanks for the joy
experienced by those who decided to set out
to listen to God and to their brothers and sisters during this year,
with an attitude of welcome, humility, hospitality and siblinghood.

Help us to enter these pages as on "holy ground."

Come Holy Spirit: may you be the guide of our journey together!

1. The experience of the synodal journey

15. The reports sent by Churches across the world give voice to the joys, hopes, sufferings and wounds of Christ's disciples. In their words we hear resonate what lies at the heart of all humanity. They express the desire for a Church that walks with Christ under the guidance of the Spirit to fulfil its mission of evangelization. "*Our current 'synod' experience has awakened in the lay faithful the idea of, and a desire to, get involved in the life of the Church, in its engagement with the world today, and in its pastoral work on the ground*" (EC Canada).eru). All of these people who got involved are the real protagonists of the Synod!

1.1 "The fruits, seeds, and weeds of synodality"

16. The first part of the synodal journey has produced abundant fruit, new seeds that promise new growth, and above all, an experience of joy in challenging times: "*Largely, what emerges from the fruits, seeds and weeds of synodality are voices that have great love for the Church, voices that dream of a Church of credible witnesses, a Church that is inclusive, open and welcoming Family of God*" (EC Zimbabwe). Haiti speaks for many: "*Despite the continuous cases of kidnapping and violence recorded, the reports of the Dioceses express the joy of those who were able to actively participate in this first phase of the Synod*" (EC Haiti). This is a joy that many have asked be extended and shared with others. The Diocese of Ebibeyín (Equatorial Guinea) echoes this: "*this synodal experience has been one of the most rewarding that many have been able to experience in their Christian lives. From the first moment the work of the Synod began to the point where we are now, there is great enthusiasm among the People of God.*" Among the fruits of the synod experience, several summaries highlight the strengthened feeling of belonging to the Church and the realisation on a practical level that the Church is not just priests and bishops: "*While sharing the fundamental question: 'How is this journeying together happening today in your particular Church?' it was noted that people could realize the true nature of the Church and in that light, they were able to see the situation of their Particular Church*" (EC Bangladesh).

17. Widespread appreciation was given to the method of spiritual conversation which allowed many to look honestly at the reality of Church life and name the lights and shadows. This honest appraisal bore immediate missionary fruits. "*There is a strong mobilization of the People of God, the joy of coming together, of walking together and of speaking freely. Some Christians who felt hurt and who had distanced themselves from the Church came back during this consultation phase*" (EC Central African Republic). Many emphasised that this was the first time the Church had asked for their opinion and they wish to continue this journey: "*Meetings in the spirit of the synodal method, in which all members of the congregation or community can openly and honestly express their opinion, as well as meetings with various groups outside the Church, should continue. This kind of cooperation should become one of the 'unwritten laws' of the Church culture, so as to foster rapprochement between Church members and groups in society, thus creating a readiness of people for deeper dialogue*" (EC Latvia).

18. However, there has been no shortage of challenges, which the reports do not hide. Some are related to the coincidence of the consultative phase with the pandemic; others stem from the difficulty of understanding what synodality means, the need for a greater effort to translate and enculturate the materials, the failure to organize synodal gatherings in some local contexts, or resistance to the basic proposal. There is no shortage of very clear expressions of rejection: "*I distrust the Synod. I think it has been called to bring about further change to Christ's teachings and wound his Church further*" (individual submission from the UK). Quite frequently, the fear has been expressed that the emphasis on synodality could push the Church

toward adopting mechanisms and procedures that depend on a democratic-type majority principle. Among the difficulties a scepticism about the real efficacy or intent of the synodal process should be noted: "*Some expressed doubts about the outcome of the synodal process due to their perception of the Church as a rigid institution unwilling to change and modernize itself, or due to a suspicion that the synodal outcome had been predetermined*" (EC Canada).

19. Numerous reports mention the fears and resistance on the part of the clergy, but also the passivity of the laity, their fear of expressing themselves freely, and the struggle to understand and articulate the priests' and bishops' role within the synodal dynamic: "*In this process there was also resistance, lack of participation, communities that did not join. This may have been partly due to the novelty of the challenge, since many communities are not accustomed to this way of living the Church. It was also due to the fact that some leaders and pastors did not assume the animating and guiding role that corresponded to them. Several diocesan reports complain about the lack or weak involvement of priests*" (EC Chile). In many cases, the synodal process and materials reveal that there is a widespread perception of a separation between priests and the rest of the People of God: "*Consultations in dioceses and at national level have shown that the relationship between priests and the faithful is difficult in many places. On the one hand, there is criticism of a perceived distance between clergy and laity, in some places priests are even experienced as an obstacle to a fruitful community. At the same time, the challenges for priests are named: the shortage of priests and also the increasing loss of volunteers lead to exhaustion; also, priests do not always feel heard, some see their ministry questioned. What makes a good priest? How can parish life be an enriching experience for everyone involved? Why do fewer and fewer men feel a vocation? These questions need to be discussed*" (EC Austria).

20. An obstacle of particular relevance on the path of walking together is 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: "T*here was ongoing reference to the impact of the clergy sexual abuse crisis and the Church's response [...]. For many, the aftermath of this is still a powerful, unresolved issue. There was a strong urgency to acknowledge the horror and damage, and to strengthen efforts to safeguard the vulnerable, repair damage to the moral authority of the Church and rebuild trust. Some Dioceses reported that participants wished for them publicly to acknowledge and atone for past abuses*" (EC Australia). Careful and painful reflection on the legacy of abuse has led many synod groups to call for a cultural change in the Church with a view to greater transparency, accountability and co-responsibility.

21. Furthermore, in too many countries the synodal way has crossed paths with the wars that stain our world with blood, "giving free reign to fanaticism of all kinds

and to persecutions, even massacres. Sectarian and ethnic incitements were noted, which degenerated into armed and political conflicts, often bloody" (Maronite Church). Particularly painful are those situations in which Christians, including Catholics, live in countries at war with each other. Even in these fragile situations which intensify an encounter with the Cross and Resurrection, Christian communities have been able to take up the invitation addressed to them to build experiences of synodality, to reflect on what it means to walk together, and express a desire to continue to do so: "Concerning the tragedy of the genocide against the Tutsi that has so divided the Rwandan people, one should better deepen the theme of communion with a view to an authentic healing of the collective memory. This Synod has given us a better understanding that the pastoral of unity and reconciliation must continue to be a priority" (EC Rwanda).

1.2. Our common baptismal dignity

22. Practices of lived synodality have constituted "a pivotal and precious moment to realize how we all share a common dignity and vocation through our Baptism to participants in the life of the Church" (EC Ethiopia). This foundational reference to baptism – not as an abstract concept but as a felt identity – immediately brings into focus the link between the synodal form of the Church and the possibility of fulfilling its mission: "there was a growing understanding that it is important for all who have received the blessing of baptism to walk together, sharing and discerning the guidance of the Holy Spirit who calls them. There was a deep realization that in the synodal Church walking together is the way to become a missionary Church" (EC Japan). Many local Churches within contexts that see the presence of numerous Christian denominations place particular stress on the baptismal dignity of all Christian sisters and brothers, and the common mission in service of the Gospel. A synodal process is incomplete without meeting brothers and sisters from other confessions, sharing and dialogue with them, and engaging in common actions. The reports express a desire for deeper ecumenical encounter, and the need for formation to support this work.

23. The reports present the synod process as an experience of novelty and freshness: "People of God remarked on the uniqueness of speaking freely and being heard in organized conversations that were open-ended and attentive with guidance of the Holy Spirit. They spoke of how, after decades of church going, they had been asked to speak for first time" (EC Pakistan). Another image refers to an experience of liberation and new life: the eggshell shattering as new life unfurls its wings.

24. Elsewhere, expressions emerge that evoke rather the idea of distance between family members and a desired return, the end of a collective alienation from one's identity as a synodal Church. To use a biblical image, one could say that the synodal journey marked the first steps of the return from an experience of collective exile, the consequences of which affect the entire People of God: if the Church is not synodal, no one can really feel fully at home.

2. Listening to the Scriptures

25. It is to a people living the experience of exile that the prophet addresses words that help us today to focus on what the Lord is calling us to through the experience of lived synodality: "*Enlarge the space of your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly, lengthen your ropes and make firm your pegs*" (Is 54:2).

26.To the people in exile the prophet's words evokes the experience of the exodus, when they dwelt in tents, and announces the promise of the return to the land, a sign of joy and hope. To prepare, it is necessary to enlarge the tent, acting on the three elements of its structure. The first is the tent cloth, which protect from the sun, wind and rain, delineating a space of life and conviviality. They need to be spread out, so that they can also protect those who are still outside this space, but who feel called to enter it. The ropes that hold the cloths together are the second structural element of the tent. They must balance the tension needed to keep the tent from drooping with the softness that cushions movement caused by the wind. That is why if the tent expands, the ropes must be stretched to maintain the right tension. Finally, the pegs are the third element: they anchor the structure to the ground and ensure its solidity, but remain capable of moving when the tent must be pitched elsewhere.

27. Listened to today, these words of Isaiah invite us to imagine the Church similarly as a tent, indeed as the tent of meeting, which accompanied the people on their journey through the desert: called to stretch out, therefore, but also to move. At its centre, stands the tabernacle, that is, the presence of the Lord. The tent's hold is ensured by the sturdiness of its pegs, that is, the fundamentals of faith that do not change but can be moved and planted in ever new ground, so that the tent can accompany the people as they walk through history. Finally, in order not to sag, the structure of the tent must keep in balance the different forces and tensions to which it is subjected: a metaphor that expresses the need for discernment. This is how many reports envision the Church: an expansive, but not homogeneous dwelling, capable of sheltering all, but open, letting in and out (cf. Jn. 10:9), and moving toward embracing the Father and all of humanity.

28. Enlarging the tent requires welcoming others into it, making room for their diversity. It thus entails a willingness to die to self out of love, finding oneself again in and through relationship with Christ and one's neighbor: "*Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit*" (Jn. 12:24). The fruitfulness of the Church depends on accepting this death, which is not, however, an annihilation, but an experience of emptying oneself in order to be filled by Christ through the Holy Spirit, and thus a process by which we receive richer relationships, deeper ties to God and each other. This is the place of grace, and of transfiguration. For this reason, the apostle Paul recommends, "*Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the*

form of a slave, coming in human likeness" (Phil. 2:5-7). It is under this condition that the members of the Church, each and all together, will be able to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in fulfilling the mission assigned by Jesus Christ to his Church: it is a liturgical, Eucharistic act.

3. Towards a missionary synodal Church

29. The biblical imagery of the tent relates to other images that appear in numerous reports: that of the family and that of home, the place to which people wish to belong, and to which they wish to return. "*The Church-home does not have doors that close, but a perimeter that continually widens*" (EC Italy). The dynamic of home and exile, of belonging and exclusion, is felt as a tension in the reports. One noted "*Those who feel at home in the Church feel the absence of those who don't*" (EC Ireland). Through these voices, we hear the dream of "*a global and synodal Church that lives unity in diversity. God is preparing something new, and we must collaborate*" (USG/UISG).

30. The submissions are encouraging because they avoid two of the main spiritual temptations facing the Church in responding to diversity and the tensions it generates. The first is to remain trapped in conflict, such that our horizons shrink and we lose our sense of the whole, and fracture into sub-identities. It is an experience of Babel and not Pentecost, well recognizable in many features of our world. The second is to become spiritually detached and disinterested in the tensions involved, continuing to go our own way without involving ourselves with those close to us on the journey. Instead, "*the call is to live better the tension of truth and mercy, as Jesus did […]. The dream is of a Church that more fully lives a Christological paradox: boldly proclaiming its authentic teaching while at the same time offering a witness of radical inclusion and acceptance through its pastoral and discerning accompaniment*" (EC England and Wales).

31. The vision of a Church capable of radical inclusion, shared belonging, and deep hospitality according to the teachings of Jesus is at the heart of the synodal process: "*Instead of behaving like gatekeepers trying to exclude others from the table, we need to do more to make sure that people know that everyone can find a place and a home here*" (remark by a parish group from the USA). We are called to go to every place, especially outside the more familiar territories, "*leaving the comfortable position of those who give hospitality to allow ourselves to be welcomed into the existence of those who are our companions on the journey of humanity*" (EC Germany).

3.1 Listening that becomes welcoming

32. In this journey, the Churches have realised that the path to greater inclusion – the enlarged tent – is a gradual one. It begins with listening and requires a broader

and deeper conversion of attitudes and structures, as well as new approaches to pastoral accompaniment; it begins in a readiness to recognise that the peripheries can be the place where a call to conversion resounds along with the call to put the Gospel more decisively into practice. Listening requires that we recognize others as subjects of their own journey. When we do this, others feel welcomed, not judged, free to share their own spiritual journey. This has been experienced in many contexts, and for some this has been the most transformative aspect of the whole process. The synodal experience can be read as a path of recognition for those who do not feel sufficiently recognised in the Church. This is especially true for those lay men and women, deacons, consecrated men and women who previously had the feeling that the institutional Church was not interested in their faith experience or their opinions.

33. The reports also reflect on the difficulty of listening deeply and accepting being transformed by it. They highlight the lack of communal processes of listening and discernment, and call for more training in this area. Furthermore, they point to the persistence of structural obstacles, including: hierarchical structures that foster autocratic tendencies; a clerical and individualistic culture that isolates individuals and fragments relationships between priests and laity; sociocultural and economic disparities that benefit the wealthy and educated; and the absence of "in-between" spaces that foster encounters between members of mutually separated groups. Poland's report states "*Not listening leads to misunderstanding, exclusion, and marginalization. As a further consequence, it creates closure, simplification, lack of trust and fears that destroys the community. When priests do not want to listen, making excuses, such as in the large number of activities, or when questions go unanswered, a sense of sadness and estrangement arises in the hearts of the lay faithful. Without listening, answers to the faithfuls' difficulties are taken out of context and do not address the essence of the problems they are experiencing, becoming empty moralism. The laity feel that the flight from sincere listening stems from the fear of having to engage pastorally. A similar feeling grows when bishops do not have time to speak and listen to the faithful.*"

34. At the same time, the reports are sensitive to the loneliness and isolation of many members of the clergy, who do not feel listened to, supported and appreciated: perhaps one of the least evident voices in the reports is that of priests and bishops, speaking for themselves and of their experience of walking together. A particularly attentive listening must be offered to enable ordained ministers to negotiate the many dimensions of their emotional and sexual life. The need to ensure appropriate forms of welcome and protection for the women and eventual children of priests who have broken the vow of celibacy, who are otherwise at risk of suffering serious injustice and discrimination, is also noted.

An option for young people, people with disabilities and the defence of life

35. There is universal concern regarding the meagre presence of the voice of young people in the synod process, as well as increasingly in the life of the Church. A renewed focus on young people, their formation and accompaniment is an urgent

need, also as a way to implement the conclusions of the previous Synod on "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment" (2018). On that occasion, it was precisely young people who brought out the need for a more synodal Church in view of the transmission of the faith today. The "Digital Synod" initiative is a significant attempt to listen to young people and offers new insights for the proclamation of the Gospel. Antilles' report states, "*Since our young people experience a high degree of alienation, we need to make a preferential option for the young.*"

36. Numerous reports point to the lack of appropriate structures and ways of accompanying persons with disabilities, and call for new ways of welcoming their contribution and promoting their participation: in spite of its own teachings, the Church is in danger of imitating the way society casts them aside. "*The forms of discrimination listed – the lack of listening, the violation of the right to choose where and with whom to live, the denial of the sacraments, the accusation of witchcraft, abuse – and others, describe the culture of rejection towards persons with disabilities. They do not arise by chance, but have in common the same root: the idea that the lives of persons with disabilities are worth less than others*" (Report of the special synodal consultation of persons with disabilities by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life).

37. Equally prominent is the commitment of the People of God to the defence of fragile and threatened life at all its stages. For example, for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, it is part of synodality to "*study the phenomenon of female migration and offer support to women of different age groups; to pay special attention to women who decide to have an abortion due to fear of material poverty and rejection by their families in Ukraine; to carry out educational work among women who are called upon to make a responsible choice when going through a difficult time in their lives, with the aim of preserving and protecting the lives of unborn children and preventing abortion; to care for women with post-abortion syndrome.*"

Listening to Those who Feel Neglected and Excluded

38. The reports clearly show that many communities have already understood synodality as an invitation to listen to those who feel exiled from the Church. The groups who feel a sense of exile are diverse, beginning with many women and young people who do not feel their gifts and abilities are recognised. Within these groups, that among themselves are highly heterogeneous, many feel denigrated, neglected, misunderstood. Longing for a home also characterises those who, following the liturgical developments of the Second Vatican Council, do not feel at ease. For many, the experience of being seriously listened to is transformative and a first step towards feeling included. On the other hand, it was a source of sadness that some felt that their participation in the synod process was unwelcome: this is a feeling that requires understanding and dialogue.

39. Among those who ask for a more meaningful dialogue and a more welcoming space we also find those who, for various reasons, feel a tension between belonging to the Church and their own loving relationships, such as: remarried divorcees, single

parents, people living in a polygamous marriage, LGBTQ people, etc. Reports show how this demand for welcome challenges many local Churches: "*People ask that the Church be a refuge for the wounded and broken, not an institution for the perfect. They want the Church to meet people wherever they are, to walk with them rather than judge them, and to build real relationships through caring and authenticity, not a purpose of superiority*" (EC USA). They also reveal uncertainties about how to respond and express the need for discernment on the part of the universal Church: "*There is a new phenomenon in the Church that is absolutely new in Lesotho: same-sex relationships. [...] This novelty is disturbing for Catholics and for those who consider it a sin. Surprisingly, there are Catholics in Lesotho who have started practising this behaviour and expect the Church to accept them and their way of behaving. [...] This is a problematic challenge for the Church because these people feel excluded*" (EC Lesotho). Those who left ordained ministry and married, too, ask for a more welcoming Church, with greater willingness to dialogue.

40. Despite the cultural differences, there are remarkable similarities between the various continents regarding those who are perceived as excluded, in society and also in the Christian community. In many cases their voice has been absent from the synod process, and they appear in reports only because others speak about them, lamenting their exclusion: "*As the Bolivian Church, we are saddened that we have not been able to effectively reach out to the poor on the peripheries and in the most remote places*" (EC Bolivia). Among the most frequently mentioned excluded groups are: the poorest, the lonely elderly, indigenous peoples, migrants without any affiliation and who lead a precarious existence, street children, alcoholics and drug addicts, those who have fallen into the plots of criminality and those for whom prostitution seems their only chance of survival, victims of trafficking, survivors of abuse (in the Church and beyond), prisoners, groups who suffer discrimination and violence because of race, ethnicity, gender, culture and sexuality. In the reports, all of them appear as people with faces and names, calling for solidarity, dialogue, accompaniment and welcome.

3.2 Sisters and brothers for mission

41. The Church is the bearer of a proclamation of fullness of life: "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly*" (Jn10:10). The Gospels present the fullness of life and the fullness of the Kingdom of God not as separate realities or spheres of action, but always as dynamically intertwined movements. The Church's mission is to make Christ present in the midst of His People through reading the Word, the celebration of the Sacraments and through all actions that care for the wounded and suffering. "*It is necessary for all of us in the Church to enter into a process of conversion in order to respond to this need, which would imply proposing the kerygma as the fundamental proclamation and listening to Christ crucified and risen for us. [...] Hence the importance of returning to the essence of Christian life and of our first love, and returning to our roots as the first communities; that is to say, where all things were held in common*" (EC Costa Rica).

42. Fulfilling our mission we grow to the measure of our Christian vocation. 'Enlarging our tent' is at the heart of this missionary activity. Therefore, a Church that practises synodality offers a potent Gospel witness to the world: "*The Holy Spirit is pushing for the renewal of our strategies, commitments, dedication and motivation so that we can walk together and reach those who are farhest away: by spreading the Word of God with enthusiasm and joy, by putting our talents, gifts and skill to use, by accepting the new challenges and by producing cultural changes in the light of the Gospel and the life of the Church*" (EC Venezuela). Contained in the reports is the dream of such a Church: one deeply involved with the world's challenges, and capable of responding to these through concrete transformations. "*The world needs a 'Church that goes forth', that rejects the division between believers and non-believers, that looks at humanity and offers it more than a doctrine or a strategy, an experience of salvation, a 'coup of gift' that responds to the cry of humanity and nature*" (EC Portugal).

The Church's mission in today's world

43. Synodality is a call from God to walk together with the whole human family. In many places, Christians live in the midst of people of other faiths or non-believers and are engaged in a dialogue formed in the exchanges of everyday life and common living: "*A social climate of dialogue is cultivated with those who practice traditional African religion, too, and with every other person or community, whatever religious denomination they belong to*" (EC Senegal, Mauritania, Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau). However, the reports indicate that there is still a long way to go in terms of social, cultural, spiritual and intellectual exchange and collaboration.

44. The wounds of the Church are intimately connected to those of the world. The reports speak of the challenges of tribalism, sectarianism, racism, poverty, and gender inequality within the life of the Church, as well as the world. Uganda echoes many other countries in noting that in the structures of the Church "*the rich and the educated are listened to more than others*". The Philippines report notes that "*many of the underprivileged and those who were marginalised in society felt that they are also left out in the Church*". Other reports note the influence that ethnic discrimination and a culture based on tribalism has on the life of ecclesial communities. These realities form not just the background context of our mission but also define its focus and purpose: the message of the Gospel that the Church is charged to proclaim must also convert the structures of sin that hold humanity and creation captive.

45. The People of God express a deep desire to hear the cry of the poor and that of the earth. In particular, the reports invite us to recognize the interconnectedness of social and environmental challenges and to respond to them by collaborating and forming alliances with other Christian confessions, believers of other religions and all people of good will. This call for renewed ecumenism and interfaith engagement is particularly strong in regions marked by greater vulnerability to socio-environmental damage and more pronounced inequalities. For example, many African and Pacific Rim reports call on Churches around the world to recognize that addressing socio-

environmental challenges is no longer optional: "*It is our desire to protect this part of God's creation, as the wellbeing of our people depends on the ocean in so many ways. In some of our countries the major threat is the ocean as changes in climate have drastic outcomes for the actual survival of these countries*" (EC Pacific).

46. Some reports also noted the importance of the role of the Church in the public sphere, particularly in relation to processes of peace-building and reconciliation. In heavily divided societies this is often seen as a crucial part of mission. Other reports called for the Church to be more confident in contributing to debate and action for justice in the public sphere. The desire was for greater formation in the Church's social teaching. "*[O]ur Church is not called to confrontation, but to dialogue and cooperation on all levels […].Our dialogue cannot be an apologetic dialogue with useless arguments, but a dialogue of life and solidarity*" (Catholic Armenian Church).

47. A further theme common to many reports is the weakness of deep ecumenical engagement and the desire to learn how to breathe new life into the ecumenical journey, starting with concrete, daily collaboration on common concerns for social and environmental justice. A more united witness among Christians and between faith communities is expressed as an ardent desire.

Walking together with all Christians

48. The call to ecumenism is not, however, merely aimed at common social engagement. Many reports emphasize that there is no complete synodality without unity among Christians. This begins with the call for closer communion between Churches of different rites. Since the Second Vatican Council, ecumenical dialogue has made progress: "*In the real life of the Central African Republic, 'living together' between Christians of different confessions is self-evident. Our neighbourhoods, our families, our mortuary places, our workplaces are real places of ecumenism*" (EC Republic of Central Africa). However, many ecumenical issues related to synodal structures and ministries in the Church are still not well-articulated. The reports also note that there is an 'ecumenism of martydom' where persecution continues to unite Christians. The reports request greater attention to divisive realities, for example the question of sharing the Eucharist.

49. The reports also point to the sensitive phenomenon of the growth in the number of inter-church and interfaith families, with their specific needs in terms of accompaniment. Revitalizing the commitment to dialogue and accompaniment as a witness in a fragmented world requires targeted formation that increases confidence, capacity and motivation for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue among bishops, priests, consecrated women and men, lay men and women. "*Although the Catholic Church in India has attempted to foster ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, there is a feeling that the mission in this realm is minimal. The dialogue efforts drew only a handful of elites and remained mostly as cerebral exercises limited to the realm of ideas and concepts rather than becoming a movement of the masses and becoming also a dialogue of life, love and action at the base, by getting people of various faiths and ideologies to discern, plan and work together for common causes*" (EC India).

Cultural contexts

50. Numerous reports highlight the importance of recognizing that the Church fulfills its mission of proclaiming the Gospel within specific cultural contexts, and is influenced by profound and rapid social changes. The factors vary, but create significant challenges for participation and shape the reality of the Church's mission. Legacies of sectarianism, tribalism, ethno-nationalisms – differently expressed and experienced in diverse places - share the same characteristic threat: to narrow the Church's expression of its catholicity.

51. Many local Churches express concern about the impact of a lack of trust and credibility resulting from the abuse crises. Others point to individualism and consumerism as critical cultural factors: "*Every day we can feel that even in our country the proclamation of the Gospel is challenged by growing secularization, individualism and indifference to the institutional forms of religion*" (EC Hungary). Malta's report, like many others, underscores how historical entanglements between Church and political power continue to have an effect on the mission context. Many Churches feel they face all these cultural challenges simultaneously, but wish to grow more and more confidentin proclaiming the Gospel in "*a consumerist society that has failed to ensure sustainability, equity or life satisfaction*" (EC Ireland). Others experience a pluralism of positions within themselves: "*Southern Africa is also impacted by the international trends of secularisation, individualisation, and relativism. Issues such as the Church's teaching on abortion, contraception, ordination of women, married clergy, celibacy, divorce and remarriage, Holy Communion, homosexuality, LGBTQIA+ were raised up across the Dioceses both rural an urban. There were of course differing views on these and it is not possible to give a definitive community stance on any of these issues*" (EC South Africa). Many reports express particular regret and concern for the pressures experienced by families and the resulting impact on intergenerational relationships and faith transmission. Many Asian reports ask for better accompaniment and formation for families, as they negotiate changing cultural conditions.

52. In some contexts, the witness of the faith is lived to the point of martyrdom. There are countries where Christians, especially young people, face the challenge of systematic forced conversion to other religions. There are many reports that emphasize the insecurity and violence with which persecuted Christian minorities must contend. In such cases, walking together with people of other faiths, instead of retreating behind the wall of separation, requires the courage of prophecy.

Cultures, religions and dialogue

53. An essential element of a synodal Church, one which still needs significant deepening and better understanding, is the call to a more meaningful inter-cultural approach. This approach begins by walking together with others, appreciating cultural differences, understanding those particularities as elements which help us to grow: "*The encounter between the Catholic Church in Cambodia and the Buddhist Monks and lay Cambodian Buddhists 'creates a new culture.' All our activities affect each other and affect the whole world. We may differ in religion, but we all seek the*

common good" (EC Laos and Cambodia). It is the Churches that represent a small minority in the context in which they live that experience this most intensely: "*For example [there is] what we might call the 'porosity' of our Churches, whose line of demarcation with civil society is paradoxically less marked than elsewhere [...]. There is no problem of doing things 'inside' or 'outside' the Church. We are an outgoing Church by definition, because we are always 'in the home of others' and this has taught us listening, flexibility, and creativity in forms, language, and practices*" (EC North African Region - CERNA).

54. However, even when we come to acceptance or even appreciation of the other, the journey is still incomplete. The Church's intercultural approach aims at the horizon to which Christ calls us: the Kingdom of God. In the embrace of an enriching diversity, we can find our deeper unity and the opportunity to cooperate with God's grace: "*We should also take heed of the thoughts and ideas of the extended family and companions in the journey; non-Catholics, Politicians and non-believers. These are voices in our neighbourhood we cannot afford to avoid lest we miss out God's whispers through them*!" (EC Zimbabwe). This constitutes a witness within a world that struggles to see diversity in unity as a true vocation: "*The community [...] must take greater account of diversity, aspirations, needs and ways of living the faith. The universal Church must remain the guarantor of unity, but Dioceses can inculturate the faith locally: decentralization is necessary*" (Archdiocese of Luxembourg).

55. In a good number of reports, there is a call to better recognize, engage, integrate, and respond to the richness of local cultures, many of which have worldviews and styles of action that are synodal. People express a desire to promote (and in some cases recover and deepen) local culture, to integrate it with faith, and to incorporate it into the liturgy. "*In this context, Christians are called to offer their own contribution starting from their own vision of faith in order to enculturate it in the new cultural contexts [...]. This diversity of approaches should be seen as the implementation of a model of interculturality, where the different proposals complement and enrich each other, going beyond that of multiculturality, which consists in the simple juxtaposition of cultures, closed within their perimeters*" (Contribution of the Pontifical Council for Culture).

56. In many cases, the reports call especially for attention to the situation of indigenous peoples. Their spirituality, wisdom, and culture have much to teach. We need to reread history together with these peoples, to draw inspiration from those situations in which the Church's action has been at the service of their integral human development, and to ask forgiveness for the times when it has instead been complicit in their oppression. At the same time, some reports highlight the need to reconcile the apparent contradictions that exist between cultural practices or traditional beliefs and the teachings of the Church. On a more general level, the practice of synodality – communion, participation and mission – needs to be articulated within local cultures and contexts, in a tension that promotes discernment and generativity.

3.3 Communion, participation, and co-responsibility

57. The mission of the Church is realized through the lives of all the baptised. The reports express a deep desire to recognise and reaffirm this common dignity as the basis for the renewal of life and ministries in the Church. They affirm the value of all vocations in the Church, and above all, invite us to follow Jesus, returning to his style and way of exercising power and authority as a means of offering healing, reconciliation and liberation. "*It is important to build a synodal institutional model as an ecclesial paradigm of deconstructing pyramidal power that privileges unipersonal managements. The only legitimate authority in the Church must be that of love and service, following the example of the Lord*" (CE Argentina).

Beyond clericalism

58. The tone of the reports is not anti-clerical (against priests or the ministerial priesthood). Many express deep appreciation and affection for faithful and dedicated priests, and concerns about the many demands that they face. They also voice the desire for better formed, better accompanied and less isolated priests. They signal the importance of ridding the Church of clericalism so that all its members, including priests and laity, can fulfil a common mission. Clericalism is seen as a form of spiritual impoverishment, a deprivation of the true goods of ordained ministry, and a culture that isolates clergy and harms the laity. This culture separates us from the living experience of God and damages the kinship relations of the baptised, producing rigidity, attachment to legalistic power and an exercise of authority that is power rather than service. Clericalism can be as much a temptation for lay people as clergy., as the report from the Central African Republic underlines: "*some parish priests behave like 'order-givers', imposing their will without listening to anyone. Lay Christians do not feel they are members of the People of God. Initiatives that are too 'clericalistic' should be deplored. Some pastoral workers, clerics and lay, sometimes prefer to surround themselves with those who share their opinions and stay away from those whose convictions are hostile and in disagreement with them.*"

59. Although frank in their diagnosis of the problem, the reports are not hopeless. They express a deep and energetic desire for renewed forms of leadership – priestly, episcopal, religious and lay – that are relational and collaborative, and forms of authority capable of generating solidarity and co-responsibility: "*The tasks of the authorities include encouraging, involving, leading and facilitating participation in the life of the Church […] and delegating part of the responsibilities*" (EC Slovakia). Lay people, religious and clerics desire to put their talents and abilities at the disposal of the Church, and to do so they call for an exercise of leadership that enables them to be free. The reports express gratitude for those leaders who already exercise their role in these ways.

Rethinking women's participation

60. The call for a conversion of the Church's culture, for the salvation of the world, is linked in concrete terms to the possibility of establishing a new culture, with new practices and structures. A critical and urgent area in this regard concerns the role of

women and their vocation, rooted in our common baptismal dignity, to participate fully in the life of the Church. A growing awareness and sensitivity towards this issue is registered all over the world.

61. From all continents comes an appeal for Catholic women to be valued first and foremost as baptised and equal members of the People of God. There is almost unanimous affirmation that women love the Church deeply, but many feel sadness because their lives are often not well understood, and their contributions and charisms not always valued. The Holy Land report notes: "*Those who were most committed to the synod process were women, who seem to have realised not only that they had more to gain, but also more to offer by being relegated to a prophetic edge, from which they observe what happens in the life of the Church;*" and continues: "*In a Church where almost all decision-makers are men, there are few spaces where women can make their voices heard. Yet they are the backbone of Church communities, both because they represent the majority of the practising members and because they are among the most active members of the Church." The Korean report confirms: "Despite the great participation of women in various Church activities, they are often excluded from key decision-making processes. Therefore, the Church needs to improve its awareness and institutional aspects of their activities*" (EC Korea). The Church faces two related challenges: women remain the majority of those who attend liturgy and participate in activities, men a minority; yet most decision-making and governance roles are held by men. It is clear that the Church must find ways to attract men to a more active membership in the Church and to enable women to participate more fully at all levels of Church life.

62. In every area of their lives, women ask the Church to be their ally. This includes addressing the social realities of impoverishment, violence and diminishment faced by women across the globe. They call for a Church at their side, and grater understanding and support in combating these forces of destruction and exclusion. Women participating in the synodal processes desire both Church and society to be a place of flourishing, active participation and healthy belonging. Some reports note that the cultures of their countries have made progress in the inclusion and participation of women, progress that could serve as a model for the Church. "*This lack of equality for women within the Church is seen as a stumbling block for the Church in the modern world*" (EC New Zealand).

63. In different forms, the problem is present across cultural contexts and concerns the participation and recognition of laywomen as well as women religious. The report from Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life notes: "*Sexism in decision-making and Church language is prevalent in the Church… As a result, women are excluded from meaningful roles in the life of the Church, discriminated against by not receiving a fair wage for their ministries and services. Women religious are often regarded as cheap labour. There is a tendency – in some Churches – to exclude women and to entrust ecclesial functions to permanent deacons; and even to undervalue religious life without the habit, without regard for the fundamental equality and dignity of all baptised Christian faithful, women and men*" (USG/UISG).

64. Almost all reports raise the issue of full and equal participation of women: "The growing recognition of the importance of women in the life of the Church opens up possibilities for greater, albeit limited, participation in Church structures and decision-making spheres" (EC Brazil). However, the reports do not agree on a single or complete response to the question of the vocation, inclusion and flourishing of women in Church and society. After careful listening, many reports ask that the Church continue its discernment in relation to a range of specific questions: the active role of women in the governing structures of Church bodies, the possibility for women with adequate training to preach in parish settings, and a female diaconate. Much greater diversity of opinion was expressed on the subject of priestly ordination for women, which some reports call for, while others consider a closed issue.

65. A key element of this process concerns the recognition of the ways in which women, especially women religious, are already at the forefront of synodal practices in some of the most challenging social situations we face. The contribution submitted by the Union of Superiors General and the International Union of Superiors General notes: "*There are seeds of synodality where we break new ground in solidarity: securing a future of racial and ethnic justice and peace for black, brown, Asian and Native American brothers and sisters (United States); connecting in depth with indigenous and native sisters and brothers (Americas); opening new avenues of presence of religious sisters in diverse movements; alliance with like-minded groups to address key social issues (such as climate change, refugees and asylum seekers, homelessness), or issues of specific nations.*" In these contexts, women seek collaborators and can be teachers of synodality within wider Church processes.

Charisms, vocations and ministries

66. Responsibility for the synodal life of the Church cannot be delegated, but must be shared by all in response to the gifts the Spirit bestows on the faithful. "*One group in Lae Diocese commented about the synodality in their parish: 'In our parish pastoral council meeting, we see that we take the opinion/suggestion of all the people and also of woman before taking decision which will affect the life of all people in our parish.' Another parish commented: 'When we want to do anything in our parish, we meet together, take the suggestions of everyone in the community, decide together and carry out the decisions together'*" (EC Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands). However, there is no shortage of expressions of difficulty in actually practicing co-responsibility: "*As bishops we recognize that the 'baptismal theology' promoted by the Second Vatican Council, the basis of co-responsibility in mission, has not been sufficiently developed, and therefore the majority of the baptized do not feel a full identification with the Church and even less a missionary co-responsibility. Moreover, the leadership of current pastoral structures, as well as the mentality of many priests, do not foster this co-responsibility. Likewise, religious men and women, as well as lay apostolic movements, often remain subtly or openly on the margins of diocesan dynamics. Thus, the so-called 'committed laity' in parishes (who are the least numerous) end up being overburdened with intra-ecclesial responsibilities that exceed their strength and exhaust their time*" (EC Mexico).

67. This desire for co-responsibility becomes grounded first of all in the key of service to the common mission, that is, with the language of ministeriality. As the Italian report says, "*The experience made [...] has helped to rediscover the co-responsibility that comes from baptismal dignity and has let emerge the possibility of overcoming a vision of Church built around ordained ministry in order to move toward a Church that is 'all ministerial,' which is a communion of different charisms and ministries.*" The theme of ministry as central to the life of the Church, and the need to articulate the unity of mission with the plurality of ministries, emerges from the consultation of the People of God. Recognizing and promoting it "*is not here an end in itself, but an enhancement in the service of mission: different actors, equal in dignity, complementary to be a sign, to make credible a Church that is sacrament of the Kingdom*" (EC Belgium).

68. Many reports refer to practices for the recognition and promotion of ministries, which enable an effective entrustment by the community: "*The promotion of lay ministries and the assumption of responsibilities takes place through the election or appointment of the faithful who are considered to possess the requisites laid down*" (EC Mozambique). In this way, each ministry becomes a structural and structuring element of community life: "*The assumption of responsibility is guaranteed by the mandate received and the principle of subsidiarity. Catechists are instituted and have a special status in the Church Family of God. [...] Some of them are 'instituted' as Community Leaders, especially in rural areas where the presence of priests is rare*" (EC RD Congo). There is no shortage of questions regarding spaces for the possible exercise of lay ministry: "*Many groups would like to see greater participation of the laity, but the margins for maneuver are unclear: what concrete tasks can the laity perform? How is the responsibility of the baptized articulated with that of the parish priest?*" (EC Belgium).

69. In some contexts, there is a need to consider the variety of charisms and ministries that emerge in an organized form within associations, lay movements and new religious communities. Attention is needed to their specificities, and also to safeguarding the harmony within each local Church. When it enters into the concrete life of the Church, the theme of ministeriality inevitably meets with the question of its institutionalization. This raises the question of the structures through which the life of the Christian community unfolds.

70. In the Catholic Church, the charismatic gifts freely bestowed by the Holy Spirit, which help 'rejuvenate' the Church, are inseparable from the hierarchical gifts which are linked to the Sacrament of Orders in its various degrees. A great challenge of synodality that emerged during the first year is the harmonisation of these gifts, without pitting them against each other, under the guidance of the pastors, and thus without opposing the Church's charismatic and institutional dimensions.

3.4 Synodality takes shape

71. The synodal journey has brought out a number of tensions, made explicit

in the preceding paragraphs. We should not be afraid of them, but articulate them in a process of constant communal discernment, so as to harness them as a source of energy without them becoming destructive: only in this way will it be possible to continue walking together, rather than each going their own way. This is why the Church also needs to give a synodal form and way of proceeding to its own institutions and structures, particularly with regard to governance. Canon law will need to accompany this process of structural renewal creating the necessary changes to the arrangements currently in place.

72. However, to function in a truly synodal way, structures will need to be inhabited by people who are well-formed, in terms of vision and skills: "*The entire synodal exercise was one of active participation at diverse levels. For this process to continue, a change of mindset and a renewal of existing structures are needed*" (EC India). This new vision will need to be supported by a spirituality that will sustain the practice of synodality, avoiding reducing this reality to technical-organizational issues. Living this vision, as a common mission, can only happen through encounter with the Lord and listening to the Spirit. For there to be synodality, the presence of the Spirit is necessary, and there is no Spirit without prayer.

Structures and institutions

73. In terms of global-local tension– which in ecclesial language refers to the relationships of local Churches among themselves and with the universal Church – the dynamic of the synodal process places before us a novelty that is constituted precisely by the Continental Stage that we are currently living. Apart from a few regions characterized by a particular historical dynamic, so far the Church lacks established synodal practices at the continental level. The introduction of a specific Continental Stage in the process of the Synod does not constitute a mere organizational ploy, but corresponds to the dynamics of the incarnation of the Gospel which, taking root in areas characterised by a certain cultural cohesion and homogeneity, produces ecclesial communities with particular features, linked to the traits of each culture. In the context of a world that is both globalised and fragmented, each continent, because of its common historical roots, its tendency towards socio-cultural commonality and the fact that it presents the same challenges for the mission of evangelisation, constitutes a privileged sphere for stirring up a synodal dynamic that strengthens links between the Churches, encourages the sharing of experiences and the exchange of gifts, and helps to imagine new pastoral options.

74. Moreover, the dynamic of synodality challenges the Roman Curia itself: "It is necessary to recall the collaboration with the other Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, with which we consult regularly [...]. It is felt, however, that in this area more means should be found to encourage the growth of a more synodal practice and spirit to be implemented in the Roman Curia, as desired by the Holy Father with the new Apostolic Constitution Praedicate Evangelium" (Contribution of the Secretariat of State – Section for Relations with States and International Organisations).

75. Episcopal Conferences are also questioning what synodality means for them: "The bishops too have prayed and debated the question: 'How to make an Episcopal Conference more synodal? And how to live it in a more synodal way?'" (EC Paraguay). For example, "While maintaining their collegiality and freedom of decision-making that is devoid of any kind of pressure, the Episcopal Conferences should include representatives of the clergy and laity of the various dioceses in their debates and meetings, in the name of synodality" (Contribution of the Secretariat of State – Section for the Diplomatic Staff of the Holy See).

76. During the Continental Stage, Episcopal Conferences will be able to experience a new role, related not only to the promotion of communion within themselves, but also of dialogue between Churches linked by geographical and cultural proximity. In addition, the Continental Stage, through the proposed ecclesial and episcopal assemblies, will offer the opportunity to work out in grounded and practical terms how to articulate ecclesial synodality and episcopal collegiality. It will also offer the chance to reflect on ways to improve the harmony between the ordinary ways of exercising episcopal ministry and the assumption of a fully synodal style, a point on which some reports register a certain lack of energy. Revisiting the experience gained during the Continental Stage will help discern how to proceed more smoothly.

77. Far more than the Latin Church, the Oriental Churches offer a wealth of synodal structures, which are called to renewal today: "*The ancient synodal structures and ecclesial processes existing in the Syro-Malabar Church (Prathinidhiyogam, Palliyogam and Desayogam) express the synodal nature of the Church at the local, regional and universal levels, and are useful for forming us to synodality. They are at the service of the parishes and communities, which discover collaborative exercise of the pastoral ministries to move forward by listening to the Holy Spirit. Moreover, there are some new initiatives and attempts which try to empower the synodal structures of the Church*" (Syro-Malabar Catholic Church).

78. The dynamic of co-responsibility, with a view to and in service of the common mission and not as an organizational way of allocating roles and powers, runs through all levels of Church life. At the local level, it calls into question the bodies of participation already envisaged at the various levels and with the specificities proper to the various rites, and those that may possibly be appropriate to set up in service to a strengthened synodal dynamic: "*it was discussed to have structure and organization which sincerely reflects the spirit of synodality*" (EC Korea). These are first and foremost pastoral councils, called to be increasingly institutional places of inclusion, dialogue, transparency, discernment, evaluation and empowerment of all. In our time they are indispensable. Economic, diocesan and parish councils should then be added, taking note also of the episcopal and presbyteral councils around the bishop. Many reports show the need for these bodies to be not only consultative, but places where decisions are made on the basis of processes of communal discernment rather than on the majority principle used in democratic regimes.

79. In different parts of the world, transparency is seen as an essential practice for a Church growing into a more authentic synodality: "*The Catholic Church needs to become more open and transparent, everything is done in secret. Parish Council agendas and minutes are never published, financial committee decisions never discussed or balance sheets shared*" (individual observation from UK). Transparency will propel toward true accountability of all decision-making processes, including the criteria used for discernment. A style of leadership anchored in a synodal way of proceeding will produce trust and credibility: "*On some issues, the exercise of authority is effectively collegial, through consultation with the bodies embedded in the various structures of administration, management and pastoral animation [...]. But it is sometimes sad to note that in our Catholic Church there are bishops, priests, catechists, community leaders ..., who are very authoritarian. [...] Instead of serving the community, some serve themselves with unilateral decisions, and this hinders our synodal journey*" (EC Chad). In addition, many reports note the need to involve people with adequate professional competence in the management of economic and governance issues.

80. All Church institutions, as fully participatory bodies, are called to consider how they might integrate the call to synodality into the ways in which they exercise their functions and their mission, renewing their structures and procedures. A special case in point is represented by universities and academic institutions, which will be able to develop research addressing questions of synodality, helping to innovate in the design of educational and formation programmes. In particular, theological faculties will be able to deepen the ecclesiological, Christological and Pneumatological insights that synodal experiences and practices bring.

81. The adoption of an authentically synodal style also challenges consecrated life, beginning precisely with those practices that already emphasize the importance of the participation of all members in the life of the community to which they belong: "*Synodality in consecrated life affects discernment and decision-making. Although communal discernment has been practised in our Institutes, there is room for improvement. Membership in a body requires participation. [...] A shared desire is the establishment – both in the life of the Church and in the consecrated life – of a circular (participative) and less hierarchical and pyramidal style of governance*" (USG/UISG).

Formation

82. The overwhelming majority of reports indicate the need to provide for formation in synodality. Structures alone are not enough: there is a need for ongoing formation to support a widespread synodal culture. This formation must articulate itself in relationship to the local context so as to facilitate synodal conversion in the way participation, authority and leadership are exercised in view of more effectively fulfiling the common mission. It is not simply a matter of providing specific technical or methodological skills. Formation for synodality intersects all dimensions of Christian life and can only be "*an integral formation that includes personal, spiritual, theological, social and practical dimensions. For this, a community of reference is*

essential, because one principle of 'walking together' is the formation of the heart, which transcends concrete knowledge and embraces the whole of life. It is necessary to incorporate in the Christian life a continuous and permanent formation to put synodality into practice, to mature and grow in faith, to participate in public life, to increase the love and participation of the faithful in the Eucharist, to assume stable ministries, to exercise real co-responsibility in the governance of the Church, to dialogue with other Churches and with society in order to bring those who are far away closer in a spirit of fraternity" (EC Spain). This training will have to be addressed to all members of the People of God: "*For the realization of the said elements of synodality, there is an urgent need for the education and formation programmes for clergy and lay people for developing a shared understanding of synodality that is so vital for journeying together in the local Churches*" (EC Myanmar). In this way, the perspective of synodality will converge with catechesis and pastoral care, helping to keep them anchored in a mission perspective.

83. However, the need for more specific formation in listening and dialogue is also emphasised, for example through the establishment of synodality agents and teams. Many reports point to the need to ensure formation in synodality for those who will be called to assume leadership roles, especially priests: "*Though long, seminary formation is geared toward preparing the clergy for a priestly lifestyle and devoid of forming them for pastoral coordination. The formation and training on working together, listening to one another and participation in the mission together is essential in priestly formation*" (EC Sri Lanka).

Spirituality

84. A culture of synodality, which is indispensable for animating structures and institutions, requires adequate formation, and, above all, needs to be nurtured by familiarity with the Lord and the capacity to listen to the voice of the Spirit: "*spiritual discernment must accompany strategic planning and decision-making, so that each project is welcomed and accompanied by the Holy Spirit*" (Greek Melkite Catholic Church). For this we must grow in a synodal spirituality that is based on attention to interiority and conscience. "*In personal spirituality and in the message of the Church, the joy of the risen Christ must prevail and not the fear of a God who punishes*" (EC Czech Republic).

85. As has already been stressed many times, a synodal Church first of all needs to deal with the many tensions that emerge from encountering diversity. Therefore, a synodal spirituality can only be one that welcomes differences and promotes harmony, and draws from the tensions the energies to continue on the journey. To achieve this, it will have to move from accentuating the individual dimension to the collective dimension: a spirituality of "we," which can enhance the contributions of each person.

86. The first year of the synodal journey has already offered stimulating experiences in this direction, through the proposed method of spiritual conversation. This method has enabled the People of God to savor the flavor of an interpersonal

encounter around the Word of God and the varied resonances it arouses in the heart of each person. In addition to making it an ordinary practice in the life of the Church, as is demanded by many, this method must evolve in the direction of communal discernment, particularly within the bodies of participation. This entails a greater effort to integrate the spiritual dimension within the ordinary life of ecclesial institutions and of their governance structures, articulating discernment within decision-making processes. Prayer and silence cannot remain extraneous to these processes, as if it were a preamble or an appendix.

87. Christian spirituality is expressed in different ways, related both to the multiplicity of traditions between East and West and to the variety of charisms in consecrated life and ecclesial movements. A synodal Church is built around diversity, and the encounter between different spiritual traditions can be a formative "gymnasium" insofar as it is capable of promoting communion and harmony, contributing to overcoming the polarizations that many Churches experience.

3.5 Synodal life and liturgy

88. The reports emphasise in many ways the deep link between synodality and liturgy: "In 'walking together', prayer, devotion to Mary as a missionary disciple listening to the Word, lectio divina and liturgical celebration inspire the purpose of belonging" (EC Colombia).

Roots that reach deep

89. The Eucharist is already, in itself, the 'source and summit' of the Church's synodal dynamism. "Liturgical celebration and prayer are experienced as a force for uniting and mobilizing human and spiritual energies.The prevailing opinion is that prayer fosters joy of life and a purpose of community, because it is seen as a point of reference, a place of strength and an oasis of peace. [...] the contributions underscore two modalities to be developed in view of a synodal journey: the unity of the community and the joy of life. This journey would pass through the great liturgical gatherings (pilgrimages...), to nourish popular piety, renew faith, nourish the feeling of belonging, and thus better accompany Christians so that they witness to the Gospel of charity in the face of communitarianism and 'identity withdrawal' which are more and more visible and aggressive" (EC Burkina Faso e Niger).

90. In countries in diverse areas of the world "the bond of many baptised people with the Church passes above all through the phenomenon of popular religiosity. [...] Many people consider it a sign of belonging to the Church; for this reason, we must promote and evangelise [it], with a view to a more intense participation and a conscious incorporation into Christian life" (EC Panama).

Managing tensions: renewal and reconciliation

91. Many reports strongly encourage the implementation of a synodal style of liturgical celebration that allows for the active participation of all the faithful in welcoming all differences, valuing all ministries, and recognising all charisms. The synodal listening of the Churches records many issues to be addressed in this direction:

from rethinking a liturgy too concentrated on the celebrant, to the modalities of active participation of the laity, to the access of women to ministerial roles. "*While being faithful to the tradition, its originality, antiquity, and uniformity, let us try to make the liturgical celebration more alive and participatory of all the community of believers; priests, laity, youth and children, reading the signs of the time with sound discernment. The young people are trying to have a space in the liturgy with songs and it is positive*" (EC Ethiopia).

92. The current experience of the Churches, however, records knots of conflict which need to be addressed in a synodal manner, such as discerning the relationship to preconciliar rites: "*Division regarding the celebration of the liturgy was reflected in synodal consultations. 'Sadly, celebration of the Eucharist is also experienced as an area of division within the Church. The most common issue regarding the liturgy is the celebration of the pre-Conciliar Mass.' The limited access to the 1962 Missal was lamented; many felt that the differences over how to celebrate the liturgy 'sometimes reach the level of animosity. People on each side of the issue reported feeling judged by those who differ from them'*" (EC USA). The Eucharist, sacrament of unity in love in Christ, cannot become a reason for confrontation, ideology, rift or division. Moreover, with direct impact on the life of many Churches, there are elements of tension specific to the ecumenical sphere, such as the sharing of the Eucharist. Finally, there are problems related to the modalities of faith inculturation and interreligious dialogue, which also affect the forms of celebration and prayer.

93. The reports do not fail to point out the main shortcomings of the actual celebratory praxis, which obscure its synodal effectiveness. In particular, the following are emphasized: the liturgical protagonism of the priest and the risk of the passivity of the wider liturgical community; poor preaching, including the distance between the content of the sermon, the beauty of faith and the concreteness of life; and the separation between the liturgical life of the assembly and the family network of the community. The quality of homilies is almost unanimously reported as a problem: there is a call for "*deeper homilies, centered on the Gospel and the readings of the day, and not on politics, making use of accessible and attractive language that refers to the lives of the faithful*" (Maronite Church).

94. A particular source of suffering are those situations in which access to the Eucharist and to the other Sacraments is hindered or prevented by a variety of causes: there is a strong demand to find solutions to these forms of sacramental deprivation. For example, communities living in very remote areas are cited, or the use of charging fees for access to celebrations, which discriminates against the poorest. Many summaries also give voice to the pain of not being able to access the Sacraments experienced by remarried divorcees and those who have entered into polygamous marriages.There is no unanimity on how to deal with these situations: "*Access to Holy Communion is denied to the divorced and remarried, and they expressed hurt at this exclusion. Some expressed the view that the Church should be more flexible, but others felt this practice should be upheld*" (EC Malaysia).

A synodal style of celebrating

95. At the same time, the synod process represented an opportunity to experience anew the diversity in forms of prayer and celebration, increasing the desire to make it more accessible in the ordinary life of communities. The French report gives voice to three aspirations: "*the first [...] concerns the diversification of liturgies to the benefit of celebrations of the Word, that is, moments of prayer that place meditation on biblical texts at the centre. The second, less frequent, recalls the importance of pilgrimages and popular piety. The third calls for a renewed liturgical formation, to address a problem reported by many reports, namely the incomprehensibility of the language normally used by the Church*" (EC France). Some regions raise the question of the reform of the liturgy, even in the Oriental Churches where it is profoundly linked to the identity of the Church: "*In our Church, a liturgical reform is opportune, so as to re-read in the light of the Holy Spirit the action and participation of the People of God in God's work in our time*" (Greek-Melkite Church).

96. Many Churches also emphasise the importance of habitually linking liturgical celebration with the various forms of dialogical sharing and fraternal conviviality. "*Conviviality and fraternity were always part of the experience [of synod meetings]. In every meeting, from the initial one to the subsequent consultations in parishes and pastoral structures, there was salu-salo (sharing of food). Many pointed out how the [synodal] meetings positively influenced the celebration of the liturgies*" (EC Philippines).

97. The variety of ritual traditions of liturgical prayer, as well as the symbolic forms with which diverse cultures express themselves, is considered by all to be an asset. A renewed love for spirituality, a commitment to care for the beauty and the synodal style of celebration all support the radiance of a missionary Church: "*All the contributions received speak of celebrations as spaces that can offer inspiration and help to live the faith in personal, family, professional life, in the neighborhood and in the community itself*" (EC Uruguay).

4. The next steps

98. Looking to the future of the synodal process requires considering two very different time horizons. The first is the long-term horizon, in which synodality takes the form of a perennial call to personal conversion and reform of the Church. The second, clearly at the service of the first, is the one that focuses our attention on the events of the Continental Stage that we experiencing.

4.1 A journey of conversion and reform

99. In the reports, the People of God express a desire to be less a Church of maintenance and conservation and more a Church that goes out in mission. A connection emerges between deepening communion through synodality on the

one hand and strengthening mission on the other: being synodal leads into renewed mission. As the Spanish report says: "*we believe that communion must lead us to a permanent state of mission: meeting and listening to each other, dialogue, reflection, discernment together are all actions with positive effects in themselves, but they are not understandable if they are not directed at pushing us to go beyond ourselves and our communities of reference in order to carry out the mission entrusted to us as Church.*"

100. The People of God have found joy in walking together and express the desire to continue doing so. How to do this as a truly global Catholic community is something that still needs to be fully discovered: "*To walk in a synodal way, by listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue, has possibly an 'already and not yet' dimension, it is there, but much more to be done. The laity are capable, talented and willing to contribute more and more, provided they are given opportunities. Further surveys and studies at the parish level can open up more avenues where the contributions of the laity can be immense and the result would be more vibrant and flourishing Church, which is the goal of synodality*" (EC Namibia). We are a learning Church, and to be so we need continuous discernment to help us read the Word of God and the signs of the times together, so as to move forward in the direction the Spirit is pointing us.

101. At the same time, walking together as the People of God requires us to recognize the need for continual conversion, individual and communal. On the institutional and pastoral level, this conversion translates into an equally continuous reform of the Church, its structures and style, in the wake of the drive for continuous 'aggiornamento,' the precious legacy of the Second Vatican Council to which we are called to look as we celebrate its 60th anniversary.

102. In the journey of conversion and reform, we are supported by the gifts we have received during the first year of the synodal journey, beginning with what Jesus shows us in the Gospels. The free and gratuitous attention to the other, which is the basis of listening, is not a limited resource to be jealously guarded, but an overflowing source that does not run out, but grows the more we draw from it. Listening and dialogue are the way to access the gifts that the Spirit offers us through the multifaceted variety of the one Church: of charisms, of vocations, of talents, of skills, of languages and cultures, of spiritual and theological traditions, of different forms of celebrating and giving thanks. The reports do not call for uniformity, but ask that we learn to grow in a sincere harmony that helps the baptised fulfil their mission in the world by creating the bonds necessary to walk together joyfully.

103. The message of our synodal way is simple: we are learning to walk together, and sit together to break the one bread, in such a way that each is able to find their place. Everyone is called to take part in this journey, no one is excluded. To this we feel called so that we can credibly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to all people. This is the path we seek to continue on in our next Continental Stage.

4.2 Methodology for the Continental Stage

104. This Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) invites us to take a further step in this spiritual journey "*for a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission*" *and constitutes its point of reference: "Just as the experience of the disciples at Emmaus was only the beginning of their new mission, our synodal process is only a first step*" (EC Russian Federation). The continental level constitutes an opportunity to live synodality, which we are still learning to grasp and which we are now invited to practise concretely.

105. The DCS, which gathers and restores to the local Churches, what the People of God from around the world said in the first year of the Synod, is meant to guide us and enable us to deepen our discernment, keeping in mind the basic question that animates 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, no. 2).

106. The DCS is thus the privileged instrument through which the dialogue of the local Churches among themselves and with the universal Church can take place during the Continental Stage. To pursue this process of listening, dialogue and discernment, the reflection will focus on three questions:

- "After having read and prayed with the DCS, which **intuitions** resonate most strongly with the lived experiences and realities of the Church in your continent? Which experiences are new, or illuminating to you?"
- "After having read and prayed with the DCS, what substantial tensions or divergences emerge as particularly important in your continent's perspective? Consequently, what are the **questions or issues** that should be addressed and considered in the next steps of the process?"
- "Looking at what emerges from the previous two questions, what are the **priorities, recurring themes and calls to action** that can be shared with other local Churches around the world and discussed during the First Session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023?"

Key stages in the process

107. Each Continental Assembly is called to put in place a discernment process on the DCS that is appropriate to its local context, and draft a Final Document to account for it. The Final Documents of the seven Continental Assemblies will be used as the basis for drafting the *Instrumentum Laboris*, which will be completed by June 2023.

108. The vast majority of Episcopal Conferences that responded to the consultation sent by the General Secretariat of the Synod want representatives from the entire People of God to be involved in the Continental Stage. It is therefore asked that all Assemblies be ecclesial and not merely episcopal, ensuring that their composition adequately represents the variety of the People of God: bishops, presbyters, deacons, consecrated women and men, laymen and women. With respect to the participants

in the Continental Assemblies, it is important to pay special attention to the presence of women and young people (laymen and laywomen, consecrated men and women in formation, seminarians); people living in conditions of poverty or marginalization, and those who have direct contact with these groups and persons; fraternal delegates from other Christian denominations; representatives of other religions and faith traditions; and some people with no religious affiliation. Furthermore, bishops are invited to meet at the end of the Continental Assemblies to collegially reread the lived synodal experience from the perspective of their specific charism and role. In particular, they are asked to identify appropriate ways to carry out their task of validating and approving the Final Document, ensuring that it is the fruit of an authentically synodal journey, respectful of the process that has taken place and faithful to the diverse voices of the People of God in each continent.

109. The process leading from the publication of this DCS to the drafting of the *Instrumentum Laboris* will be marked by the following steps:

1) The DCS will be sent to all diocesan bishops; each of them, together with the diocesan synodal team that coordinated the first phase, will arrange an ecclesial process of discernment on the DCS, starting with the three questions indicated above in no. 106. Each local Church will thus have the opportunity to listen to the voice of the other Churches, gathered in the DCS, and to respond to it from its own experience.
2) With the involvement of its synodal team, each Episcopal Conference has the task of collecting and synthesizing in the form most appropriate to its own context the reflections around the three questions coming from the individual Dioceses.
3) The reflection and discernment of each Episcopal Conference will then be shared within the Continental Assembly, according to the modalities identified by the Continental Task Force.
4) In planning the conduct of each specific Continental Assembly, it may be useful to reflect on how to use the widespread and much-appreciated method of "spiritual conversation" (see Vademecum, Appendix B, no. 8), which can facilitate the involvement of all in discernment. In particular, its three phases should be emphasized: the taking of the floor by each participant, the resonance of listening to others, and the discernment of the fruits by the group. As already highlighted in the Methodological Guidelines, it will be important to ensure the participation in the Continental Assemblies of bishops, priests, deacons, lay men and women, consecrated men and women, as well as people capable of expressing the views of those on the margins.
5) Each Continental Assembly will draft its own Final Document of a maximum of about twenty pages confronting the three questions from its own specific context. The Final Documents are to be submitted by each Continental Task Force to the Synod Secretariat by March 31, 2023. Based on the Final Documents of the Continental Assemblies, the *Instrumentum laboris* will be drafted by June 2023.

FINAL DOCUMENTS OF THE CONTINENTAL ASSEMBLIES

FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE CONTINENTAL STAGE IN AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR

"I came here to encourage you to take this synodal process seriously and to tell you that the Holy Spirit needs you. It is true: the Holy Spirit needs us. Listen to him by listening to each other. Leave no one behind or excluded."

(Pope Francis)

1. Introduction

From 9th – 10th October 2021, the Holy Father Pope Francis officially launched the Synod on Synodality and on the 17th of the same month the initiative was launched in all the Dioceses of the world. This first phase of the Synod was experienced in the local Churches. This involved consultations, seminars and sensitisation activities at the various levels of the Dioceses. Different religious bodies and groups in the local Churches were organised to express their views on the new initiative. The results of these consultations were brought together by each Diocese and were, further, collected at the national levels. The National Episcopal Conferences, finally, produced the national syntheses of the lived experience of Synodality which contains the expectations of the people of God concerning the Synodality initiative. These syntheses were sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod in Rome.

In September 2022, the Secretaries General of the Regional Episcopal Conferences in Africa submitted the syntheses of the contributions of the National Episcopal Conferences of their regions to the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). From these, SECAM produced a document that recapitulates the expectations of all the regions in Africa.

Having gone through the syntheses of the Episcopal Conferences from all the countries of the world, the General Secretariat of the Synod on Synodality produced a universal synthesis from what was received from the local Churches called "Working Document for the Continental Stage" (DCS). From 5th -9th December, 2022, and from 22nd-26th January, 2023, SECAM brought together the members of the Continental Team for the Synod on Synodality, namely: Secretaries General of the Regional Episcopal Conferences, members of the African Synodality Initiative, theologians, religious and some lay faithful, numbering 28 and 20 persons respectively, to receive the Working Document for the Continental Stage and to familiarise themselves with the practice of the Spiritual Conversation method towards the Continental Assembly.

The final phase of the continental celebration of the Synod on Synodality took place in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia from 1st to 6th March 2023. This event brought together about 209 people made up of Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Religious men and women, and lay faithful, with the lay faithful being in greater number. It was an occasion for an inclusive listening where, using the Spiritual Conversation Method, everyone was given the opportunity to express his/her views about Synodality, guided by the Document for the Continental Stage. For five days, the Church Family of God in Africa through the continental representatives prayed, listened and reflected on the new way of being a Church today, i.e. the Synodal way. It was a spiritual Synodal journey of the Church Family of God in Africa, an opportunity to practise Synodality in reality. At the end of the session, the assembly went through the Final Document and officially adopted it as the Document for the African Church.

In the spirit of collegiality, all the Cardinals and Bishops sat together in another

meeting on the last day of the Assembly to evaluate the whole Synodal process. They expressed satisfaction about the process, especially about the family spirit that prevailed throughout the Assembly. They, equally, went through the Final Document and unanimously adopted it as the Final Document for the African Continental Synodal Assembly.

These meetings became the basis for the elaboration of the present document which took into consideration all the main ideas raised during the discussions.

At the opening of the first working session in Accra, the purpose of the session was given as follows:

- To come to know one another better, a way of living the Synodality in a concrete manner.
- To enter into communion with the universal Church in the process of deeper prayer, listening and discernment to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church.
- To listen to what the people of Africa said during the first year of the Synod.
- To reread the Document for the Continental Stage in the context of the Church in Africa.

The method used in the work is the Spiritual Conversation Method. The method was not familiar to most of the participants. It was, therefore, taught to the group.

Having learnt the method, the group practised it for the remaining days of the working session starting from the first day. The evening session of the first day was devoted to the practical aspects of the method. Five groups were constituted and asked to give their "personal impressions from the regional summaries and synthesis: What have the people of God from the Church in Africa said in the first year of the synod?" The session ended with the reports of the various groups on the outcome of their reflection on the question.

The second day of the session was devoted to the study of the Document for the Continental Stage. This was done with two presentations on the major outlines and logic of the document. After the exposé, the participants were given time to pray, reflect and study the document individually. The evening session was, then, devoted to group study of the documents focusing on:

- Intuitions that resonate most strongly with the lived experiences and realities of the Church on the African continent.
- Questions or issues that should be addressed and considered in the next step of the process.
- Priorities, recurrent themes and calls to action that can be shared with other local Churches around the world and discussed during the first session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023.

At the end of the first working session in December 2022, each participant was

asked to practise what was learnt, especially the use of the Spiritual Conversation Method, with the people of his or her faith community or Regional Conference as the case may be. This was meant to be a way of renewed listening to the people at the grassroot levels and a way of mastering the method which would be used in facilitating the continental event in March 2023.

The working session in Accra was followed by another in Nairobi, Kenya, from 22nd – 26th January, 2023. The aim was to continue deepening the knowledge of the Document for the Continental Stage and training members of the working team to help them in facilitating the planned Continental Assembly to be held in Addis Ababa from 1st to 6th March, 2023.

The working session of Nairobi was an opportunity for members of the team to share their experiences with regard to the use of the Spiritual Conversation Method in the study of the Document for the Continental Stage with their various communities after the Accra session. The sharing of the experiences exposed some difficulties that occurred while listening to others in the spirit of Synodality. These difficulties include:

- Listening to the other was not easy, as most people wanted their positions to be taken into account.
- Some people were not happy that they were not consulted at the initial phase of the consultation only to be invited at the continental phase.
- There was a sort of reticence from some people who felt that having worked at the Diocesan phase, they should not start the same work all over again.
- The time was too short to reach out to the right persons to deepen the understanding of the document and obtain the desired result.
- It was difficult to apply the Spiritual Conversation Method to a big text like the Document for the Continental Stage.
- There was difficulty in meeting people physically and the alternative means which was that of telecommunications also met with the problem of insufficient resources.
- Those who were not in an official position in the Church found it difficult to bring people together to study the Document for the Continental Stage using the Spiritual Conversation Method because people listen more to those in authority in the Church.

The general experience of the participants was that people were eager to be involved in the life of the Church and that the Synod on Synodality has awakened a new desire for a Church that takes into account the thoughts, concerns and feelings of every member. They were ready to make contributions and wanted to be sure that their expectations would bear durable fruit by bringing lasting changes in the life of the Church and her institutions.

The two previous experiences of Accra and Nairobi formed the basis for the Addis Ababa event which involved representatives from all the countries of Africa and the Islands. The group used the same method of prayer, silence and Spiritual

Conversation. They worked in plenaries and in small groups and were able to discern the Synodal Priorities for the Church in Africa.

The choice of Addis Ababa as the venue for the Continental Assembly was conditioned by a number of factors: it is the seat of the African Union (AU), a body that unites all the countries of Africa; it is a country that has the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam; it is a country marked with a welcoming culture.

2. The Synodal Experience at the Continental Stage

The encounter as a concrete experience by Africans of Synodality by working and journeying together for five days helped us to become aware of some intuitions that generally resonate from one country to the other and raised some pertinent questions concerning Synodality.

2.1. Intuitions

Our prayer and reflection on the Document for the Continental Stage gave rise to the following intuitions from our African background:

1. **The Church in Africa has lived out Synodality from the time of the Second Vatican Council. The fruit of this is seen in the formation of SECAM and other Regional Episcopal Conferences during and immediately after the Council.**
   Some important documents on and from the African Church are also fruits of Synodality. They include *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995), *Africae Munus* (2011) and the Kampala Document (2019).
   The Small Christian Communities are the fruits of Synodality at the grassroot levels where people live and act together with common faith concerns.
2. **The image of the tent as the principal image for Synodality "enlarge the space of your tent" (Is. 54:2) was heavily contested by many, who associate the image with warfare, displacement and refugee situations**. The assembly preferred the image of the Family of God where everyone has his or her place and responsibilities according to 'family values' (though there is no homogeneity on what the latter includes in all countries).
3. **Listening is an attitude of the Synod and the Church must be a listening Church if it is to remain Synodal. However, the realities listened to are not always the same: family, church, national issues, social problems, spiritual problems, etc., often vary in interpretation or social importance**.
   Listening helps to bring healing to those who are wounded. Listening invites us to another way of celebrating our liturgy in a culturally authentic manner. Applying the culture of listening to the liturgical celebration will help to put the

people at the forefront, enhance their active participation and make them more actors than spectators.

The Church listens to all, but the listening disturbs in such a way that the Church is, sometimes, so overwhelmed that some persons feel that the Church does not listen, or at least is selective in whose voices matter. Many would want the Church to listen to all and bring solutions to all problems of the society, thus confusing the role of the Church with that of the State and government.

Listening is not only listening to people. It involves listening to the local culture with the dynamics of co-responsibility and with the consciousness that culture is dynamic and evolving. The Church in Africa is a fruit of the endeavours of Western missionaries. The Church came with a culture into another culture. Synodality should help to listen to the cultural practices that have been either ignored, condemned or suppressed by the Western culture through which the Gospel was preached to Africans. These cultural practices, some deeply influenced and changed by Western and Christian cultural influences, continue to affect the way Christians live out the Gospel. They should, therefore, be listened to in view of either integrating, purifying or collectively rejecting them based on a clear understanding of the exigencies of the Gospel.

4. **The need for the participation of women, youth and physically challenged persons in the life of the Church is another intuition that comes out strongly in the Document**.

   Women form a greater percentage of active members of the Church. They make meaningful contributions to the life and mission of the Church. Many of them feel that they are not given a sufficient place in the decision-making structures of the Church. There is a call to create more opportunities and structures for women to do more in the Church.

   The youth also complained that they would like to be more visible in the life of the Church. An idea that was strongly felt was that of a preferential option for the youth. There is a call to adapt the activities and celebrations of the Church to styles that will attract and maintain the youth in the Church.

   The need to enhance the participation of persons with disability in the life and mission of the Church also came out clearly in the Document. The Church should guard against the way the society tends to cast them aside. They are often considered as not having much to offer based on the false idea that their lives are worth less than others. If the appropriate opportunity is created, they can feel at home in the Church and can contribute towards the progress and growth of the Church. This calls for special initiatives, formations and structures that will help them to have a prominent place in the Church.

5. **It is evident that there are mundane forces that are opposed to the mission of the Church**. Such forces include ideologies and economic or political policies that are prejudicial to the doctrines of the faith. Some of these forces influence Church leaders and put pressure on theologians with the intention of diluting the content of the faith. There is a call for the Synodal Church to be awake to such influences and remain focused on the Word of God and the firm tradition of the Church.

6. **Synodality draws everyone's attention to the need for co-responsibility – making it relevant to learn to walk together through listening, discernment and dialogue**.
   Many expressed the view that decisions in the Church are sometimes taken without sufficient dialogue, but Synodality requires taking everyone as important and responsible. The recognition of the value of everyone in a Christian community imposes the necessity of taking their opinions into consideration for proper discernment and decision-making.
7. **The Synodal Church should seek to balance her efforts in addressing the concrete issues in people's lives with the spiritual aspects**.
   This idea comes from the experience of some people who believe that the Church seems to concentrate more on their spiritual needs than on concrete material needs. Just as Jesus fed the hungry, the Synodal Church should learn to balance her care for spiritual issues with her care for material problems.
8. **A sensitisation on Synodality as tied to evangelisation**: from the image of the Church as a Family of God where efforts should be made to accommodate everyone who so desires and even those who are deliberately outside comes the intuition that inclusivity should be harmonised with conversion, since walking together in communion, participation and mission cannot be divorced from evangelisation. The mission of the Church to spread the Gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth should be based on the need to help people abandon their old ways that are not in conformity with the Word of God and embrace the truth of the Gospel.
9. **There is the need for openness of all Catholics to continuous formation**. The understanding of the Synodal Church as one that walks together with everyone calls for the formation of the clergy and the laity on this new consciousness. Pastors who lead the people of God should be the first to imbibe the Synodal mentality and apply it in their life and ministry. There is an urgent need for educational and formational programmes for the clergy and the lay faithful to initiate the necessary conversion to imbibe the new culture of walking together as a Synodal Church, especially at the local Church level. This formation should touch on the formation received in the seminaries, so that future pastors are prepared to embrace the new culture of walking together and acquire the capacity for listening to the Spirit of God and to the people.
10. **Some feel that the Synodal Church should be less conservative and have the courage to do a self-examination on how she has accepted new ideas**. The new culture of the Synodal Church would demand a lot of openness and a learning attitude from the Church, in order to remain relevant in the world. However, some feel that the Church must not be too open to every new idea since some ideas are perceived as not for the betterment of the world. In such cases, the Church should even have courage to go against certain currents of thought. Much depends on Christians' perception of new social forces – some well-informed, others less so – and the degree to which such ideas that challenge the Church's official positions might have valid points should be discerned more openly and thoroughly.

11. **The care and protection of children and vulnerable persons was also invoked as an integral aspect of the mission of the Synodal Church**.
12. **To open the family means accommodating those who feel marginalized, for example, people in polygamous marriages, divorced and remarried, and single parents**. Many people expressed the desire to revisit the position of the Church on those that considered themselves officially marginalized due to irregular family situations. How does the openness of the family apply to such people in the spirit of Synodality that encourages the Church to walk together with all believers? And what domestic arrangements have we overlooked?
13. **About clericalism, there is a new awareness that clericalism is even present among lay people who give credence to or accept without question what the priest says**. Inasmuch as some priests could be accused of being closed and authoritative, the internalised clericalism of laity is also seen as promoting such a culture by not playing its proper role in the Church and by deferring to priests to carry all the burden of leading, teaching and making all the decisions. This deference is seen as another form of clericalism.
14. **There is the need to deepen reflections on no. 35 of the Document for the Continental Stage about the youth with regards to real accompaniment and the need to help the youth and be close to them in their crucial moment to help them rediscover the value of marriage**. Give more attention to the youth in the Church by providing more formative programmes to deepen their faith, give them a voice, and create opportunities (through structural changes) that allow the youth to bring innovative ideas to the Church today. Without attending to the issues faced by the youth, we cannot walk together. The issues of the youth go beyond religion. We need to reflect on contemporary political and economic systems like new capitalism that will not only lead to unemployment but also to redundancy (caused by lack of jobs through technological advancement).
15. **There is the need to keep alive the Synodal spirit in the Church beyond the Continental Assembly in Addis Ababa**. Many issues that are local to Africa came up in the discussions and such problems can only be treated locally. Based on this, there is a call for each local Church to continue deepening the experience of Synodality in order to evolve a more dynamic Synodal Church that goes beyond the Continental Synodal Assembly.
16. **Give Stage and make deliberate efforts to overcome cultural marginalisation of minority groups, especially the indigenous peoples. more attention to cultural issues as in nos. 55 and 56 of the Document for the Continental**. There is the need to reread the history of the indigenous people and then recover, promote and integrate their cultural practices into the liturgy. This is a proper inculturation which enhances diversity, moving from multi-culturality to inter-culturality where different practices complement and enrich one another.
17. **To deepen the study of no. 88ff of the Document for the Continental Stage on Liturgy which seems more theoretical**. This process could help to make it more practical and sensitive to cultural differences. The emphasis here should be on getting people to participate more actively in Liturgical and community prayer gatherings. This will require getting in deep contact with the people's

cultural ways of worship. There is the call to make Liturgy more contextual.

18. **Liturgically, the Church should find a way of doing things differently, so that those who come to Liturgical celebrations should feel that they are actually considered and given an opportunity to express themselves and participate actively**.
19. **African Unity**: To be able to ask questions and try to resolve problems without removing our capacity to reflect and achieve what we need by ourselves. Undertaking a deep evaluation of all the documents, for example, the Kampala Document, so that we do not look for answers outside us. At the level of Solidarity, we are weak: a problem in Uganda should be of concern to Algeria. A Synodal African Church should be able to unite Africans.
20. **The need for Church authorities to engage the political leadership of the society in advocacy for Good Governance and Justice**. This is to be seen as part of the missionary mandate of making Christ known to the world. A Synodal Church should, therefore, be a Church in continuous mission in all the dimensions of human existence.

2.2. Questions or issues

A careful study of the Document for the Continental Stage raises a number of questions and issues that need to be clarified. They include:

1. What mechanism do we put in place to cater for the respect for diverse cultures?
2. How is the Synodal Church more empathetic and what are her means of promoting concrete Solidarity?
3. There is a tension between a strong understanding of truth and the principle of mercy (particularly the accommodation with difference, minority views and dissent), between belonging to the Church and not living as a full member of the Church, between autonomy and co-responsibility. How do we deal with it?
4. Where is Synodality taking us as we listen to the voices of diverse people? Is this not leading us to democracy? Thus, there is only a thin line between dialogue, listening and decision making and the rule of the majority.
5. Everything we have raised is important. How would the local Church make use of all the points that are being raised in our discussions?
6. In listening to others, to the Holy Spirit and to the Word of God, what are the criteria for discernment and judgement?

3. Conclusion

Having listened to other Churches and to the experience of Africans, we consider the following eight points to be recurrent and urgent priorities on which it is important to continue discernment at the level of the universal Church. These points are directly related to manner of living out the Synodal spirit of Communion, Participation and Mission.

1. **To deepen Catholic Synodality according to the values of the Church as Family of God, nurture life from conception to natural death, based on co-responsibility, biblical hospitality (Eph. 2:19), dignity of children, women and men, and reaching out to the entire human family and all creation, from the Small Christian Communities to the Vatican level.**
   The Church is built on the Word of God, Tradition and the Magisterium. The Synodal Church style should be founded on the Traditions and teachings of the Church through which the Church has engendered values that have stood the test of time. Synodality should stand on such values to be able to have a firm foundation that could lead the Church to the desired renewal, even as we draw on Reason and the lived Experience of all the faithful.
2. **African voices and values should be taken into consideration when elaborating the doctrines and teachings of the church, values such as family, solidarity, communitarian life, reverential dialogue, hospitality and co-responsibility.**
   Africans have equal responsibility for the doctrines and teachings of the Church in collaboration with other local Churches (Eph. 2:19). Accordingly, it is paramount that their experiences and ever-evolving cultural values be taken into consideration and their problems be always equally considered. This will help them to own the teachings and to be committed to living them out.
3. **The commitment of the Church, Family of God (*Africae Munus*, 1) to conflict resolution, to fight against economic colonialism and illegal exploitation of resources in Africa, and the promotion of Good Governance, Justice and Peace.**
   Peace has become so fragile in our time that sometimes, securing an end to conflict is difficult because of the vested interests of the intervening powers. In such situations, it has become necessary for the Synodal Church to get involved in advocacy and concrete negotiations for peace, especially among warring nations and communities. The Synodal Church should make more effort to devise effective mechanisms for active engagement in peace making at the international and local levels in the manner of Christ, the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6).
   Religion is, equally, a cause of conflict in Africa. The desire to promote peace should also lead the Church to promote ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. There is need for the Synodal Church to work together with other faith communities in the promotion of peace and conflict resolution in building the kingdom of God on earth.
   It is clear that one of the major causes of conflict in Africa is the manipulative

attitude of the exploiters of natural resources. The Church should stand with the people and ensure that there is no exploitation without free, prior and informed consent of the population.

The Church should equally foster good governance in African countries, including the pastoral accompaniment of the faithful engaged in social, economic and political life.

4. **The process of synodality must also involve inculturation and liturgical renewal in order to respond to the aspiration, participation and overall growth of the African faithful.**

   Inculturation helps the faith to be rooted in the life and practice of the people. Worship in Africa is an integral experience involving the whole person: mind, spirit and body. The current ways of celebrating the liturgy sometimes leave many Africans unfulfilled. A synodal Church should take into consideration the nature of Africans to have a more participatory liturgy, in line with authentic liturgical theology and doctrine.

5. **Synodality is the way of being Church and hence the necessity of formation as a means of making the synodal model a pastoral model of the Church's life and practice.**

   The new understanding about the synodal Church would lead to a new way of understanding and exercising authority in the Church like Jesus (Lk. 22:27). This new understanding will necessarily demand the formation of the clergy, consecrated persons and the laity in the practice of synodal leadership. An African proverb says "crops are to be cultivated whereas weeds grow on their own." The synodal model needs to be planted in the life of the people of God. Each group must be open to ongoing formation in the synodal way of being Church, including bishops, clergy, lay women and men, young people and consecrated persons.

6. **Synodality should strengthen subsidiarity on all levels of the Church's life so as to promote the inclusion, participation and communion of all the members, especially women, the youth and persons living with disability.**

   The principle of subsidiarity helps each group to autonomously contribute its quota in the development of society and to deal with local pastoral challenges. This should apply to the activities of the synodal Church in all its dimensions.

   Women form the greater percentage of active members of the Church. They continue to make enormous contribution to the Church in Africa. However, there are not enough structures to encourage and enhance their participation, especially in the decision-making processes and platforms of the Church. The Church in Africa wishes that, following the principle of subsidiarity, formal forums for women participation in the Church be enhanced.

   The above is also true of young people who form the greater percentage of the African population. They have creative ideas and desire to take initiatives in the Church and in society. Often they do not find enough space to exercise their initiatives in the Church. In Africa most young people are faced with the difficult decision of remaining Christians in the face of many competing options.

   For persons living with disability, there is need to offer them opportunities to feel

at home in the Church. This will demand putting in place structures that should be concerned with them at the highest level of the Church. The Church should not only listen to the challenges of the people but also, based on the principle of subsidiarity, find ways of creating opportunities for them to contribute to the life of the Church.

7. **The family is an important structure in the promotion of the synodal Church and demands pastoral care that focuses on marriage and family and their challenges in the present-day Africa, especially situations of polygamy, divorced and remarried people, single parenthood and child protection.**
   In Africa we are faced with the challenges of broken marriages based on traditional practices that have been difficult to transform through Christian values and other socio-economic factors, including polygamy which is still imposed by some social conditions in African societies. Divorce is also becoming a common occurrence. There is equally the situation of elective and circumstantial single parenthood, widowhood and cohabitation. We equally note the necessity of protecting children from abuse. People involved in these still want to remain practising Catholics. There is a need to develop an evangelising family pastoral care and catechesis that will make it possible to help them to live their faith with confidence and joy.
8. **Ecological justice and stewardship should become a way of life of the synodal Church.**
   Climate change is an existential threat to the whole world and the Church is not separated from the world. Africa bears the brunt of the current climate crisis, although it contributes the least to it. The Church ought to continue to do more in finding solutions and developing innovative strategies to respond to this urgent crisis as an integral part of her mission.

To conclude, Synodality, founded on love, inclusion and respect for all, particularly those who are marginalised, has engendered a new dynamism through the synod on synodality. This dynamism should be sustained so that synodality becomes a Christian identity (Jn. 13:35), a way of being Church from the grassroots to the highest level. This can only happen if everyone sincerely opens up to the gospel and to the Holy Spirit who has enkindled this synodality as a new way of Christianity in our time.

Adopted Unanimously by the African Continental Synodal Assembly Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
05 March 2023

Adopted Unanimously by the Bishop Delegates to the African Synodal Continental Assembly Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
06 March 2023

FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE CONTINENTAL STAGE IN NORTH AMERICA

The outline of the *Final Document*[1] is as follows:

Introduction: Description of the Continental Stage in North America and the methodology used.

Presentation of Three Key Themes:

- *Called and Gifted Through Baptism*: Implications of the dignity and responsibilities of our common baptism.
- *Communion with Christ and One Another*: Recognizing the stresses on our ecclesial communion in North America today and discerning ways forward.
- *Sent Forth on Mission*: Living out our common baptismal call to bring the Good News to the world.

Bishops' Reflections on the Experience of Synodality in North America: Given the desire expressed by many to know how bishops perceive the synodal process, this section provides some of their insights and reflections.

Priorities Directed to the October 2023 Gathering of the Synod in Rome: Presentation of five priorities proposed for further discussion by the Synod in Rome.

Conclusion: The gift of being gathered together.

[1] This *Final Document* is based on reflections on the three questions found in the Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) #106, although its structure does not directly mirror those questions.

I. Introduction

He said to them, "Come, and you will see." (John 1:39)

The Invitation

1. Time and time again, the invitation from the Holy Father to the People of God to participate in the *2021-2024 Synod: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation & Mission* elicited a range of responses. Profound joy and enthusiasm were experienced by many, while resistance, suspicion, and anxiety were aroused in some. In the Continental Stage, the delegates accepted the invitation; they came, and they saw. As one delegate remarked, "*The Holy Spirit is at work! This is only the beginning; we don't know where the Holy Spirit is taking us. We are coming to a deeper understanding of what it means to be Catholic*" (Session X Group 1). The experience of the Synod demonstrated that many Catholics in North America are committed to the communal discernment necessary to discover where the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church in the present moment.

2. There was great gratitude for being together with other Catholics, who come from different parts of the continent, who are lay, religious, and clergy, each with their own ideas and views, yet all part of the one Church. As one group mentioned, "*The synodal process gives us life and also gives life to the Church; we are grateful for that gift*" (Session IV Group 8). The overwhelming sentiment from those who participated in the local, national, and now continental stages was an optimistic hope and uplifting joy at being able to participate and contribute. As one group noted, "*The word that kept coming up in our group was **joy** – to share, to listen, and to be together*" (Session III Group 10). The experience of being able to share and express both disappointments and blessings was seen as a real fruit of the synodal process. "People would start with pains and resentments, but at the end of the process the Holy Spirit had opened people up" (Session II Group 7).

The Virtual Continental Assemblies

3. The Continental Stage in North America consisted of twelve virtual assemblies (sessions): seven in English, three in Spanish, and two in French. Attending these assemblies were 931 delegates, with an almost equal split among delegates between women and men (50.2% / 49.8%, respectively). The 931 delegates ranged from a variety of vocations, with 391 lay women, 235 lay men, 148 priests (diocesan and religious), 77 women religious, and 4 non- ordained men religious. There also were 146 bishops who participated in one or more of the virtual assemblies. Almost 90% of the dioceses and eparchies in the United States and Canada (236/267) were represented in the assemblies. As one group reported, "*There was a lot of participation and diversity, yet there was still lots of convergence. The Spirit is at work*" (Session III Group 6).

4. The virtual format for the Continental Assembly was chosen to accommodate as many delegates as possible, including those who were unable to travel due to health or work, and to minimize financial burdens while maximizing participation of

the dioceses and eparchies in the United States and Canada. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic also influenced the decision to hold virtual assemblies. Feedback from the assemblies revealed mixed opinions on the value of a virtual format. Some were appreciative that the virtual assemblies allowed for greater participation. "*Some of the groups I attended were easily able to engage in a prayerful manner in spiritual conversation and the questions. There was a possibility of significant dissonant voices to be heard*" (Session I Feedback). Others felt that the spiritual conversations suffered due to the lack of in-person engagement. "*Zoom is a great tool and made it easier for more participation as travel may have limited those who could attend, but in-person is always so much better*" (Session II Feedback).

5. Each Ordinary was asked to select four to five delegates to be part of the Continental Assembly. These delegates, along with the bishops themselves, were then asked to register for one of the twelve virtual assemblies that would be the main component of the Continental Assembly. For each assembly, small listening circles were formed in such a manner that they consisted of a mix of delegates from Canada and the United States, dioceses and eparchies, men and women, generations, and cultural backgrounds. To aid the preparation for these assemblies, each delegate was sent a *Delegate Preparation Guide* (see Appendix C) that outlined the format of the assemblies and the *Spiritual Conversation Model*.

6. A week before each assembly, the delegates were introduced to one another via email. In this exchange, they were asked to share their name, diocese or eparchy, and how they had been engaged in the Synod thus far. There was a range of experience, from planning and facilitating listening sessions in their parish in the Diocesan Stage to the virtual assemblies being one of their first encounters with the Synod. Many exchanged warm wishes along with their hopes and prayers for the upcoming assemblies. While not always effective, overall, these introductions were helpful.

7. Each of the twelve virtual assemblies began with the Adsumus prayer, followed by time together in small group listening circles (147 in total). These small groups followed the Spiritual Conversation Model, as suggested by the Secretariat for the General Synod. After the small group discussions, everyone returned to the larger group to share the fruits of the conversations, there was a reflection from DCS #25-26, and there was a period of silence (see Appendix D for the format of these discussions). While some delegates noted that the spiritual conversations had the potential to be more enriching if they had been in person, many others observed that the Spirit was present in the virtual assemblies. "*I am very grateful for the opportunity to participate in the synodal process and truly appreciate the efforts of those who organized the virtual gatherings. While there certainly were limitations because the sessions were virtual, nevertheless, I do believe it was a good experience and could sense the Holy Spirit at work*" (Session III Feedback). "*The very real feeling of the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit is its greatest strength*" (Session VIII Feedback).

8. The North American Synod Team (see Appendix A), in a spirit of co-responsibility,

relied upon the delegates to facilitate and report back the fruits of the listening circles at the plenary portion of the Continental Assemblies. This process achieved varying degrees of success, depending on the preparation of the participants. Nonetheless, the methodology offered the delegates an opportunity for formation in synodality. All of the delegates were given resources explaining the Spiritual Conversation Model, and a webinar on this topic was offered to those who volunteered to facilitate a listening circle; a recording of the webinar was made available to others.

9. The listening experienced by the delegates during the spiritual conversation was greatly appreciated. Many spoke of it with admiration, acknowledging that they had been transformed. Not only did the synodal experience create a space for them to speak freely, but it also provided an opportunity to be heard. For many it was a discovery, an illuminating experience. It filled them with joy, hope, and gratitude. "*The methodology that has emerged from the synodal process – particularly the spiritual conversations – is so important. We have learned that we* **can** *learn from listening. We hope this will continue! This is an empowering way to reach out and to attend to places of hurt*" (Session XII Group 2).

The Continental Debrief Session

10. After the completion of all twelve virtual assemblies, representatives from each met with the North American Synod Team, which was tasked with writing this report. At this "debriefing," the representatives shared the fruits of each of the twelve assemblies; common themes and experiences naturally emerged and were further discussed. In contrast to the virtual assemblies, the Debrief Session allowed the Synod Team to ask follow-up and clarification questions of the delegates. As will be seen below, what emerged from the assemblies was a recognition that there are strong tensions within the Church, but the delegates predominantly felt hope and encouragement and a desire for the synodal process to continue. At the Debrief Session, one delegate shared that she "*was very encouraged by the small groups; people are modeling synodality for themselves, and I can see that as a fruit of the process*" (Debrief Session).

The Continental Writing Retreat

11. For the composition of this document, the North American Synod Team began with a weeklong retreat. A word that frequently surfaced during the team's discernment at the retreat was "messiness." Synodality is not always easy to comprehend; it can also be seen to be a complicated process. As a participant at one of the virtual assemblies noted, "*People don't know what the Synod on Synodality is for. They don't understand the purpose, couldn't grasp what was trying to be achieved*" (Session XI Group 14). Yet, there was the simultaneous acknowledgement that trust in the Holy Spirit is crucial for the fruitfulness of the Synod. "*Maybe we need to admit that we're stuck here and that we don't exactly know where we're going, but it's okay because we're following the Holy Spirit! We must allow the Holy Spirit to take the lead to guide us to where we are meant to go!*" (Session XI Group 14). When there were moments of uncertainty, the Synod Team chose to trust the Holy Spirit and each other. Openness

to the Spirit is essential to being fruitful companions on the synodal path.

The North American Final Document

12. What follows is based on what was heard at the virtual assemblies. The North American Synod Team was composed of laity, priests, religious, and bishops from both Canada and the United States, who met together to reflect on what was shared and to discern not a plan or a project, but simply what has arisen from this journey so far. In order to further ensure that the *Final Document* was faithful to what was shared during the Continental Assembly and to foster co- responsible discernment, the Synod Team invited comments and reflections on a draft of this document from 25 delegates from Canada and 25 delegates from the United States. The document was subsequently revised in light of their contributions. Bishops designated by each episcopal conference validated and approved the *Final Document*.[2]

13. This report from the Continental Stage is North America's contribution to the larger, global discussion and discernment stage of the 2021-2024 Synod. The North American participants felt that the DCS reflected much of what the participants expressed during the diocesan and national stages of the Synod. The conversations at the Continental Stage focused on the intense need for the Church to become even more synodal. In summary, what was shared and what was heard at the Continental Stage was that by our common baptism, we are each **called by God and gifted by God with dignity**. This common baptism places us in **communion with Christ and one another.** The synodal journey thus far has made us more conscious of where the stresses on our communion lie. But it also has revealed that, as one delegate described it, "*the more we become missionary disciples the more we will address these challenges*" (Debrief Session). Our baptismal dignity is inseparable from our baptismal responsibility, which **sends us forth on mission**. "*Many times, we focus on the negative and forget the joy; the Spirit we experience in our core is to be a missionary*" (Debrief Session).

Called and Gifted Through Baptism

14. Expressed over and over in the Continental Assembly of North America was the need to grow into a more synodal Church, starting with the recognition of the dignity of all the baptized. "*Walking together and expanding the tent envelops everyone. All the baptized have a right to be there*" (Session IX Group 2). Every human person possesses the dignity that comes from being created in the image of God. Through baptism, Christians share in an exalted dignity and vocation to holiness, with no inequality based on race, nationality, social condition, or sex, because we are one in Christ Jesus (Lumen Gentium 32; cf. Gal 3:28, Col 3:11). "*Synod was a good way for laity and clergy to realize that we are all the Church and that we have a co-*

[2] This included the CCCB Executive Committee and the USCCB Executive Committee.

responsibility for expanding the tent. If we aim to do that it will take all of us!" (Session VIII Group 3).

15. In the Continental Stage in North America, the joy of the participants was based in large part on their baptismal dignity being acknowledged through the synodal path. This awakened a desire for a greater recognition of, and opportunities for, co-responsibility within the Church and her mission. "*One of the challenges was the need to keep discovering and keep seeing what our baptismal call is inviting us to do*" (Debrief Session). At the same time, many of the conversations, like those held during the diocesan and national stages, referenced times when the Church's members failed to recognize this shared dignity. These failures place stress on our communion with one another. "*Responding to Christ's message requires that we talk the talk and walk the walk. We all must respond to our universal call to holiness*" (Session VIII Group 10).

Co-responsibility

16. Our personal call to holiness arises from our baptismal dignity. We are called to a particular state of life and simultaneously to share in the mission of the Church. The call to holiness includes and endures for all the baptized, no matter their state in life. "*We should release the gifts of everyone*" (Debrief Session). As several delegates in the North American Continental Stage explained, this universal call to holiness is lived out in particular ways of service to the wider mission of the Church. "*We cannot always be all things to all people; some people have certain charisms and we need to divvy up the work*" (Debrief Session).

17. Frequently in the Continental Assembly, there was the desire for greater co-responsibility among the laity and the clergy, including bishops. "*We need to ground ourselves in the equal dignity of baptism. This is an entry point for co-responsibility*" (Session XII Group 2). An emphasis on our shared baptismal dignity allows us to see in each other a co-laborer who can be formed, equipped, and encouraged for mission. "*We are called to act co-responsibly in a synodal fashion, not to wait until we know how to do everything perfectly, but to walk together as imperfect people*" (Session II Group 6). When Church structures and practices are dynamic and able to move with the Holy Spirit, everyone is able to "*use their gifts in service of the Church and of each other*" (Session XII Group 4).

18. For many delegates, the experience of the synodal path was one that reignited their call to discipleship. "*Through the synodal process the Church is being lived out right now in front of us and we are experiencing it! We are excited about this. The Holy Spirit is moving in this process and giving us a common spirit of mission worldwide!*" (Session III Group 2). This co- responsible Church will challenge each of us and necessitate greater collaboration and communication among all the People of God. "*We must . . . reach out to everyone from every walk of life. The responsibility of ministry is not just for priests, but for each baptized person. This is a real space where we can allow women and some of the more marginalized folks in the Church to really take up leadership roles*" (Session XI Group 7).

Women

19. There can be no true co-responsibility in the Church without fully honoring the inherent dignity of women. The continental delegates recognized the crucial work women do to keep the Church "*alive and healthy*" (Session IV Group 8). Nonetheless, delegates also named women as a marginalized group in the Church. "*We have come a long way, but we deplore the fact that women cannot invest themselves fully*" (Session V Group 4). While clarity is still needed around exactly what a fully co-responsible Church looks like, delegates proposed the examination of a variety of aspects of Church life, including decision-making roles, leadership, and ordination. Central in the discernment of these questions is the faithful acknowledgment of women's baptismal dignity. A frequently heard call was that "*more space needs to be opened for them, especially at decision-making tables*" (Session IV Group 8). The Church in North America was encouraged to "*recognize, discern, and promote the role of women . . . so that they may have a greater presence in the Church*" (Session IV Group 5).

Youth / Young People

20. Authentic acknowledgment and respect for the gifts and talents of young people is another vital aspect of a co-responsible Church in North America. "*We are often perceived as the future, but we are also the 'now' of the Church*" (Debrief Session). Many delegates lamented the absence of young people both in their parishes as well as in the Continental Assembly. "*We are concerned that young people are not at the table and we wonder how they are going to be represented in Rome. Not only people who work with young people but the young people themselves. They know their reality the best*" (Session VI Group 1). Empowering young people to more fully live out their baptismal dignity requires that we confront tensions within our communion as the Body of Christ. The "*gifts of young people are not always fully appreciated by older generations. We should appreciate the creativity and the ingenuity of young people*" (Session I Group 6).

Formation

21. The People of God participating in the Continental Stage in North America expressed a great longing for formation as the key to living out both their baptismal dignity and their duty in a co-responsible Church. Especially as a response to ongoing challenges – as well as the desire to further engage in the practice of synodality – formation arose as a fundamental requirement. "*The answer to that question that surfaced was the need for formation – formation for synodality, for listening deeply; formation for stretching as is alluded to in widening the tent*" (Session I Group 9). Delegates expressed the desire for the Church to further "d*evelop formation in order to know our faith better*" (Session V Group 7). There also was a special concern to better accompany youth throughout their formation process, fostering a bold curiosity about the Christian faith. "*Children who go through religious education come out wondering if there is even a God. Are they afraid to ask questions? If they are afraid to ask questions, they may be stunted in their ability to grow in their faith*" (Session VIII Group 7). This desire was intimately linked to the dignity of our baptism and the responsibility it entails. "*In sharing our faith, we – who are in the pews – we have to*

not only be able to share our faith but to understand it" (Session I Group 5).

22. Delegates expressed a desire for formation that is life-long and offered to all members of the communion of the baptized, whatever their vocation. This includes not only formation in the fundamental teachings of our faith, but also formation for synodality, co-responsibility, welcoming, and going out to the peripheries. "*A deeper formation allows us to present the beauty of our faith, rather than a list of rules. To go deeper and underneath it and be formed in a way that allows us to present the hows and whys*" (Session XII Group 6). Delegates were insistent that deeper formation is central to our ability to live out our baptismal dignity and strengthen communion with Christ and each other. "*How do we go about becoming a people that have a disposition of listening, of being synodal, of putting listening first?*" (Session III Group 8).

Communion with Christ and One Another

23. During the Continental Assembly, the North American Synod Team heard over and over again of the need within the synodal process to maintain the centrality of Christ, with whom we are all united by baptism. "*Jesus Christ [is] at the center of the tent*" (Session II Group 9). "*The Eucharist is the center of our lives*" (Session XI Group 4). "*The center of our faith is the person of Jesus Christ*" (Session XII Group 8). "*Jesus is the center pole of the tent that we must never lose sight of in what we do*" (Session III Group 16). Through baptism we are made members of the Body of Christ and are drawn into communion with one another.

24. Yet the synodal process of discernment in North America has revealed that the Church, like the larger society, is experiencing polarization and a strong pull towards fragmentation. This was a major theme throughout the diocesan, national, and continental stages of the Synod. As one delegate commented, "*The call to communion is something we need to make present in us and in our communities*" (Session XI Group 15). There was a recognition that we cannot fully live out our baptismal dignity and responsibility without addressing the areas where our communion with one another, and thereby our communion with Christ, is stressed almost to the breaking point. Several themes emerged that were common among all the virtual assemblies.

Trust and Credibility

25. A significant threat to communion within the Church is a lack of trust, especially between the bishops and the laity, but also between the clergy in general and the lay faithful. One of the major areas of tension in North America is the clergy sexual abuse crisis and its effects, which have created a loss of trust that cannot be overstated. Many people continue to carry the wounds of abuse and many others have lost their trust in the clergy and in the Church's institutions. To this reality, one must add that the historical wrongs found in the residential/boarding schools for Indigenous people, which also included abuse of all kinds. This only compounds the woundedness

of the Church and the lack of trust in its leaders. "*The sexual abuse crisis and the residential schools are so much a part of the reality of the Church; we have to be able to engage those questions and face those situations*" (Session II Group 9). Although it was acknowledged that Church leaders have done much to promote healing and prevent future abuses, it is apparent that more needs to be done to rebuild trust. As one delegate commented, "*There are different levels and degrees of engagement within the Church as an institution, but it has to start with healing and trust-building*" (Session II Group 8). Many of the listening sessions of the Synod called for a cultural change in the Church with a view to greater transparency, accountability, and co-responsibility. "*Synodality,*" it was seen by many, was "*a beautiful way to build trust through dialogue*" (Session XII Group 4).

Greater Inclusivity

26. In the Continental Assembly, as in our national reports, there was a deep desire for greater inclusivity and welcome within the Church. In fact, one of the major factors that was seen as breaking down communion was the experience of many that certain people or groups feel unwelcome in the Church. The groups named during the Continental Stage included women, young people, immigrants, racial or linguistic minorities, LGBTQ+ persons, people who are divorced and remarried without an annulment, and those with varying degrees of physical or mental abilities. While the reasons for experiencing the Church as inhospitable may vary, what is common is the Church's need to authentically honor the baptismal dignity of everyone. As one participant explained, "*we think we are welcoming, but we know that there are people who feel 'outside' the Church*" (Session III Group 12). Another suggested that this is because "*we get caught up in the minutiae of evaluating the worth of people on the margins*" (Session VIII Group 14). "*There is a need to differentiate between the importance of teaching and the need to welcome those into the Church, especially as it relates to our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters*" (Session II Group 4).

27. Some participants in the synodal process reported on the profound sense of suffering of those prevented from receiving the Eucharist. While there are a variety of reasons for this reality, perhaps preeminent among them is Catholics who are divorced and remarried without an annulment, and others whose objective situation in life contradicts the beliefs and teachings of the Church. Additionally, some delegates spoke of those wounded by the limitations placed on the pre-conciliar Latin rite. Unfortunately, liturgy is not always experienced as unifying. "*We could find our unity in common prayer, but liturgy is one of the things that is divisive in the Church and we must break through that*" (Session X Group 18).

28. The listening sessions also produced ample examples of the longing to incorporate young people more fully in the life of the Church. As one group stated simply, the youth "*are indispensable*" (Session V Group 4). Practically all of the synodal consultations shared a deep ache in the wake of the departure of young people and viewed this as integrally connected to becoming a more inclusive Church. One group noted that there is a "*generational divide in communities – tension between younger*

and older members of the Church. This is something to pay attention to" (Session XI Group 9). The desire to be a more inclusive Church resonated throughout all the virtual assemblies. One delegate said, "*The Church must know how to be the family of God, to be open and receptive*" (Session IV Group 7).

Listening

29. Alongside the desire to be a more inclusive and welcoming Church was the need to understand how to be more hospitable, while maintaining and being true to Church teaching. "*There is tension between welcoming and formation in Church teaching. We need to keep in mind that Church teaching comes from the gospel – work must be done in that kind of hospitality*" (Session III Group 6). A key to solving this problem was seen in the ability to listen. One delegate reminds us that "*listening doesn't always mean you get the answer you are looking for*" (Session X Group 6), while another pointed out that listening helps us understand the perspectives of others and thereby welcome them (cf. Session III Group 12). Another proposed that we "*need to be inclusive and to love people enough to meet them where they are, but to love them enough not to leave them there*" (Session III Group 7).

30. A frequent theme heard during the assemblies was that "*tension is a part of life and will never be completely resolved. We must keep listening, but tension will always be part of our life. We need to be okay with that and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through that*" (Session XI Group 11). The delegates reported that the Synod was an experience of both being heard and of listening. It is important that "*people have a chance to speak but also to be heard and validated, recognized*" (Session III Group 11).

Formation in Synodality

31. In the virtual assemblies there was discussion about the stress placed on our communion within the Church. There was a consensus that more formation in synodality is needed. "*We need formation on how to listen and accompany; resources that will help us grow as people*" (Session VI Group 4). The majority of the delegates agreed that in order to become a more listening Church, one that bolsters communion, more formation in how to be a synodal Church is crucial. "*How do we continue training ourselves, converting ourselves and others, to this synodal way?*" (Session 1 Group 12) was a frequent question.

32. Synodality is a great source of hope for renewing and strengthening communion. The hope is that by becoming more synodal, the Church, as one delegate described, would create "*safe places where people can ask their real questions about Church teaching without judgment or punishment*" (Session X Group 8). In describing the experience of the Synod, one delegate said, "*The most beautiful thing about this was that from every stage of listening, people responded in an extraordinary way. People felt listened to very well. We believe that the concept of synodality is a concept that must continue, that must become a way of life. We thank God for these fruits*" (Session VII Group 3). Such formation not only would aid the development of deeper bonds

of communion within the Church, but also would be a stimulus for evangelization and mission. As was discussed in one of the assemblies, "*We want our faithful to know that they are needed and wanted . . . Listening is the first part of evangelization; we are accompanying folks, meeting them where they are*" (Session VIII Group 2).

Sent Forth on Mission

33. Throughout the Continental Stage in North America, delegates recognized the duty of the communion of the baptized to go out on mission to the peripheries to proclaim the Gospel and care for those who are wounded and downtrodden. "*How beautiful the Church got to be by the wounded and the hurt! When the Church reaches out in times of disaster, that is a reminder that the Church is a place of compassion and care. Caring for people is a good way to welcome them in*" (Session I Group 4). Many recognized that the Church is at its best when walking alongside those forced to the margins of our society. It was recognized that for the Church to be truly missionary – to go out to the peripheries and to evangelize – what is needed is holistic formation in our baptismal dignity and calling, in co-responsibility, and in synodality. It also was recognized that in order to proclaim Christ effectively and clearly, the Church must be united. "*We must find the balance to proclaim Christ to others and be united as a Church rather than being fragmented into separate groups*" (Session VIII Group 8). With God's grace, this, in turn, will make for a stronger communion, allowing the Church to be a credible witness to Christ and a Church *en salida* (Spanish) or *en sortie* (French), i.e., a Church that "goes forth" (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 24).

34. As noted in an image from Isaiah 53, the Church en salida or en sortie requires us to leave the tent – to not just welcome people where we are but to seek them where they are. As one participant noted, "*We want to respect everyone's inherent dignity and meet people where they are. We want to do all this while remaining faithful to the teachings of the Church.*" (Session X Group 13). Delegates expressed the desire to "nurture the joy of discipleship" (Session X Group 2) by accompanying those who experience alienation in our society. "*We are called to accompany marginalized people. How can we give the truth with compassion and get rid of the fear that parishioners have to go out and evangelize?*" (Session VI Group 3). For some, this means living even more deeply the truth of the Gospel. "*These people have not left the Church, but the Church has left them. How do we go out and minister to them and exude that joy?*" (Session II Group 8). The North American Synod Team heard repeatedly that central to this mission of accompaniment is Jesus Christ. "*This whole process of synodality must all be centered around Jesus Christ. It is Christ we are trying to live out in all our listening, accompanying, worship, participation*" (Session III Group 16).

Moving Out of the Tent

35.For many delegates, being a Church on mission is the natural outgrowth of synodality and co- responsibility. "*There is hope in trusting the Holy Spirit as we*

apply synodality to the local community. We are being called to have that missionary mindset to see the love of Christ and then go out and walk in friendship with those who are feeling marginalized and accompany them. . . What do co-responsibility and synodality look like in our lives to bring people to Christ?" (Session II Group 11). It was precisely the experience of synodality that, for many, renewed this call to discipleship and evangelization. "*All people are called to mission and have something important to contribute to the life of the Church and the world. This is our opportunity to go out and share with others*" (Session X Group 3). It also was expressed that moving forward, the Church in North America needs to "*engage synodality as a missionary movement. Synodality leads to an encounter with the Lord and with truth*" (Session I Group 15). For the Church in North America, synodality is inseparable from becoming a Church sent forth on mission. A delegate spoke of "*the importance of authentically listening to each other and to reaching out to the peripheries, expanding our tent and embracing the reality that there is a place for everyone in this Church and that Jesus wants everyone to know him and receive his love*" (Session I Group 10).

A Church in the World

36. Throughout the Continental Stage in North America, the tensions present within a Church sent out on mission in the world were apparent. "*Consumerism and secularism have provided answers to questions we didn't know we were asking in ways that feel fulfilling but that really aren't. This false fulfillment will collapse and crumble, but the Church offers true fulfillment that will last. Economic/political upheaval are doing great damage, but as we all come – broken and sinful – to the Church, everyone must feel welcomed and at home*" (Session XI Group 7). For some delegates, this tension created feelings of fear and discomfort. "*There are tensions between letting the popular culture enter into the life of the parish. There is a tsunami of culture threatening to overwhelm us*" (Session III Group 15). For others, this tension was understood as an opportunity to collaborate with other people of faith. "*We don't live in Christendom anymore! We need to recognize that so that we can move forward. This should involve partnering with others. What does ecumenism look like right now? How can we work with people of other faiths?*" (Session VIII Group 8). Delegates from the Continental Stage in North America are ready to embark on mission, while tending to inevitable discomfort. "*Tension is conversion; it leads us to the openness of listening to the other, welcoming the marginalized, not rejecting those who come in the tent and receiving them. It creates tension; to want to receive people brings up the question of those who feel distant. How can we have this gift of helping them to approach without fear about their process of conversion to the teachings of the Church? We need to look for ways to help them*" (Session VI Group 6). Navigating this tension is an important task for mission and evangelization in North America today.

Formation for Mission and Catholic Social Teaching

37. Proper formation is the key to embracing our baptismal call to go out on mission. As one delegate put it, we need to "*recognize the importance of faith formation for our ability to be a missionary Church. We have to be adequately formed in our faith to bring it to others*" (Session XI Group 11). There also was a desire among delegates

to understand more deeply the social mission of the Church. "*There is a need for formation at all levels (clergy, laity, etc.). We need to be formed to understand our Catholic Social Teaching, to be leaders, and to be evangelizers*" (Session XII Group 7). This formation in evangelization and Catholic Social Teaching is crucial to walking the synodal path. "*We must embrace a missionary mindset and reach out to everyone from every walk of life. The responsibility of ministry is not just for priests, but for each baptized person*" (Session XI Group 7). The duty to know and live the teachings of our Catholic faith, including the Church's social teaching, flows from our baptism, but it is not always easy and requires intentional formation. "*This isn't so much about the what as about the how*" (Session III Group 4).

Bishops' Reflections on the Experience of Synodality in North America

38. This *Final Document* presents the response of the People of God in North America who participated in the Continental Stage of the Synod. As baptized members of the People of God, many bishops participated actively in this process. Many, however, particularly the lay faithful, expressed a longing to know how this synodal process was viewed by their bishops. Furthermore, in accordance with the methodological guidelines for the Continental Stage, bishops were "invited to meet at the end of the Continental Stage to collegially reread the lived synodal experience from the perspective of their specific charism and role" (DCS #108). Accordingly, what follows is an insight into the reflections and experiences of the many bishops who participated during the Continental Stage of the synodal process, as well as those who participated in the drafting of the *Final Document*.

39. During the course of the Continental Stage, 146 bishops from Canada and the United States participated in at least one of the virtual assemblies. Of these, with rare exceptions, they shared in the full two and one-half hour session, which included spiritual conversation in small groups. Some participated in small groups by being dispersed at random into the general mix of participants. The great majority, however, participated in small groups made up of other bishops from Canada and the United States. The bishops who participated in the small group spiritual conversations also participated in the plenary portion of the Continental Assemblies, heard what the other groups shared, and reported back to the wider body the fruits of their own spiritual conversations as bishops.

40. Some of the bishops commented that it would have been preferable for all of the participating bishops to have been placed in the randomly mixed small groups, as it would have provided another opportunity for bishops to listen and share within a setting more representative of the full body of the Church. Other bishops, however, commented on their appreciation of having a sustained time of small group reflection

with other bishops about their experiences of the synodal process thus far. It often was mentioned that it has been rare for bishops to have an opportunity to listen to and share with other bishops about their synodal experiences. Further, it was frequently noted that the opportunity to hear and discuss with bishops from both Canada and the United States together was a tremendous grace, unique in the history of the two episcopal conferences.

41. In addition, the eight bishops from the United States and Canada who were members of the North American Synod Team had an opportunity to prayerfully reflect together on the experience of collegiality and synodality in North America. These reflections will be summarized at the conclusion of this section.

42. During the Continental consultations, the bishops expressed their experience of synodality at the Diocesan Stage as a great grace, although often challenging, and as a learning experience. They frequently expressed their joy at participating in their home dioceses by prayerful listening and dialoguing with their own people. In this sense, the bishops shared in the joy that the wider body of participants also expressed. "[We are] *grateful for the opportunity for fraternal dialogue. This echoes the positive reaction of the faithful to the listening process*" (Session X Group 18). Likewise, many bishops expressed the same kinds of uncertainties and ambiguities about "where all of this is going" that many participants at all levels of the consultative process mentioned. "*Many of our people expressed gratitude at being asked to participate. [But they asked] what are the next steps? Where do we go from here?*" (Session XII Group 8).

43. The participating bishops conveyed appreciation for the pathway of patient listening and the dialogue it opened. "*Small groups make* ***such*** *a huge difference, even among bishops, because this is where dialogue can begin. This must continue*!" (Session VIII Group 16). "*For some people, a listening session was the first opportunity they had ever had of speaking directly to a bishop!*" (Session X Group 15). Yet there is a general recognition of the challenges that still face us. "*This is a great process for us all to participate in; there is still a need for the wider Church to understand what synodality is all about*" (Session III Group 16). Indeed, the listening sessions in the local Churches caused bishops to reflect on the structural challenges that make it difficult to sustain this style in a consistent way. "*Has the Church been so organized that it becomes difficult to speak to it? The Church has organizationally isolated itself from the people of God*" (Session III Group 17). "*Synodality is the way forward, but it is not an easy way*" (Session III Group 18).

44. Concerning the DCS, some bishops remarked that it provided a rare window for the Church in North America to hear voices from the Church experiencing great trials and even persecution. "*We feel gratitude that the process has helped us to see the witness of the whole Church, the suffering Church that is persecuted in other countries*" (Session VI Group 6). "*Our concern should be for the Church around the world, not just our own dioceses*" (Session VI Group 6). This made the sharing of

common concerns across very different global situations all the more striking. "*The synodal documents expanded our consciousness about the realities of life in the Church in different places in the world. Also bringing our attention back to our own situation in the local Churches and to see the commonalities we all share*" (Session XI Group 15).

45. The bishops reflected frequently on what they heard during the various consultative phases, from the diocesan through the national and continental stages. They noted gratefully the resonances that were shared throughout the synodal process. This included the joy of the baptized at being asked to participate and share their perspectives, as well as the call to co- responsibility. It also included hearing the many pains and tensions expressed by participants. This has been of immense value. "*The openness that the synodal process should bring about for everyone is to listen and hear what is hurting people and what needs healing. [We should be asking] what is helpful and what does this mean for reconciliation?*" (Session XI Group 16). "*People of God have concerns across the board and we need to listen and accompany better*" (Session III Group 18).

46. "*The great opportunity we have now as bishops is to transmit, to share our experience of conversion. Our faithful see the process as something difficult, [but] we must reflect on whether we are giving witness of conversion for the laity. We can continue to grow as a synodal Church, have the gift of being able to dialogue and change the culture of the Church, listen to the voice of the Spirit in order to walk together*" (Session VI Group 6).

47. The week-long writing retreat offered the participating bishops from Canada and the United States an opportunity for a sustained reflection on the synodal experience in North America. For them the continental retreat was a valuable experience of collegiality. It was a fruitful challenge for these two countries to address common experiences as well as to explore the many nuances and varieties of circumstances in each one. Through this challenge there has been growth in mutual understanding and in the sense of having a unique ecclesial bond. The bishops openly wondered, however, about how it might have been a further grace also to have walked and worked together with the Episcopal Conference of Mexico. While it is clearly understood why Mexico collaborated on the Continental level with the countries of Central and South America, it was acknowledged that the North American ecclesial context is deeply impacted by the faith and practice of the Church in Mexico, and the Church in Mexico is deeply affected by the Church in the United States and Canada.

48. During their meeting on the final day of the writing retreat, the bishops observed that "*our people are interested in where we are going with this. Synodality is an adventure and we aren't very familiar with it. We do have the experience of parish pastoral councils, presbyteral councils, and diocesan pastoral councils, but this is different, bigger. How can we teach it and learn it? We need to do more with our people – listen to them more to aid our discernment; sit down with them and discuss*

the religious life in the diocese. We cannot just sit in the office and make important decisions by ourselves." The bishops were grateful for the spiritual conversations and prayer that were present throughout the synodal endeavor. They also noted that this aspect, and its relation to ecclesial discernment, is vital for living the way of the Church that avoids the polarizing habits of the wider society in North America. "*If we are going to be people of dialogue, we have to first have a dialogue with God; synodality needs to be based on a dialogue with Scripture and the Lord.*" The bishops also stated a desire to promote much- needed formation in Scriptural prayer and discernment. "*Much of the anxiety around the Synod comes from a misunderstanding of what discernment actually entails.*"

49. The bishops also noted that the great majority of our people had little or no direct contact with the synodal process and are unsure of their role in it. Likewise, many are unsure of the discerning role of the local bishop and the college of bishops in union with the Pope as the process unfolds.

50. As a learning experience, the bishops noted that "*we are recalibrating; how can we do the synodal process better?*" This flowed from a recognition that the process undertaken with great generosity and creativity also revealed our weaknesses. We can and must do better in consulting those who are poor, migrant communities, Indigenous peoples, and racial minorities in our communities, and the many others who are wounded in the Church and in society.

51. The relative absence of priests also was noticeable in this process. The bishops acknowledged that it is their responsibility to address this in the future, both by example and by conveying the transparency and spiritual/pastoral fruitfulness of synodality. "*We need to be more intentional in working with our priests and parish leadership on synodality.*" The circumstances are somewhat different in the northern dioceses of Canada, where "*the majority of bishops have [a very small number of] priests in the diocese . . . So the relationship between bishops and priests and bishops and the people is closer. Under these circumstances, the bishop can't just do what he wants to do with a parish. He must do it together with the clergy and the people.*" Bishops need to do a better job of modeling synodality by listening, conversing, and discerning together.

52. There is a concern about the danger of false or unrealistic expectations regarding what the synodal process is meant to be and to "produce." Western, North American culture automatically thinks in terms both of measurable results and of winners and losers, and the Church's voice can be drowned out by that competitive impulse. Nevertheless, the bishops felt that they must show a different way, one that promotes our common baptism, our communion in the Lord, and our will to work together to address the challenges we face, which is led by the Spirit and is faithful to the Lord Jesus. "*Bishops must simply do the best we can in the synodal process and be authentic and honest. We must be transparent. Bishops need to reveal themselves more. We need to recognize the need for conversion all the way around (bishops,*

priest, laity). We can't control the outcome of this process. Bishops cannot regain credibility without acting credibly."

53. The bishops noted the importance of the national syntheses as well as this continental Final Document. They view them as documents that serve to reflect back to our local communities what was said and heard in the synodal consultations. This is especially important in acknowledging that as the Church in Canada and the United States, we heard those who feel wounded or cast aside by the Church. This does not solve the issues or heal the wounds, but it is an important beginning. "*The Indigenous want to know that the Church knows. This needs to be in the document. We must let them know that we understand the issues they are dealing with in their daily lives, and we are listening to them.*" A woman who is a leader in her Indigenous community told a Canadian bishop, "*Don't give up on us. Yes, we are grieving and, yes, we are angry, but don't give up on us.*" This aspect of the synodal experience also applies in addressing the anger and distrust caused by the ongoing effects of the sexual abuse crisis. The bishops ask also that the people not give up on us.

Priorities Directed to the October 2023 Gathering of the Synod in Rome

54. The Church in North America has experienced a significant moment of joy and hope in the journey along the synodal path. Gathered in a spirit of prayerful listening, local communities in our dioceses have expressed their joys and their anxieties. The path led initially to shared spiritual conversations in each of our countries, and then to similar, mutual conversations by delegates from the United States and Canada. During the Continental Assembly, many resonances and tensions were expressed, all of which were spoken out of a great love for Christ Jesus and his Church. The North American Synod Team labored to give a synthetic account of the richness of the conversations. The Synod Team has gathered the principal themes that emerged from our Continental Assembly and now propose them for further consideration at the Synodal Assembly to be held in Rome in October 2023.

I. **Integration of synodal consultation in the local Churches. This would include formation both in synodality and in the spirituality of discernment**. Although the synodal way was experienced with such joy on our continent by those who participated, we acknowledge that it is just the beginning. Much work remains to be done to integrate the synodal style of consultation at the level of the local Churches, as well as at the national and continental levels, to increase participation and reach many in our communities who have not yet even heard of synodality. This includes particular attention to the spiritual formation necessary for personal and communal discernment. We also urge that formation in the synodal style be encouraged and guided, so that it may be properly understood.

Many who chose not to participate conceive of it as a competitive model, opposing laity to clergy. Others see it as insufficiently clear in its methodology, ecclesiology, and aims. Nevertheless, there is the practical matter of rethinking our diocesan and national ecclesial practices and/or structures in a way that truly prioritizes the synodal style.

II. **The challenge of welcoming those who feel excluded from participation in the life of the Church in a manner that is authentic and faithful to the Gospel and the Catholic faith weighs heavily on the hearts of our people**. This tension in individuals and in communities was spoken of often. Our people perceive that welcoming and serving the wounded and isolated in the world and in the Church is an essential aspect of the mission given to us by the Lord Jesus; yet they also observe that the new complexity of issues before us requires discernment, because it implies both new pastoral initiatives and fidelity to the kerygma that we are to announce publicly. Hence, many asked what is meant by "radical inclusion," and what are its pastoral and even doctrinal implications? The term itself elicited widely divergent reactions during our consultations. There also is a need for formation in how to be more welcoming of one another.

III. **Co-responsibility**. A plea for renewed consideration of the mission of all the baptized, with specific attention given to particular vocations, was frequently mentioned. The discernment of how baptismal co-responsibility for the Church's mission should be appreciated and achieved demands a better understanding of the roles of the laity in general, and of women and young people in particular. The theme of co-responsibility also touches the frequently raised issue of shared decision-making and the desire for more transparency in Church governance. Discerning a practical way forward on these issues will require a consideration of current canonical norms and ecclesial structures. Intimately connected to this theme is the need for more integral formation for the whole of Christian life.

IV. **Addressing the unity and communion of the Church in the midst of various kinds of polarization and division**. Some polarizations arise within the Church, whereas others originate in the wider society and are transposed into the Church. Discernment is needed so that local Churches are better able to promote the ecclesiology of communion, rooted in baptism and nourished by the Eucharistic sacrifice. These must be seen as primary sources of our identity and unity as the People of God, and prior to any racial, ethnic, social, economic, political, or ideological differences. This is a challenge for our immediate future.

V. **A Church that goes out to the peripheries**. Much of the conversation in the Continental Assembly concerned the internal workings of the Church, but we also are called to be outward looking. Our people speak often of having heard the call of Pope Francis to go out credibly to the margins. On our continent there is always a danger of forgetfulness of, and indifference to, those who are poor and ostracized. The North American Synod Team heard through the synodal consultations that our people are asking for more robust formation in

this kind of missionary activity. It is vital that the local Churches hear the call to assist the needs of the poor and marginalized churches around the world. This is a concern of the whole Church and should be articulated with greater urgency on the level of the Universal Church.

Conclusion

They were all in one place together. (Acts 2:1)

55. At the very beginning of the Church, at the time of Pentecost, there was confusion and fear and yet expectation and hope as well. This is true of every age, including our current time. The response of the Holy Spirit was to gather the Church together *in one place* and give them the ability to hear and understand the Gospel message. As the Church in North America continues to journey on the synodal path, we must imitate Mary, who was present at the first Pentecost and continually said "yes" to the invitation to contribute to the building up of the Kingdom of God. "*We want to be like Mary*" (Session I Group 2).

56. The gift of being gathered together in the Holy Spirit was experienced again by the Church in Canada and the United States during the Continental Stage. There was great gratitude for being in one place, that is, being (virtually) together with other Catholics, who come from different parts of Canada and the United States, who are lay, religious, and clergy, each with their own ideas and views, yet all part of the one Church. "*I am thankful for the time and effort taken to facilitate this process. It gives me hope that we can move forward to healing and rebuilding trust with the Church and among our brothers and sisters*" (Session II Feedback).

57. The gift of being together in one place and listening to each other is perhaps the best lesson learned during the Continental Stage in North America. As one participant said, "*People enjoyed sharing, rather than just being talked to – there is no going back*" (Session III Group 4). The benefits of being intentionally synodal was a common theme. As was mentioned by a bishops' group, "*The synodal process has not been perfect, but it has been good*" (Session XII Group 8).

"The Synod then offers us the opportunity to become a listening Church, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen. To listen to the Spirit in adoration and prayer."

(Pope Francis)

FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE CONTINENTAL STAGE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

"This is what we need most of all: a Church that can walk together, that can tread the paths of life holding high the living flame of the Gospel. The Church is not a fortress, a stronghold, a lofty castle, self-sufficient and looking out upon the world below."

(Pope Francis)

Narrative: The Continental Phase of the Synod in Latin America and the Caribbean

1. "It is possible to walk with Christ at the center and to allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit of God. We have the growing hope of living already a new time for the Church". This expression of one of the participants of the Continental Phase of the Synod reflects the enthusiasm that the process awakened in Latin America and the Caribbean. The four regional meetings held in El Salvador, Santo Domingo, Quito and Brasilia in February and March 2023 were the central moment of discernment in this process.

2. Preparation for the Continental Stage began the year before, with the formation of a commission to accompany the national teams responsible for animating the Diocesan Phase and to establish, in dialogue with the General Secretariat of the Synod, the method for conducting the continental assembly. After a few months, an interdisciplinary work team was formed with the following membership: Miguel Cabrejos (president of CELAM), Msgr. Jorge Lozano (General Secretary general of CELAM), Fr. Pedro Brassesco (Assistant Secretary of CELAM), Sr. Daniela Cannavina (General Secretary of CLAR), Fr. Francisco Hernández (Executive Secretary of Caritas Latin America), Mauricio López (Director of CEPRAP, CELAM, and liaison with the General Secretariat of the Synod) and Oscar Elizalde (Director of the Center for Communications, CELAM).

3. The Latin American and Caribbean Church has a long history of participatory experiences marked by the five General Conferences of the Latin American Episcopate, the Amazon Synod, the Ecclesial Assembly and the various ecclesial structures of communion on the continent.

4. Our Church is nourished by the social and cultural diversity of each region, which is an aspect to be cherished and strengthened in order to consolidate our common identity and a renewed enculturation of the Gospel among the peoples. For this reason, it was decided that the Continental Stage would be centered on regional meetings that would allow greater participation, discernment and listening in order to contribute the richness and the particular way of being Church.

5. Out of a total of 400 participants, a number of representatives, proportional to the total population, was established for each country. Each group of representatives was also assigned an estimated number of bishops, priests, religious men and women, deacons, laymen and laywomen. Among the latter, a special request was made for the integration of people from areas that had not been sufficiently heard in the diocesan phase. Finally, CELAM also invited representatives from peripheral sectors that had not been invited previously.

6. The regional meetings were held on the following schedule: in San Salvador (El

Salvador) from February 13 to 17 for the Central America and Mexico region; in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) from February 20 to 24 for the Caribbean region; in Quito (Ecuador) from February 27 to March 3 for the Bolivarian region; and in Brasilia (Brazil) from March 6 to 10 for the Southern Cone region.

7. A total of 415 people participated: 96 in Central America and Mexico; 41 in Caribbean countries; 92 in the Bolivarian region and 177 in the Southern Cone. There were 65 bishops; 70 priests; 61 religious men and women, 16 deacons and 194 lay men and women.

8. Each assembly opened with a spiritual retreat on Monday morning. It was a moment of profound encounter with the Spirit held in a physical space of special significance for two of the regions: in El Salvador, the martyr's chapel of St. Oscar Romero and in Santo Domingo, the Primate Cathedral of America. That same afternoon there was a time for the presentation of the synodal process in relation to the Ecclesial Assembly, the explanation of the methodology of "Spiritual Conversation" and the formation of the "Communities of Life" with a first meeting so that the members could get to know each other.

9. The following days were dedicated to reflecting on the Document for the Continental Stage and the three questions it poses. The third chapter was divided into three parts, each day dealing with one of them in three group sessions, one for each question. At the end of each day, all the communities were brought together as a new moment of communal discernment. A total of 423 syntheses were collected with intuitions, tensions and themes to be deepened based on what was developed in the DEC. A CELAM team recorded and organized these proposals, identifying common themes while respecting the multiplicity of voices and suggestions.

10. On the last day, the assemblies were divided into groups by vocation to reread the experience and make new contributions concerning the horizons for the next stage, which allowed another 30 documents containing contributions to be received.

11. In addition to the contributions from the regions, various pastoral organizations, such as the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA), the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) and the Afro Pastoral, made their own journey in light of the DEC by way of their meetings and gatherings.

12. Moments of spirituality were a powerful feature of each day, providing a climate of encounter with God and a sense of fraternal community beyond the diverse states of life, languages, positions or places of origin represented by each participant. In addition, local organizers offered moments of recreation or cultural exchange that strengthened the bonds of belonging to each region. Each assembly culminated with the celebration of the Eucharist.

13. From March 17 to 20, a meeting was held at CELAM headquarters in Bogota

(Colombia) to draft a continental synthesis based on the contributions of all the assemblies. Members of CELAM's Pastoral Theological Reflection Team (many of whom participated in the assemblies), the facilitators who carried out the methodology in each regional meeting, and the members of the continental coordinating team were summoned. A team of sixteen people, accompanied by members of the General Secretariat of the Synod, guided the process.

14. The drafting process involved discerning (first individually and then as a group) the main themes in light of the Spirit and the lived experience. The assembly agreed on an outline with the contributions offered and themes were drafted by groups, taking care to insert quotations that reflected the voices heard. The drafting team consolidated the final text based on a joint reading, corrections and suggestions made.

15. Within the framework of the face-to-face meeting of the General Secretaries of the Episcopal Conferences, and with the online participation of their Presidents, March 21 was dedicated to a collegial rereading of the synodal experience, based on their specific charism and responsibility. The bishops were presented with the process that had been developed and the proposed text of the synthesis. Then, gathered in pastoral regions, the document was read and finally, in plenary, they made their contributions and evaluations. The dialogue was enriched by the presence of Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J., General Relator of the Synod; Bishop Luis Marín de San Martín, Undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod; and Father Giacomo Costa, coordinator of the Preparatory Commission of the Synod.

16. The experience lived in this Continental Phase has thus consolidated the participatory and communitarian character of the Church on pilgrimage in Latin America and the Caribbean and has brought new elements from the methodology used, a strong spiritual imprint that was sought, and the openness to listen to new voices.

Introduction: A Church in a synodal key

17. The Latin American and Caribbean Church has completed the continental stage of the synodal process convoked by Pope Francis with the theme "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission". The preceding narrative explained the process of listening, dialogue and discernment carried out in the four regional assemblies with the participation of the twenty-two Episcopal Conferences. In this journey together, we have learned to develop more fully the sense of the "ecclesial we" and are reaping various fruits.

18. Conciliar, synodal, and collegial life in our Church has a long history. In the path walked by the great missionaries of the first evangelization, we find Our Lady of Guadalupe with her dark face, her message of "God for whom we live", her

enculturated pedagogy through conversation in the indigenous language, and the search for a land without evil. She is the first missionary disciple of the continent. In the Church on pilgrimage in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Spirit has distributed a rich diversity of gifts among its peoples and endowed them with spiritual and communitarian values, such as respect for Sister Mother Earth. For five centuries the Church, with lights and shadows, with holiness and sin, evangelized the continent bearing witness to the faith and fighting for justice—above all through its saints and martyrs—and thus contributed to the formation of communities of children, brothers and sisters.

19. In recent times, we have welcomed the power of the Holy Spirit who always rejuvenates the Church through significant synodal processes. This common journey has intensified since 1955 with the celebration of the First General Conference of the Episcopate in Rio de Janeiro and the creation of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), an organism of communion and coordination at the service of the bishops and the Episcopal Conferences. Also noteworthy are the assemblies of the General Conferences of the Episcopate: Medellin (1968), Puebla (1979), Santo Domingo (1992) and Aparecida (2007), in the Marian sanctuary of Brazil, with the invitation to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ so that, in Him, our peoples may have life.

20. In 2019 Pope Francis suggested preparing a first Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, insisting that it not only be a meeting of bishops but of all the holy faithful people of God who walk, pray, speak, think, discuss and seek His will. This Assembly, celebrated in 2021, was received with great joy. This unprecedented experience, fruit of the overflow of the Spirit, took place in the midst of the pandemic crisis and constituted, in times of suffering and death, the prophetic sign of a Church alive and close to her people to sow hope and build the future. It is a true milestone that combines the participation of many members of the People of God with the exercise of the pastoral ministry of the bishops and episcopates. With all that was shared, the text *Towards a Synodal Church, Going Out to the Peripheries. Reflections and pastoral proposals from the First Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean was elaborated*.

21. There have also been other synodal processes of different magnitude and scope that teach us to walk together: CELAM was renewed and restructured with a more synodal style; the Assembly of the Synod for the Amazon Region was held; the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA) was created; and several ecclesial networks were formed: Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM); Mesoamerican Ecological Ecclesial Network (REMAM); Ecclesial Network of the Gran Chaco and the Guarani Aquifer (REDCHAG). These networks pay particular attention to the enculturation of the Gospel and the Church, the particular problems of indigenous and Afro- American communities, the values of inter-culturality and care for our common home.

22. Within the context of these ecclesial processes, and in the midst of the complex

realities of our countries and our region, the Latin American and Caribbean Churches welcomed Pope Francis' convocation to the Synod on the Synodal Church. We wanted to incorporate this new process into our regional experience and, at the same time, contribute to the synodality of the whole Church from our own recent history, knowing that the Spirit weaves harmony. The People of God are experiencing the call to feel themselves as active subjects of the Church. In the regional assembly of Central America and Mexico (CAMEX), a layman said, "This is already Synod". All these processes have been intertwined, forging rich contributions of experience, concern and proposals.

23. The General Secretariat of the Synod has formulated the main question guiding our synodal journey as follows: "How is this 'journeying together' that enables the Church to proclaim the Gospel, in accordance with the mission entrusted to her, taking place today at various levels (from local to universal) and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take to grow as a synodal Church?" (*Preparatory Document* 2, 26; *Document for the Continental Stage* 2, 105). In one of our regional meetings this question was clarified in the following way: "What do we mean when we say 'synodal Church'"? These important questions invite us to deepen our theological, pastoral and spiritual reflection in ways that helps us to better live ecclesiality, synodality, ministeriality and collegiality.

24. In this paragraph we synthesize the main contributions of the continental stage in Latin America and the Caribbean around eight main themes. These themes include and refer to other important questions for the nature and practice of synodality; they bring together concerns, tensions and priorities. Each and every one is considered "in synodal key".

1) The protagonism of the Spirit in a synodal Church.
2) The synodality of the People of God.
3) Synodality: the way of being and acting of the Church.
4) Missionary synodal Church.
5) Synodality: socio-environmental commitment in a fragmented world.
6) Synodal Conversion and reform of structures.
7) Vocations, Charisms and Ministries in a Synodal Key.
8) Contributions of the Latin American and Caribbean synodal itinerary.

1. The leading role of the Spirit in a synodal Church

25. The Church is the People gathered to share in communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (cf. LG 4). The road we have traveled has allowed us to recognize how God is really leading the Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean towards an increasingly synodal way of being, something that is inherent to the Church, but which takes on greater importance in view of the challenges that societal changes

pose to its life of communion and mission. This implies an awareness of the experience of our lowliness and fragility, intensified by the crisis caused by the pandemic. It is necessary to "trust and affirm the Holy Spirit as the protagonist of this process, and that he illuminates the changes that can take place in the Church of Jesus" (CAMEX).

26. At Pentecost the Spirit is the Church's origin and the permanent source of her vitality. It is he who moves her to flow and to traverse history with relevance and meaning, and who leads her along paths of renewal into the future. He shapes the Church's face and her relational fabric, making unity in diversity possible. Without him, there is no authentic following of Jesus, no new life, no ecclesial kairos. The Spirit encourages his Church to an authentic conversion that presupposes the following: listening, dialogue, discernment, honing our attention to reality and our capacity to understand the cry of God in the enduring cries that resound in history. This is the moment to recognize the *kairos* in which we live with confidence in the Spirit and the certainty that everything is God's work.

27. The experience of knowing that we are inhabited by the Spirit has launched us beyond our own analyses and reflections, inviting us to overcome the temptation of intimism, fundamentalisms and ideologies that make us disguise ourselves as wanting God when they are the pursuit of particular interests. He asked us to place ourselves in context and to root the ecclesial journey in the depths of history, until we allow ourselves to be permeated by reality, recognizing that in it God manifests himself and acts, calling us to commitment, to work with him, passionate for his Kingdom. We have understood the synodal journey "as a personal and communitarian process of radical openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who alone is capable of creating a new Pentecost in the Church and overcoming the constant temptation to fragment ourselves" (BOLIVARIANA).

28. The action of the Spirit, like everything in the dynamism of the Kingdom of God, must be discerned. His voice must be heard and welcomed, listening to "what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:11). His promptings require the docility of our hearts. Hence the need to assume a permanent attitude of discernment, of seeking not to our own will but rather to do will of the Father of Mercy, imitating Jesus. This generates a great tension in these our times in which individuality and voluntarism have been inordinately exalted and the "I" has been made the measure of all things; in which we are tempted to impose our own intentions, which are only ideologies and partial visions of reality, on others. To discern means to distinguish, among so many voices and movements, that which comes from the Spirit, what the Lord tells us and expects of us. This is what we have done in this process, trying to overcome our own temptations. Like the experience of faith itself, this discernment must become ever more communitarian, and attentive to the "*sensus fidei*" of the God's People on "the way".

29. We are called to a profound reform of the Church, one which arises from God's action in the depths of history. "Behold, I make all things new, do you not perceive" (Is

43:19). We are called to live a conversion that originates in our faithful listening to God and to reality, a listening that is the condition for the transformation of the heart. We must listen to one another and discern the signs of the times in order to seek together God's will in the light of Sacred Scripture.

30. During this synodal journey we have felt the call to listen to the melody of the present, convinced that the quality of our listening determines the quality of our response and opens paths to missionary commitment. We note that today the Church is more than ever committed to a new relational style that is more contextualized and embodied in reality; that is capable of listening and making different voices resonate; that is capable of positioning herself so as to generate that is required for encounter. We feel called to generate authentic dynamics of listening, participation, communion, shared mission and co-responsibility.

31. One fruit of the Spirit in those who participated in the synodal process is the renewal of their hope and of the humble and confident recognition that synodal conversion is led by the Spirit. From an attitude focused on thinking only about the synodal assembly and the final document as the desired response, we have moved on to recognize the need for patience, constancy, perseverance in purpose, creative courage and audacity, all of which are virtues linked to hope. We have moved on to the conviction that synodal conversion begins in our own daily lives, and from there it projects itself, like leaven in dough, towards the transformation of the whole world. "On the synodal journey we must not run, we must follow the rhythm of the Spirit so that the experience allows us to give time to each moment" (CAMEX) "The synodal journey is an invitation to be peasants of faith; this requires us to learn new verbs: to wait without despairing, to water what is necessary for each kind of plant, to persevere without tiring, certain that we are guided by the Spirit" (BOLIVARIANA).

32. The People of God walked in hope of the Savior's coming. Today we walk in the joyful hope of His return, which encourages our service to the Kingdom and longs for the fullness of Life for all.

2. The synodality of the People of God

33. Many voices heard in the four regional assemblies have reminded us that synodal renewal presupposes "recovering the conciliar proposal expressed in the notion of the People of God, which emphasizes equality and common dignity rather than differences of ministries and charisms" (BOLIVARIANA).

34. The Church is the community of those who follow "the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25). It is the People of God on pilgrimage in the world. Synodality manifests the

social and historical dimension of the Church, rooted in the pilgrim condition of the human being who journeys through life searching for happiness. The People of God is called to walk together with the whole human family, being a sacrament of salvation and hope. Here arises the double dimension of synodality in that it expresses the Church's life of walking together and the Church's accompaniment of people in history toward the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

35. The common journey of the Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean is advancing a sense of "we" through the dynamics of old and new synodal processes that are experienced. In this process we are bringing to life our conviction that the People of God on the way is the subject of synodal communion. The assemblies reaffirmed what the Second Vatican Council expressed about the common dignity and fundamental equality of all the baptized, women and men. The gift of faith and the sacrament of baptism make us followers of Jesus and confer on us all membership in the one People of God, from the least of the baptized to the successor of St. Peter.

36. In our journey we feel and affirm that synodality helps us to be a more participative and co- responsible Church. A synodal Church is challenged to encourage the participation of all, according to the vocation of each and every one, with the authority conferred by Christ on the College of Bishops presided over in charity by the Bishop of Rome. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are called and enabled to place the gifts received from the Holy Spirit at the service of others. The authority of the Pastors is a gift of the same Spirit of Christ the Head to serve the edification of the whole Body. In synodal communion the Bishops exercise their apostolic mission by walking with, accompanying and guiding their brothers and sisters to follow Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

37. Synodality expresses the condition of subject that corresponds to the whole Church and to each one in the Church. We believers are brothers and sisters on the same journey, called to be active subjects through our participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the source of a great diversity of vocations, identities, talents, competencies and ministries that enrich our unity in communion. Here a permanent challenge arises. How can we synodally promote diversities so as to prevent them from becoming divisions? How can we build unity in such a way that avoids unity becoming homogeneity? The vast majority of the Christian faithful are lay men and women who receive the faith and learn to live the communion of love within their families and communities.

38. Synodal life witnesses to a Church made up of persons and communities who are free and diverse subjects called to relate to one another fraternally by bonds of mutual respect and reciprocal affection. Many voices questioned how we treat one another within the Church, especially in the relationship between pastors and laity and between women and men. In all the assemblies we heard a deep cry to be treated well, respected as equals, and valued in one's own identity and specific contribution. The shared discernment shows that we still have a long way to go in relating to each

other with human, evangelical, and synodal attitudes. "*We need a structural change that uninstalls us. It requires flexibility, dialogue, tolerance, acceptance, respect. Not putting new wine into old wineskins*" (CARIBE).

39. One challenge is to open the spaces, provide the means and generate ways for the effective participation of women in the instances of discernment and decision making. The October synodal assembly should deepen these themes: women's leadership and their contribution to theological reflection in pastoral councils, in the accompaniment of communities, in the areas of elaboration and decision- making. "The participation of women is a prophecy, a factor of hope" (CONO SUR).

40. Synodality is founded on and expressed in the celebrations of Baptism and the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of Christian life. In the Eucharistic assembly, baptismal communion is actualized and a dynamism of participation is generated. There is a tension between different ways of valuing and living these sacraments. There are those who point out "a tension between a ritualistic liturgy and an open and inculturated liturgy" (CONO SUR). It is necessary to build new liturgical languages and expressions while maintaining the Eucharist as the source and summit of our journey together" (BOLIVARIANA).

41. Synodality encourages the ecumenical commitment of all Christians because it is an invitation to walk together on the path to full unity in Christ. Without minimizing differences, synodality opens us to recognize legitimate diversities in a reciprocal exchange of gifts and guides our steps toward "reconciled harmony". At the same time, a synodal Church desires to advance interreligious dialogue and universal fraternity on every continent.

42. The Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows the beauty of this pluriform face in the different peoples who experience God's gift within and through their own culture. "In order to advance in the configuration of Churches with their own face and to respond to the specific challenges of their context, the Amazon region feels the need for greater autonomy and diversification of the local Churches, as well as of their representative bodies, such as the Episcopal Conferences" (CEAMA-REPAM).

III. Synodality: the Church's way of being and acting

43. Synodality is the dynamic dimension of ecclesial communion, called to incarnate a way of being and acting founded on union with the Most Holy Trinity, animated by the Spirit and centered on Jesus Christ. Encounter with the person of the Lord is the fundamental criterion of all discernment and sustains the Church's evangelizing mission. We are convinced that "the great horizon is the discernment of a new way of being Church from the encounter with Christ as the path to communion, participation

and mission with a clear pastoral conversion that reflects the desire to live in synodality in all its spheres, until synodality becomes a way of life [...] (BOLIVARIANA).

44. Missionary disciples find their source of life and inspiration in the celebration of the Eucahristic feast and in the prayerful reading—personal and communal—of the Word of God. These permit them to live in a continuous process of pastoral conversion, to strengthen the sense of belonging to the ecclesial community, and to enliven co-responsible participation in the synodal journey.

45. A Church of missionary disciples, attentive to the signs of the times, feels invited to cultivate a synodal spirituality that is both concrete and Marian because "Mary reminds us that Christ is the center of our life and the model of the synodal journey" (BOLIVARIANA). It recovers richness of faith and popular piety "to strengthen the interior experience of our people as a complement to the liturgical life" (BOLIVARIANA), which should be enculturated, and should express the "wisdom, joy and teachings of our peoples [...] They contribute, celebrate, listen, welcome, accompany, give and receive in the various dimensions of existence" (Afro-Garifuna Contribution).

46. The Church's synodal way of being and acting demands a style of community discernment based on mutual listening to the Spirit and on truthful and trusting dialogue. It is the "Spirit who impels us to this openness, to this search for the newness of God, even at all the risks that this implies" (CARIBE). We must "overcome our fears in the face of listening, because we know that it commits us to action and to responding to the brother who is being listened to" (CONO SUR).

47. For such discerning listening, the Church must consider and practice spiritual conversation. As a method and praxis, it helps to learn to listen, to dialogue, to be formed in pathways, dynamics and processes that support conversion at the personal, ecclesial and structural levels. In light of this style, a necessary reciprocity is generated which leads us to a complementarity of vocation and the gifts of each one. The dynamic will be "to learn to listen, to listen to each other and above all to listen to each other with depth, because when we listen to the other person with depth (full attention) it touches, stirs our being and requires transforming attitudes, changing ways of relating and moving on to dialogue" (Indigenous Peoples contribution). This way of being helps to rebuild bonds and invites us to adopt new ways of relating that are open to the action of the Spirit who always surprises and opens new paths. Synodality supposes a "spirituality that consists in loving and listening, with responsibility, with commitment and without fear" (CONO SUR); it moves us to embrace the "path of forgiveness and reconciliation, recognizing our faults and omissions, to rebuild from our own vulnerability, the synodal Church" (CAMEX).

48. In light of the reflection, especially appropriate for this time, on the method of spiritual conversation, intuitions, tensions and priorities emerge that can assist in in the process. Spiritual conversation enables us to speak freely about uncomfortable and painful topics, in an experience of one-on-one relationship. Far from cancelling

one's own identity and life stories, it helps to put oneself in the other person's place, to tune in with his or her sentiments, and from there to refine one's own convictions. This experience is a formative process that is open to learning and to combining feelings and ideas; it leads to change by making improbable encounters possible, favoring dialogue and creating channels of communication.

49. It is evident that the animation and action of the Spirit accompanies the whole process. It is necessary to live this experience from an interior freedom and with an open heart, avoiding polemics, the imposition of ideas, "agendas" and everything that prevents the Holy Spirit from being the protagonist.

50. The method is like an upward spiral that moves from the "I" (1st moment - feelings: personal) to letting myself be touched by the other, the "You" (2nd moment - echoes: relational), to finally arrive at the "We" (3rd moment - choosing the will of God: the common). The method should not be the sum of individual discernments, but the means and expression of a communitarian process.

51. It is important to integrate the hermeneutical method of "See - Judge – Act" that has been adopted by the Church of Latin America and the Caribbean, with the process of spiritual conversation. In this way a profound analysis of reality associated with discernment is maintained as well as the the search for a consensus in order to reach a transforming action. Certainly there are already advances from our region that come from our experience of continental synodal work. These advances associate associating seeing with listening and contemplating; judging with discerning and interpreting; acting with projecting and responding.

52. In fidelity to what is shared and to what the Spirit wants to tell us, and in order to promote the process of synodal discernment, its timing and its steps, it is important that group moderators and secretaries be trained and instructed. Moderators must be trained so that he/she can animate the process as such and avoid conducting a conversation that leads merely to a group opinion. Secretaries must be trained so that he/she can help to elaborate a community synthesis that is not merely the fruit of brainstorming.

IV. Missionary Synodal Church

53. A synodal Church, according to the name given this Synod, is a Church in communion and participation for the mission. A "Church that is synodal has the challenge and the mission to show herself missionary" (CARIBE). Therefore, "structures are urgently needed to ensure a missionary Synodality, including all the members of the periphery" (CAMEX). Instead of the Church closing in on itself, synodality leads the Church to be missionary at the service of universal fraternity. Like synodality, missionality is constitutive of the Church, for every baptized person is a missionary

disciple of Jesus Christ in his Church. Discipleship is the following of Jesus, a setting out with him to collaborate with his work and to prolong it in history. In turn, because the work of Jesus is to evangelize, this is also the Church's mission. As St. Pope Paul VI said, "the Church exists to evangelize" (EN 14). A "revision of the structures and of the ecclesial institution as a whole is necessary, in function of service and evangelization" (CONO SUR).

54. In his person, his life, his work and his Passover, Jesus makes present the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is an absolute, to which everything becomes relative. The Church's evangelizing mission is none other than to give continuity to Jesus' mission, contributing to the growth of the Kingdom in the world, especially in the peripheries, which must be its center. It is necessary "to take the Good News to the peripheries; to recognize that there it is incarnated and is life, that it is lived and builds synodality" (BOLIVARIANA).

55. Undertaken in synodal key the mission to evangelize is not proselytism. The latter leads to a self-referential Church and an eclipsing the Kingdom of God of which the Church is meant to be a sacrament. It is necessary "to be a credible Church, sacrament of the Kingdom" (CARIBE). This mission consists in the joyful and gratuitous proclamation to all humanity of Jesus Christ and his Paschal Mystery. This proclamation is offered within intercultural relationships since it is made to a plural and diverse world. It was indicated that "the clearest horizon that opens up is the challenge of evangelization in diversity. How to be missionary disciples in the midst of the diversity of contexts, situations and the complexity of the world" (CARIBE). It is urgent to "attend to the subjects of evangelization, respecting their culture, inviting them to participate, approaching their way of life and understanding their vision of the world" (CONO SUR). The mission consists of incarnating the Gospel within cultures, contributing to form native local Churches with the face of the peoples who are part of them. To an incarnated Church corresponds an enculturated and enculturating evangelization of the Church as an institution, in its organization and structures.

56. Synodality helps all the baptized to be active subjects of the evangelizing mission and enables the People of God to take on a posture of dialogue and service to the world and, in view of a universal fraternity, to journey with humanity that, in its entirety, is on pilgrimage. It is indicated that "the world needs an 'outgoing Church' that rejects division, that turns its gaze to humanity and, more than mere doctrine or strategy, offers an experience of salvation, an 'overflow of the gift' that responds to the cry of humanity and nature" (CAMEX). In the Church's evangelizing mission, the "others" are not only addressees, but also partners in dialogue by the fact that missionary disciples are in a horizontal relationship of communion with all people of good will, in whom the Spirit of God is at work. Synodality leads to open missionary activity, to participation and exchange without borders.

57. However, the evangelizing identity of the Church does not always seem to be present in all communities since, at times, they are more concerned with resolving

their internal problems and not with announcing the Good News. There is a tension "between a self-centered church and a missionary church" (CONO SUR). This can lead to the temptation of "believing that first we have to solve the problems of synodality and then go out on mission" (CARIBE). Synodality and mission are two intimately linked aspects because synodality enriches mission and mission energizes synodality.

58. In the regional assemblies it was mentioned that the Church's tendency to focus on itself can arise from "fear and doubt about how to go out in daily life and in living with the people" (BOLIVARIANA). There is also "fear of losing power and desire to control, which leads to intolerance and rigidity that prevents taking concrete and bold steps to fulfill the evangelizing mission of bringing people to their encounter with God" (CARIBE). This causes a strong tension between a pastoral ministry of a Church that seeks merely to maintain its spaces and times and a Church that not only widens its tent to welcome, but also moves beyond itself to meet others where they are.

59. In this sense, a question arises that generates a variety of attitudes: to what extent and in what way should the Gospel penetrate cultures? Responding to this question represents the challenge of discerning how to carry out the evangelizing task in the present multicultural and intercultural context in order to learn to live the faith in the great diversity of our day. "This enculturation should also influence the construction of liturgical spaces to make them more adequate to the theology of synodality" (CONO SUR).

60. Evangelization takes place through the witness of personal and community life. Faith grows through the attraction of God's grace, values individuals and peoples as subjects, and recognizes the evangelizing patrimony of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples who live the faith in their own way. Another "challenge for the Church in its evangelizing mission is sectarianism" (CONO SUR), understood as the division and internal struggles of sectors closed in on themselves, which is an anti-witness.

61. It also calls for "moving from an evangelization centered on sin, to a perspective of the Good News, like the doctor who, rather than focusing on the disease, focuses his work on health; (in this way) we can move from lamenting to focusing on what we can do" (BOLIVARIANA). At the same time, it is always necessary to remember the purpose of the evangelizing mission which, at times, is reduced to one of its processes, such as the administration of the sacraments, rather than fostering a true encounter with Christ that initiates and strengthens a path of following and growing in faith.

62. The role of the laity, and especially of women, in the transmission of the faith was emphasized in the meetings. Catechists and evangelizers who serve, with passion and hope, in distant places and difficult contexts, are a gift of God for whom we are grateful and whom we value. However, it has also been mentioned that at times there is a perceived tension with the clergy who arrogate to themselves the responsibility of directing all evangelizing action in the community. "The support, proclamation and

witness of missionary women must be valued. And this is fundamental in a synodal Church" (BOLIVARIANA).

V. Synodality: socio-environmental commitment in a fragmented world

63. Synodality motivates the Church to move beyond herself and to place herself and her entire mission at the service of society. As the syntheses show, there are synodal experiences of a Church that is a companion on the journey of the peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean. Several contributions affirm that there is great ethnic, cultural and social diversity in many societies of our region. This is a richness, but it can also be perceived as a threat that manifests itself in multiple fragmentations, in wide inequalities, and in the marginalization and exclusion of various groups on the continent. Our societies also suffer from strong ideological and political polarization; in several countries we are concerned about the weakening of democracy as a system of representation and government. In these contexts, a synodal Church is called to renew its preferential option for the poor and to highlight the social dimension of evangelization, because if it "is not properly explained, there is always the risk of distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the evangelizing mission" (EG 176).

64. At the meetings, attention was drawn to what is observed in many places: "the distancing of the local Churches from reality, from the cries that come from the lands and peoples, from the diverse realities of people in vulnerability, from the peripheries" (CONO SUR), be they geographical, territorial, social and existential peripheries. The poor have the many faces of women, native peoples and people of African descent, people in vulnerable conditions such as migrants and refugees, people with disabilities, children and the elderly who are vulnerable, and many others.

65. A synodal Church is called to "be a more prophetic and Samaritan Church. A prophetic and missionary Church that truly goes out to the geographical and existential peripheries and listens to the cry of the poor and creation" (BOLIVARIANA). It is important that in the synodal process we have the audacity to raise and discern major topics, often forgotten or ignored, and to meet with the "other" and with all those who, within the human family or within our Church, are often marginalized. In several appeals it is remembered that, in the spirit of Jesus, we must "be inclusive of the poor, LGTBIQ+ communities, couples in second union, priests who want to return to the Church in their new situation, women who have abortions out of fear, the imprisoned, the sick" (CONO SUR). It is about "walking together in a synodal Church that listens to all types of exiles so that they feel at home", a Church that is "a refuge for the wounded and the broken" (CONO SUR). This calls for availability to "go out to the encounter, to give our attention, to get involved. Because synodality means not waiting for people to come, but going out to meet them" (CONO SUR).

66. The Church offers its Samaritan love and service in solidarity, learning to walk with all those who are also at the service of those who suffer, seeking to generate alternatives to the throwaway culture, and to confront the different types of violence that have increased in recent years, among them: violence linked to the great social inequalities, drug trafficking, organized crime, human trafficking, abuse of children and women. In this journey together, the Church is discovering different ways of being synodal in alliances with social and popular movements, and other people and institutions involved in promoting everyone, such as the Global Education Pact.

67. Some contributions ask: "Listening to the cry of the peoples and the earth" is a commitment to the Gospel that asks us to be allies with the peoples in defense of life and their territories" (CONO SUR). This is especially true for the Amazon, threatened by ecological collapse, with disastrous consequences for the life of the earth and its peoples. There is a feeling from the Amazon that points out "the abandonment of our indigenous peoples; the lack of a real presence in the midst of the Amazonian peoples" (BOLIVARIANA). It is identified as "a pending matter: to reach the original peoples, marginalized by their different language, culture and cosmovision; and [...] to reach the [other] peripheries, to approach and welcome the indigent, those of other creeds and customs-values" (CONO SUR).

68. The socio-environmental service to which the Church is called to serve in the light of the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church is strengthened in an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue that leads to common action. In many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean there are Interreligious Councils in which representatives of various Christian Churches and multiple religions present in our region actively participate. From a shared commitment to the promotion of human rights, justice, peace and care for the common home, they jointly carry out activities for the benefit of society.

69. Several contributions express that a synodal Church, lived as a field hospital, should give a central place to young people. To be close to them, to heal their wounds and to accompany them in their search, the Church must "adapt its language and symbols to approach their concrete realities. We must think of new methods to enchant and rescue the presence of young people in the Church, going where they are and walking together with them" (CONO SUR). It is important that "they, and we too, become aware of the leading role they have to assume in the Church and society" (CONO SUR).

70. The request for listening, integration and participation in decision making on the part of young people is reiterated. The prayer that a group of them made at the meeting of the Southern Cone Region resounds, expressing why their friends had left the Church and concluding with a heartfelt prayer: "God, Mother and Father, hear our cry in prayer! Blow strongly so that the Church does not forget the youth, that it may embrace their lives as they come, with their dreams and desires, and accompany them in the task of spreading and promoting synodality".

71. Many young people show great sensitivity to social and environmental problems and great creativity in generating solutions from within their own contexts. Being "digital natives," they have much more knowledge and skill to help the Church discover the digital potential for evangelization, networking and the creation of a synodal culture in these spaces.

72. The participation of representatives of the Digital Synod in the assemblies generated an interest in a more active and proactive presence in this space. There was also a need to accompany digital evangelizers more closely.

VI. Synodal conversion and reform of structures

73. The Second Vatican Council conceived the Church as an institution in need of permanent renewal. In continuity with the Council, Francis refers to the Church as *Ecclesia semper reformanda*, which requires the conversion of the entire ecclesial community. The Latin American and Caribbean Church assumes this call as a permanent pastoral conversion, which calls for the revision of "personal and community praxis, relationships of equality and authority, and structures and dynamisms" (SD 30). The regions consulted stated that "synodality requires a personal, communitarian, ecclesial and structural conversion" (CONO SUR), for which reason "a change of mentality, a change of structures is urgent" (CAMEX)

74. This call is not exempt from challenges and tensions. We find people and groups who want to separate the change of mentality and personal conversion from the reform of structures, just as there are those who do not want the reform of the Church. Therefore, these changes must be part of a process of "active conversion, for a real transformation of mind and heart, since we were all formed in different times and have many ingrained practices" (CONO SUR). From this derives the need for the local Churches to generate processes and spaces for listening, dialogue and discernment that continue to deepen the fundamental question of the synodal journey: "How does this journey together take place today in our own particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take"?

75. The answer to these questions is built by involving the entire People of God. It is necessary to take the step towards an authentic synodalization of the whole Church, which will entail "spiritual, pastoral and institutional reforms" (DA 367) with the aim of shaping a new institutional model. The regional consultations recognize that, in order to achieve this, "new pastoral options must be created from a change of mentality and renewal of existing structures" (CARIBE). In this context, the challenge of seeking the reform of seminaries and houses of formation arises, especially when some of these institutions have not moved beyond their Tridentine form. Many people see

"seminaries as closed houses that do not help the vision of a ministerial priesthood" (CAMEX). It is necessary to continue with the updated reform of the *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*. In the formation of candidates to the priesthood, families, laity and consecrated men and women must be involved. This was emphasized by all the regional assemblies.

76. The whole process of renewal toward greater synodality in the Church requires more formation. It was requested that formative and catechetical programs be integrated and that the members of the People of God carry them out together. It was emphasized that families, as domestic churches, and parish and educational ecclesial communities, should be the first sphere of formation in synodal communion. At the same time, it was requested that parishes be renewed based on the model of a community of communities, thus revitalizing small communities.

77. Among the numerous proposals and requests for formation expressed in the assemblies as an outstanding theme, various horizons and areas emerge: "we believe in the importance of synodal formation and therefore we would like to contribute some ideas for an integral formation: learning to work collaboratively; growing in a culture of discernment; implementing transparency in the various areas of ecclesial life; acquiring digital and radio skills to be permanently connected with the needs of the parishioners; showing experiential experiences to make visible the relevance of synodality" (BOLIVARIANA).

78. A theme that cuts across all ecclesial areas is that of formation for a culture of respect for all persons and in the prevention of all types of abuses.

79. The regional consultations mention the priority of making obligatory the constitution of the various councils promoted by Vatican II: presbyteral councils, economic councils (diocesan and parochial) and pastoral councils (diocesan and parochial). They also ask that "they be a space for inclusion, dialogue, transparency and discernment not only at the national and regional levels, but also in the base communities, parishes and dioceses, prelatures and vicariates, following the process of communion and participation" (CONO SUR). It is recognized that the councils offer "permanent environments for the exercise and promotion of communion and synodality" (CTI Sinodalidad, 80). But their formal implementation is not enough. It is requested that each council "not only be a consultative space, but that we ensure that it has a weight in the decisions on the mode of government and change of structures" (CAMEX).

80. A Church structured on the basis of a network of councils would make it possible to establish institutional procedures of accountability and transparency that start from the communities and help to eradicate abuses of conscience and power as well as spiritual, psychological, sexual and economic abuse. This requires the creation of instances and protocols for prevention, reparation and justice (cf. AE 355). This would respond to the voices that see "a tension between the desire for a

more transparent Church versus a culture of secrecy" (CONO SUR), and that call for a greater "commitment to care for and listen to the victims of abuse" (CAMEX). This and other aspects will require "openness to possible modifications in Canon Law that give juridical form to synodal practice; especially that synodal institutions be recognized by law and that law help to guarantee and promote greater transparency" (CONO SUR).

81. The emergence of a new synodal ecclesiality presents us with the challenge of imagining new structures. Some have already been emerging, such as the Ecclesial Conference for the Amazon (CEAMA) and the first Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean. However, the concern has arisen regarding how to articulate episcopal collegiality and synodal ecclesiality, inviting us to think about how to integrate the elaboration and the making of decisions: "the synodal dimension of the Church must be expressed through the realization and governance of processes of participation and discernment capable of manifesting the dynamism of communion that inspires all ecclesial decisions" (CTI Sinodalidad 76). Likewise, these new structures place us before forms of organization and functioning that must consider how to articulate the sense of faith of all the faithful, episcopal authority and the service of theology, because the Holy Spirit speaks through all the People of God as a whole and not just through some (the bishops) or one (the Bishop of Rome, who has the primacy). "If the People of God were not a subject in decision-making, there is no synodality. And if the People of God is not constitutive of an organism that makes decisions for the Church as a whole, this organism is not synodal either" (CEAMA-REPAM). In all of the above, we understand the need to "renew and rethink the structures of the Church in order to respond to the challenges of today's world, interpreting the signs of the times [and] one step towards this is the reform of the Code of Canon Law" (BOLIVARIANA).

VII. Vocations, Charisms and Ministries in a Synodal Key

82. Synodality is the art of valuing, welcoming and knowing how to articulate all the gifts and charisms that the Lord has given us, so that they flow and become a channel of grace and blessing, and, therefore, it is important to value the different vocations" (BOLIVARIANA). The Church is a prophetic, priestly and royal-serving People whose members are subjects of the theological life towards holiness. They receive from God diverse charisms to serve the common good (Cf. AE 171).

83. The regional meetings repeatedly mentioned the rich diversity of charisms and ministries expressed both in the gifts that enrich the consecrated life and in the widely varied gifts of the laity. Therefore, it is necessary "to review the structure of the Church so that it may be a community of communities, recognizing the unity in mission with the diversity of ministries that the Holy Spirit gives through gifts to each of its members, according to their vocation, so as not to oppose the charismatic dimension

with the institutional dimension" (BOLIVARIANA).

84. However, a Church that is "all ministerial" is not necessarily a Church of "all instituted ministries". There are many legitimate ministries that flow from the baptismal vocation, including spontaneous, non-instituted ministries and others that are instituted with their training, mission and stability. Some indigenous peoples even indicated that they have their own ministries, which are already being lived, but are not recognized by the ecclesial institution.

85. Profound community discernment is needed regarding the ministries to be created or promoted in light of the signs of the times, especially among the laity. These should have the purpose not only of attending to the internal needs of the Church, but also to be a "response and at the service of the world" (CAMEX), because "the mission of Christians, above all, is in the world" (CEAMA-REPAM). Here resounds the voice of Pope Francis who, in the exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, speaks of "a markedly lay ecclesial culture" (QA 94). We must value and promote "the service of the laity in the construction of the world, the economy, politics, the sciences, the arts, etc."as an essential dimension so that "the Church may be a prophetic, priestly and regal People" (CARIBE, CEAMA-REPAM).

86. A central issue is to encourage the participation of the laity, especially women and young people, in decision-making scenarios. There is a majority presence of women because "they are the ones who support the Church the most" (CAMEX). At the same time, they "need to be open to incorporation and participation in decision-making spheres" (CONO SUR). Some contributions indicate that these spaces already exist in some of our local churches, but others have "the feeling that women are 'cheap labor' within the Church" (CONO SUR) and that it is "necessary to create and institute new ministries, especially for women" (CEAMA-REPAM). Many voices consider the institution of the female diaconate an urgent need, recognizing what is being experienced in several communities.

87. Priestly ministry has undergone a profound renewal since Vatican II. Nevertheless, the denunciation of clericalism, understood as the expression of clerical authoritarianism and the deformation of ministerial service into an abuse of power, has arisen repeatedly. This affects not only the ordained priesthood, but is also a temptation for all ministers of the Church, including the laity. "We see the need to think of a conversion within the Church that overcomes clericalism and machismo that excludes women from the processes of discernment and decision-making, and that is something cultural that we have to face, even if we have to go against the current. Fraternity and sisterhood is what must be cultivated" (CONO SUR, CEAMA-REPAM).

88. That is why it is important "to take steps to overcome clericalism in the laity and in the clergy, taking up our mission from the principle of subsidiarity as a synodal way of proceeding" (BOLIVARIANA). The Church is more synodal when it walks with all the baptized and encourages them to live the mission recognizing the common dignity as

the basis for the renewal of ecclesial life and with ministries in which authority is service. "Authority as service builds interdependence (neither dependence nor independence) based on the common vocation as disciples" (BOLIVARIANA).

89. The revalorization of baptismal life and dignity as the primary source of all ministries demands a new institutional model to counteract the pyramidal model that facilitates clericalism. Synodality offers the appropriate interpretative framework for thinking about the renewal of ordained ministry, which implies, among other things, "discerning the ministeriality of the entire People of God in terms of co-responsibility" and living "ministeriality as a covenant with the poor" (CONO SUR).

90. This also entails rethinking the model of ordained ministry. There are those who say that in their communities there is a "conflict between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood", as well as "forms of priesthood that do not respond to the needs of the People of God" (CAMEX), "We do not know how to articulate lay and ordained ministry" (CARIBE). Thus, if we want a more synodal and missionary Church, "it is necessary to rethink the profile of the ministries, especially of the ordained ministers, so that they exercise their ministry 'in' the community and not 'over' it", with a formation" that is closely related to the pastoral processes and the life of the people they are going to serve" (CEAMA-REPAM).

91. In this area of ordained ministry, several voices have stated that "we need an open and sincere dialogue on whether the topic of celibacy and its relationship with priestly ministry is still useful" (CARIBE, CEAMA-REPAM). In addition, the possibility of the priestly ordination of permanent deacons has been favorably considered, and some have raised "the service and inclusion of married priests and members of the consecrated life who have left their institutes" (CONO SUR).

92. In a special way, it is requested that the October General Assembly address this issue, promoting the revision of the theology and forms of a ministerial Church, the formation and profile of ministers, instituted and ordained, and the opening of some ministries to women.

93. Consecrated life, present in the Regional Assemblies, is aware of the action of the Spirit and perceives a strong call to walk in communion with the Church, which is a community of equal disciples—by baptism—and that shares ministries, vocations and charisms for building the Kingdom. It is born in the Church, grows and is called to bear evangelical fruit in the living communion of the faithful People of God, for which reason it longs "to continue to nourish the experience of synodality and to be an engine to energize it in the various contexts and in the local communities of belonging, in which it is constitutively called to be a prophetic synodal presence expressed in community meetings, Chapters, Assemblies, pastoral services, etc." (CARIBE). Consecrated men and women are committed to live as an outoing Church centered on the Gospel, and therefore poorer, missionary, rooted in local contexts, pneumato-centric and in constant dialogue with reality.

94. Synodality and consecrated life are interlinked in the journey of conversion, listening and mission, with the criteria of participation and co-responsibility which also define the identity and nature of the Church herself. Hierarchical and charismatic gifts walk together to "unlearn and eradicate all attitudes of dependence, submission and silence within communities, Churches and society; and to remove the clericalism introduced in the way we relate to other members of the Church. For this reason, we try to rescue and value the synodal experiences that have been lived for a long time in some churches of Latin America in order to apply them in a renewed way in our here and now" (BOLIVARIANA).

VIII. Contributions of the Latin American and Caribbean Synodal Journey

95. In the Narrative of the Regional Assemblies and in the Introduction to this synthesis, we pointed out some peculiarities of the synodal journey made in the Latin American and Caribbean Church. In the development of the seven previous themes we gathered the main contributions of the assemblies and of the syntheses for the *Instrumentum laboris*. Now, as a summary projection, we raise four central questions.

96. (I) Both the text of our first Ecclesial Assembly and the *Document for the Continental Stage* promote a missionary synodal Church. This first question concerns the mutual relationships between ecclesiality, synodality, ministeriality and collegiality. Throughout the Assembly process we felt the mutual fruitfulness and positive tension between synodal ecclesiality and episcopal collegiality. The recent journey of the People of God in our midst, the discernment of the voices and expressions of the sensus fidei fidelium, the responsible and co-responsible participation of all, present the adequate interpretative framework—theoretical and practical—to listen, dialogue and discern together based on the common dignity received in the filial and fraternal grace of baptism. Our experience shows that in this horizon of communion the exercise of the episcopal ministry as a pastoral service to the People of God is enriched. We are learning that, if the ministry of the bishops is not situated within a synodal ecclesiality, it can be impoverished because it fails to receive the benefits of a broad exchange and by feeling threatened as if synodality were a democratization that questions the hierarchical institution of the Church. In a process that is lived synodally, the elaboration and making of decisions by the competent authorities grows in legitimacy and fosters a more positive reception by the community.

97. In this context a question arises which should be analyzed in the next synodal assembly with spiritual discernment, theological depth and pastoral sense. It concerns the mutual relationships between ecclesiality, synodality, ministeriality and collegiality. This can be deepened on the basis of the central role of the Spirit of God in the life and mission of the Church. The theology of the sacraments, especially Baptism

and Holy Orders, the reciprocal relationships between the common priesthood and the ordained ministry, and the reforms of the ministries and structures of the Church, including the reform of the ministry of the Successor of Peter, can be analyzed from a synodal point of view.

98. (II) The emergence of a renewed synodal ecclesiality is driving the challenge to envision synodal reforms in ecclesial mentalities, attitudes, practices, relationships and structures. The novelty that is represented by both the Ecclesial Conference for the Amazon and the first Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean shows that the creation of new institutions is not enough, but that they must be accompanied by an awareness and a formation that help to articulate communion in new, organic and dynamic forms of community participation. It is not possible to successfully carry out the promptings of the Spirit for the Church of the third millennium without a spirituality of synodal communion.

99. We must take up, in a synodal way, the orientations of the Second Vatican Council for a permanent renewal of the Church in her fidelity to Jesus Christ and her evangelizing mission to the peoples. The conciliar exhortations that the Church be an *Ecclesia semper reformanda* (UR 4, 6), or an *Ecclesia semper purificanda* (LG 8), are a source of inspiration for the next Assembly to renew synodality as communion, participation and mission. In the new synodal context, the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean continues to receive that conciliar call as a path of pastoral and missionary conversion.

100. In this process, questions arise that, while not being new, acquire new relevance. What is the magisterial value of the outcomes of Ecclesial Assemblies? Would they not have greater validity and acceptance if they were presented as guidelines and documents of the entire People of God in a region, because they are the fruit of listening, dialogue and common discernment? What would happen if some decisions of an Assembly were rejected by the episcopal body? When, how and where should consultative and deliberative votes be taken? Is it possible to dream of a synodal configuration for Episcopal Conferences and continental structures such as CELAM? Certainly, spiritual discernment, theological foundation and canon law must be articulated here.

101. (III) Ever since the Second Vatican Council, and based on the method employed by the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the Latin American and Caribbean Church has made a major contribution in the form of reflecting on the faith and orienting evangelization not only through the service of bishops and theologians, but also through the contributions of the synodal tradition of the People of God. The teaching of recent Popes leads us to learn from the *sensus fidei* of the faithful as a whole, while at the same time sustaining the service proper to those who teach the faith of the Church with apostolic authority. It seems to us that the Synod should consider the admirable exchange between the magisterium of the People of God, Pastors and theologians.

102. The "See-Judge-Act" method has acquired "citizenship" in the Latin American and Caribbean Church, as expressed in the Aparecida Document (cf. DAp 19). It has been refined and now it has been enriched with the method of spiritual conversation, even as it enriches the latter. In this context we speak of the circular and progressive process configured by the respective moments of seeing/listening/contemplating, judging/discerning/interpreting, and acting/responding/projecting.

103. The background of our hermeneutical method is the conviction that God communicates himself in history and has spoken fully through his Son Jesus Christ, that his Word is transmitted in Sacred Scripture received and communicated in the Tradition of the Church, and that God continues to speak through historical events, especially through the signs that mark the present time. In the magisterium of Latin America and the Caribbean, history, theology and pastoral ministry are mutually enriching.

104. The Synodal Assembly could synodally deepen communitarian discernment in listening to the Spirit and the historical-pastoral hermeneutic in the light of the Gospel of Christ, at all levels and in all ecclesial subjects, in conformity with conciliar teaching (cf. GS 11, 44).

105. (IV) The Church on pilgrimage in Latin America and the Caribbean recognizes herself as a Church of churches and a community of communities. In the councils and synods of the first evangelization, and in the post-conciliar conferences of our Episcopate, there were valuable exchanges between the local churches, episcopal conferences and regional structures, which were promoted by CELAM. In his teaching, Pope Francis refers to local, regional and universal synodality. At this moment we are going through a process that begins in the local churches, is enriched in the national conferences and now reaches continental dimensions. In the Assembly it will be lived at the level of the entire Church. In his encyclicals, exhortations, and speeches, Pope Francis includes local ecclesial experiences and the magisterium of episcopal conferences, such as the Document of Aparecida (cf. EG 25, 122).

106. The call to live and act synodally urges us to redefine the mutual implications between the particular and the universal, the value of ecclesial experience in the peripheries and its repercussion on the whole, the just and tense balances between local, national, regional and global priorities, and the challenge of opening ourselves to harmony, the work of the Spirit. The next Assembly may focus on these questions: How to integrate the particular riches into the beauty of the whole; how to respect the rhythms and demands of those who walk more slowly; how to overcome a predominantly vertical practice, where particular churches seem subordinate, with a true communion of churches in universal catholicity; how to overcome a predominantly vertical practice, where particular churches seem subordinate, with a true communion of churches in universal catholicity.

107. The text of the Ecclesial Assembly teaches: "From the beginning of our ecclesial history the Mother of God sustains the hope of the people of the continent

and is the great spiritual bond in all America" (AE 224). Our believing people, spiritually and affectively Marian from our Guadalupan origins and in all its local expressions, feels and knows that "there is a Marian style in the evangelizing activity of the Church. This dynamic of justice and tenderness, of contemplating and walking towards others, is what makes her an ecclesial model for evangelization" (EG 288). From the heart of faith and piety of our Church we ask the Virgin Mother to sustain us in the hope of the synodal journey because she is "queen and mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope".

"To listen to our brothers and sisters speak of their hopes and of the crises of faith present in different parts of the world, of the need for a renewed pastoral life and of the signals we are receiving from those on the ground."

(Pope Francis)

FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE CONTINENTAL STAGE IN ASIA

"Finally, it offers us the opportunity to become a Church of closeness. Let us keep going back to God's own "style", which is closeness, compassion and tender love. God has always operated that way."

(Pope Francis)

I. The Asian context

1. Asia, blessed with diverse cultures, religions, languages, and ethnicities, is the largest continent in terms of both geographical area and population. It has a landmass of 44.6 million square kilometres, about 30% of the total surface. Asia is home to approximately 4.6 billion people with over 2,300 languages spoken across Asia. It is also considered the birthplace and cradle of major world religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism and several others. Islam is the most prominent religion and is practised by 1.2 billion people, followed by Hinduism with 900 million people.

2. Though the systems of beliefs, values, and symbols vary from place to place, the interconnectedness of the human community draws the Asian peoples together. The Asian value of being relational (with God, self, other human beings, and the cosmos) brings with it the unity of the human family and the unity of the peoples of Asia.

3. Asia holds the dubious distinction of having the most billionaires in the world on one hand, while on the other, it has 320 million people that are extremely poor, living below the poverty line, according to the World Bank Report. The recent pandemic has further exasperated the inequality and economic divide between the haves and the have-nots.

4. Politically too, we see diverse systems of governance that include parliamentary democracies, military dictatorial regimes, communist rulers, constitutional monarchies, and presidential forms of government.

5. Despite the benefits that unity and diversity bring to Asia, it is also entrenched with many challenges that directly affect the Church and the lives of the people of Asia. Some of the challenges are the widespread poverty across Asia, the ecological threat that has brought disequilibrium in the lives of people, the challenges of systemic corruption, the waves of economic migration in search of better lives, the political instability that causes internal disruption to peace and harmony, and much more. All of these have a direct impact on the Church as she seeks to reach out to all peoples.

6. While Christianity remains a very small minority in most parts of Asia, the vibrancy and richness of the individual cultures bring joy to the life of the Church. The Asian continent is vast and is divided into four recognizable regions, namely Central, East, South and Southeast Asia.

7. Founded on our common baptismal dignity, this synodal journey is indeed an expression of the universal Church and the local Churches walking together as one. The positive effects of bringing people from all walks of life, both within and outside the Church into a process of praying with one another, listening to one another, and discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit bring forth in them a new experience of vitality and dynamism to the life of the Church.

8. Among the 4 billion people living in Asia, the Catholic Church comprises only 3.31% of the total population, yet it contributes greatly to the fields of education, healthcare, social welfare and reaching out to the poor and marginalised groups in society.

9. In a pluralistic Asian society, the Catholic Church continues to spread the message of love by empowering those on the margins through quality education and integrating them into the mainstream of society.

10. Thousands of priests, consecrated men and women, along with lay missionaries and catechists are involved in faith formation and catering to the spiritual and pastoral needs of the Catholic community across Asia.

II. The Synod process

Pre-Synodal Phase: FABC 50 General Conference

11. Pope call for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops came while the Federation of Asian Conferences (FABC) was preparing for a General Conference - patterned after those of the Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano y Caribeño (CELAM) - to highlight the contribution of the Church in Asia to the wider Church. With the approach of the 50th anniversary of the Asian Meeting that was held during Pope St. Paul visit to Manila in 1970, the General Conference was first set for November 2020. The coronavirus disease pandemic, however, forced the FABC to postpone the General Conference to October 2022.

12. The coincidence of both movements was considered providential: the General Conference process was bringing to the fore the current situation and challenges of the peoples of Asia as well as the contemporary mission of the Churches in Asia, while the synodal process was providing the methodology and sometimes even creating the listening mechanisms for conducting the General Conference consultations.

13. The fruits of the General Conference will be most evident in the section on below. These represent the concerns and priorities that were recognized during the General Conference but were not extensively covered in the Asian responses to the Document for the Continental Stage.

14. As Pope Francis remarked at the beginning of the FABC General Conference, Paul VI encountered in Asia a Church of the poor, a Church of the young and a Church in dialogue. Fifty years later, the Church of the poor is a Church that cares for our common home, the Church of the young is now navigating and evangelising the digital continent, and the Church in dialogue is called to build bridges between cultures, religions and peoples.

First Phase: Churches of Asia in the FABC

15. The Federation of Asian Conferences (FABC) comprises 17 Episcopal Conferences,[1] 2 Synods of Oriental Churches[2], and 3 Associate Members.[3] There are 29 territories included in the FABC membership.[4] There is the hope to welcome the Church in mainland China in the FABC membership.

16. As the General Conference was ending the Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) was released. Copies were printed and ready on 28 October and distributed to all of the participants on 29 October 2022. The Asian Task Force was formed and approved by the Central Committee at a meeting during the General Conference. The Task Force was to coordinate the entire Asian Synodal process.

17. The Task Force met via Zoom on 7 November 2022. A letter was sent describing the process along with the DCS and other information from the Synod Secretariat on the methodology for the Continental Stage including the FAQ. The dates for the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality were set for 24-26 February 2023.

18. All 22 FABC members were requested to respond in 10 pages to the DCS on or before 15 January 2023. The Task Force would then send to the members a draft framework of the Asian Final Document on or before 15 February 2023. 21 out of 22 responses were received. The draft framework' was sent out as scheduled on 15 February.

19. Most found that there was very little time to do this as it overlapped with advent and Christmas. It took time for the needed translations given the diversity of languages in Asia. Each conference chose its manner of responding to the DCS. This included using the existing synodal teams at the deanery, diocesan and national levels. In some places, online meetings were held. Small group meetings were utilized, focus groups, assemblies where possible and bishops and priets' councils.

Second Phase: Discernment and Writing Team

20. The second phase is the writing of the draft framework of the summary of the Episcopal Conferences' reports. It was held at the Camillian Pastoral Care Centre, Bangkok, Thailand from 31 January 4 February 2023. The FABC Central Committee appointed the Asian Task Force to be the Discernment and Writing Team and to

[1] Catholic Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB), Catholic Conference of Central Asia [Conferenza Episcopale Cattolica dell'Asia Centrale] (CECAC), Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), Catholic Conference of India (CBCI), Catholic Conference of Indonesia [Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia] (KWI), Catholic Conference of Japan (CBCJ), Catholic Conference of Korea (CBCK), Catholic Conference of Laos and Cambodia [Conférence Episcopale du Laos et du Cambodge] (CELAC), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB), Catholic Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), Pakistan Catholic Conference (PCBC), Catholic Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), Catholic Conference of Sri Lanka (CBCSL), Chinese Regional Conference (CRBC) [Taiwan], Catholic Conference of Thailand (CBCT), Conferencia Episcopal Timorense (CET), Catholic Conference of Vietnam (CBCV).

[2] Syro-Malabar Synod (India), Syro-Malankara Catholic Church (India).

[3] Diocese of Hong Kong, Diocese of Macau, Apostolic Vicariate of Nepal.

[4] Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Thailand, Timor Leste, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam.

accomplish the task of drawing up a draft framework. The team was expanded and was composed of 9 individuals: 2 lay people (1 female and 1 male), 1 consecrated female, and 6 priests, with the FABC Secretary General overseeing the process, representing the four FABC regions, namely South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Central Asia.

21. For four days, the team devoted themselves to praying, sharing and conversations, listening, discerning, and writing the draft framework in the atmosphere and spirit of synodality. The team was divided into 3 groups reading 7 country reports. Each team discerned the common themes, context, and peculiarities in answering the 3 questions from the DCS, namely Resonances, Tensions, and Priorities using the spiritual conversation methodology.

22. The team came into a plenary to further reflect and discuss their insights and wrote the draft framework. They would again pray, reflect, and discern as they continued to revise, improve, and develop the draft framework. The draft framework document was sent to all the Episcopal Conferences and Associate Members on 15 February 2023.

23. The team also planned the programme for the Asian Continental Assembly. The four days' experience enriched them so much that they proposed the same discernment process in the Asian assembly. The programme was submitted to the FABC Central Leadership for their comments and approval.

Third Phase: Asian Continental Assembly

24. By the procedure outlined during the FABC 50 General Conference, each Episcopal Conference was asked to send three delegates and each Associate Member could send two delegates to the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality, which was held from 24-26 February 2023. It was further determined that these delegations should consist of the bishop president or his delegate and two others chosen based on the DCS 108 and 109. Delegates were sent information about the meeting in advance along with instructions for preparation for this event.

25. On 23 February, participants arrived at Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Training Center in Bangkok, Thailand. Delegates from 17 Episcopal Conferences, 2 Synods of Oriental Rites, and 3 Associate Members of the FABC were joined by members of the General Secretariat for Synod, the Relator General for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and several other guests. The number of Asian participants at the Assembly was: 6 Cardinals, 5 Archbishops, 18 Bishops, 28 priests, 5 consecrated women, 7 laymen and 11 women.

26. Before the beginning of the sessions, the participants were provided with the following materials as a resource for discernment and discussion: The Continental Stage Document (DCS), a copy of the Draft Framework for the Final Document (FD) prepared by the Discernment and Writing Team, and a compilation of Pope Francis'

Catechesis on Discernment.

27. In our endeavour to compose a draft of the Final Document that is to be submitted to the FABC Central Committee after "validation and approval" from this body, which will then be forwarded to the General Secretariat, the Asian Continental Assembly included the following elements: spiritual conversation; input from brief presentations; common and individual prayer periods; general as well as small group discussion, review and reworking of versions of the draft (which was created using a framework text proposed by the Discernment and Writing Team); and a forum during plenary sessions for interventions from participants.

28. Groups were intentionally designed to consist of a mix of people from various conferences and different states of life (i.e., clergy, consecrated persons, lay, etc.). Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology assisted in the process of compilation of input derived from the group work.

29. The responses of the groups to the discernment sessions that looked more deeply into the different parts of the draft document were slowly integrated day by day into the working draft as the Team met at the end of each day. Moreover, it added two more steps for participants to contribute to the writing of the draft: firstly, bringing back the edited draft to all in the small groups, the team asked what they would want to amend, and what would they want to add. Secondly, after the Team integrated amendments and additions from the small groups, it again asked all the participants to read the whole text and reflect as a group on what the Team missed significantly.

30. The working sessions concluded with an expression of unanimous affirmation of the draft document by the various groups of participants. Following this, the assembly members discussed the following two questions: (1) Which ecclesial structures need to be changed or created to enhance the synodality of the Church in Asia? (2) What do you wish to see happen between the October 2023 session and the October 2024 session of the Synod on Synodality?

31. Cardinal Charles Bo, president of the FABC, presided at the closing Liturgy of the Assembly, during which representatives from the Assembly presented a provisional draft of the Final Document from the Asian Continental Assembly of Synodality.

Fourth Phase: Discernment and Writing Team

32. The Discernment and Writing Team was entrusted with finalising the final document. They met from 27-28 February 2023 to incorporate the amendments as suggested by the delegates of the Asian Assembly. The team also participated actively in the assembly by joining in the groups in the discussions, spiritual conversations, and communal discernment. Listening to all and feeling the pulse of the participants aided the discernment process in the writing of the Final Document.

33. The final editing of the document was done in a spirit of communal writing, warm companionship, and prayerful discernment. The Team then forwarded its work to the FABC Central Committee for and "validation and approval."

Fifth Phase: FABC Central Committee

34. The Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly on Synodality was presented to the FABC Central Committee at their online meeting on 3 March 2023. This was for the Bishop-Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences to validate and approve the Final Document of the Asian Continental Assembly, ensuring that it was the fruit of an authentically synodal journey, guarding the unity of the Church that can never degenerate into uniformity or polarization.

35. After having deliberated on the draft final document, the FABC Central Committee, on 3 March 2023 validate and approved the final document with some very minor changes to be incorporated indicating that it should be further edited and then be sent to the Synod Secretariat as the Final Document for the Asian Continental Assembly on the Synod.

III. General sentiments to the process

36. Despite the challenges, the synodal journey is not a democratic process but it's a moment of grace and healing for the Church. The image of the Church astent' projects it to be a place of refuge that can be expanded to all in a spirit of inclusivity. It also expresses that God can pitch His tent wherever the Spirit of God blows, including in places where there is violence, unrest, and suffering.

37. Most importantly, in the tent, there is room for everyone, with no one being excluded because it is a home to everyone. In this process, those who in the past felt "left out" now realised that they have a home in this tent, a sacred and safe space. Most of the respondents responded positively to the image of the tent.

38. The image of the tent also reminds us that Jesus pitched His tent among us through the incarnation and therefore the tent is also a place of encounter with God and one another. The tent, now seen as the common home, has also rekindled a sense of belonging and sharing in the common baptism. The synodal process has brought about a greater awareness of the importance of walking together in the Church as a communion of communities for the organic growth of the Church.

39. The continental consultation in the respective countries took varied forms. Some countries were able to involve many people from different walks of life while others were only able to gather smaller groups of people. As mentioned earlier, the challenges of time and language became an obstacle for some countries. Nevertheless,

those who took part in this process of reflecting on the DCS contributed constructively through a spirit of prayer and discernment for the betterment of the Church.

40. The involvement of such a vast number of people in the synodal process has revealed a profound love for the Church despite the shortcomings and weaknesses of the Church as an institution.

41. The inability to translate the DCS into the many vernacular languages was another limitation experienced by the Churches in Asia. However, the FABC 50 General Conference that was held in October 2022 was indeed a blessing in preparing for this stage of the synodal process.

42. Many of the conversations that were held before and during the FABC General Conference already provided indications regarding the context of the Church and Asia. In 2listening" to the reports, it has been noted that on the horizon, there remains a sense of hope and joy for the Church to move forward because of the love of God for His people. We are convinced that the Holy Spirit neither stops nor fails in inspiring the people of God to move in the direction of personal, communal, and structural conversion.

43. We also acknowledge that the process of having the synodal conversations as requested has sometimes been painful and unsettling, while at the same time, making us vulnerable to each other.

44. The DCS in a succinct way has been able to capture the hopes, aspirations, desolations, and challenges of the people in a way that opens the door for a greater renewal in the life of the Church. The invitation to listen to people from all walks of life demonstrates openness to one another and the spirit of dialogue facilitates moving together as one unit: this encounter and dialogue is the meaning of the synodal journey (DCS, 6).

45. What the DCS has been able to do is be the catalyst for more profound spiritual conversations. In many places, it was indeed experienced as a moment of living synodality in the Church through a process of shared identity and shared responsibility.

46. The general sense of concern for the Church as demonstrated in the participation of all in this process reflects a natural or organic inclination to authentic synodality. In some countries, the of itself was not new because there were already mechanisms to implement pastoral plans of local Churches and communities at a variety of levels which brought about synergy and convergence with the spirit of synodality.

47. The FABC itself has been playing a vital role in living synodality between Episcopal Conferences. This indeed captures the sense of walking together as members of the Body of Christ towards the reign of God and in that process, being

able to widen our experiences and enlarge the tent.

48. Considering these general observations that have provided not only the *locus* for the Church in Asia to reflect on the DCS, we also acknowledge the vast diversity of views and experiences across Asia has made it challenging to synthesize every single opportunity and challenge raised by the different countries. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the following paragraphs provide insights into the resonances, tensions, and priorities as articulated by the Churches in Asia.

49. The Discernment and Writing Team has also taken the liberty to identify some of the gaps (*lacuna*) that we felt were either absent or not sufficiently treated in the reports sent by the Episcopal Conferences but were key points of discussion at the FABC 50 General Conference. It is our prayer and hope that the following insights are faithful to the mind and heart of the respective processes undertaken by the countries in Asia.

IV. Asian resonances

After having read and prayed with the DCS, which intuitions resonate most strongly with the lived experiences and realities of the Church in your continent? Which experiences are new, or illuminating to you?

50. The resonances that the Churches in Asia sensed while reflecting on the DCS are underlined by the fact, as already mentioned earlier, that there is a deep love for the Church. In that deep love for the Church resides varied emotions like joy, sadness, vulnerability, and woundedness.

51. Despite this potpourri of emotions and the diversity of Asia which encompasses ethnicity, race, culture, language, and religion, the spirit of synodality as called for by the Church, challenges us (Church) to have the courage to despite some resistance within the Church, the lack of appreciation for the rich spirituality in Asia, and also the loss of a sense of sin.

52. Although the process has been well received and facilitated throughout the countries in Asia, a few reports mentioned that the process of consultation and listening brought about by the synodal journey could cause some disenchantment and disappointment due to an absence of clear explanation and acceptance of the goal of gathering and listening. The temptation to engage in this process could be described as a more political or, even, ideological (i.e., as resembling more a forum for parlimentary-typdiscussion) rather than as a truly synodal endeavour from a Catholic-Christian perspective. Some faithful are sceptical regarding the purpose and the prospective outcome of such a synodal process.

53. Some dioceses maintain this lingering doubt if the voices of those living in minority settings and traditional Christian communities would have equal influence on the synodal process and even its outcomes. It was also mentioned that listening is a difficult task because many people would prefer to be praised rather than be criticised or commented on. Those who dared to speak up were sometimes considered to be antagonists by certain sections of the community because their comments and opinions were seen to be not of mainstream thought or could negatively impact the Church as a whole.

The Experience of Joy

54. It must be noted that the synodal process called for by the universal Church is both a spiritual experience and a spiritual journey. For this reason, it is necessary to put our egos aside, empty ourselves, and listen to God so that we can constantly be renewed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and go deeper in the spirit of synodality.

55. The dynamics of listening as widely as possible which is entrenched in the synodal process, have indeed motivated the Church to listen more intently and discern wisely where the Holy Spirit is leading us toward embracing and becoming a more synodal Church.

56. This journey that we have initiated helps us realise the true nature of the Church and the ability to see the situation of the Church. The experience of joy is heightened because the synod process is certainly a place of grace, encounter, and transfiguration.

The Experience of Walking Together

57. The process of walking together brings forth to the local Churches a greater awareness of their unique contexts and rich cultures across Asia, including that of the indigenous communities that are often neglected and forgotten. This wealth needs to be nurtured through communion and dialogue as an experience of walking together.

58. As Catholics in Asia living in diversity, we seek to enhance the quality of our friendship with one another by listening to, respecting, and caring for each other, so that we can be a good mother and an example to bring peace and unity to the world. Faith formation that is founded on the living word of God, is foundational to synodal spirituality.

59. In walking together, the synodal journey has gathered us at the table of the Lord, so that through Him, in Him and with Him, we have realised our natural and organic inclination to synodality and are inspired and strengthened to traverse and discover new pathways for the Church in Asia.

60. It is heartening to read repeatedly of the profound love for the Church from so many local Churches across the world. This love and commitment to the faith resounds

throughout the DCS and certainly reflects the almost universal sense expressed by Catholics throughout the world.

61. The experience of walking together is also marred by external threats that make living the faith challenging. It has been noted that in several countries across Asia, there are still many Christians who suffer from various threats because of keeping their faith.

62. Despite these new forms of many still are faithful to the faith and are even willing to give up their life for it. In some areas, threats and violence against Christians have been noted while in other areas there are other ways in which Christians are discriminated against for their beliefs.

The Experience of Wounds

63. The reports also resonated with the vulnerabilities and wounds of the Churches in Asia emphasising the need for healing. Among the many wounds of the Church are abuses related to finance, jurisdiction, conscience, authority, and sex. These would have certainly portrayed the Church negatively, which has led to some leaving the Church because of the lack of credibility. At the level of governance too, the lack of transparency and accountability has led to a crisis of credibility in the Church.

64. The reports also point to the fact that due to these abuses, there is growing intolerance, resentment, and negativism against the Church. These are expressed through social and print media, and other public domains. Responsibility for the Church must belong to all and therefore everyone should be allowed to participate actively in the process of making decisions through communal discernment.

65. There is also a deep concern on the lack of sufficient inclusion of women in governance and decision- making processes in the Church. Women in consecrated life, despite being committed to the various ministries of the Church, experience a sense of alienation and whose voices are not often heard sufficiently in the policy decisions of the Church. They are actively involved and their committed services are very much evident.

66. The synodal conversations have called for a rethinking of women's participation in the life of the Church given that women played an important role in the Bible. There is a need in the Church for a renewal of governance structures that will allow the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of the Church.

67. The reports acknowledge the Church lack of understating and failure in providing sufficient pastoral care to some groups of people who are part of the Church but are often struggling to feel welcomed. Among them are single parents, people in irregular marriage situations, mixed marriages, people who identify themselves as LGBTQIA+, as well as migrants and others.

68. Several reports raised grave concerns about the absence of the youth in many Churches and especially in the decision-making process. At the same time, the young people continue to inspire and challenge the whole Church to have the courage to take risks and make changes.

69. Very sporadically some reports make a passing mention of the plight of the indigenous peoples. It has also been noted that many of their aspirations and voices were not sufficiently highlighted in the DCS.

70. At the same time, listening to the cry of the poor and the earth were issues that were not treated adequately given that these are grave concerns for the peoples of Asia. It must be the role of the Church to listen to vulnerable communities and work towards protecting them and their environment, rights, and privileges.

71. Some of the wounds experienced in the Churches were brought about by the infiltration of ideologies such as individualism, consumerism, and materialism, that is caused by the rapid economic growth and freedom of access to social media. Though much of these may have brought about development in many parts of Asia, the Church is also influenced by its various side effects.

72. The voice of the Church has been silenced by oppressive regimes to an extent that it has not been possible for the Church to play its prophetic role. The silence has also led to passive complacency compounded by fear and sometimes even apathy. The need for Churches across Asia to support Churches under oppressive regimes in ways that do not threaten or jeopardise their existence.

The Call to Embrace New Pathways

73. The experience of joys and wounds across Asia can only be seen as opportunities to explore new pathways toward a synodal Church. Standing together as a united Body of Christ calls for a new vision in the pastoral mission of a "new Church", a synodal Church.

74. The Church must begin in a spirit of inclusion where everyone feels both welcomed and a sense of belonging inside the tent. As a people of God, no one should be excluded; even if they are frail and weak, inclusivism within the Church is a must for the synodal Church.

75. The diversity of religions in Asia makes it almost compelling to engage in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as a way of building peace, reconciliation, and harmony. Many reports speak of fruitful engagement with other Christians and persons of other religions. Despite the diversity of religions and cultures across Asia, there are still limitations in matters concerning ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

76. In some places, this push for dialogue has been the initiative only of the Catholic Church and there are times when reciprocity is not forthcoming. It has also

been seen as the "work" of the clergy rather than of the laity.

77. Some expressed reservations about these dialogues for various reasons including mistrust and suspicion regarding the motives for such dialogues. The Church plays a significant role in building bridges for peace, reconciliation, justice, and freedom.

78. Though very little is mentioned about safeguarding (minors and the vulnerable) in the Asian reports, there is a need to develop and nurture the environment of a culture of safeguarding in the Church, at all levels.

79. The synodal process has called for widespread listening to one another to bring about transformation at all levels of the Church. Together with the laity and consecrated women and men who have been saying that they have not been heard or given a voice in the Church, some priests felt that they were not sufficiently heard, even to a point of feeling neglected.

80. Reading the reports, there is a strong sense of an inward-looking Church that must cast its nets further and wider. The mission *ad-extra* must be at the core of the Churches in Asia. We have the task of transforming an inward-looking, individualised and polarised approach to spiritual life towards a more missionary, communitarian and integrated approach.

81. The tent needs to be expanded in ways best known to the respective Churches in Asia so that we can move in promising ways that fulfil our mission as a Church.

82. The Churches in Asia have been able to relate and resonate with much of what has been said in the DCS. This only indicates that there are many similarities with the Churches in other countries and continents, for which we give thanks to God that we are all on this journey together.

83. We also recognize that some of these issues may be peculiar to certain regions, but we take consolation that as we walk together, there can be a renewal in the Church and the expansion of the reign of God.

V. Asian tensions

After having read and prayed with the DCS, what substantial tensions or divergences emerge as particularly important in your continent's perspective? Consequently, what are the questions or issues that should be addressed and considered in the next steps of the process?

84. Having prayed, studied, and read the different reports, we are filled with

hope that this synodal journey will bear fruit in not only "extending the tent" but also recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit in Churches throughout Asia.

85. In reading the DCS, the Churches in Asia also recognized some universal tensions and some that are particular to the context of Asia. Keeping in mind that some of these tensions are far more intricate than they seem, our task is not to seek solutions at this time, but rather to acknowledge these tensions and divergences and to further reflect on what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church in Asia.

Tensions in Living Synodality

86. The Church is composed of people from all states of life (clergy, consecrated, and laity); yet there seems to be a kind of "divide" within the Church - between the clergy and laity, bishops and priests/religious congregations, ecclesial groups and movements, dioceses, and conferences and even outside between the Church and political authorities and even between religions, as indicated in many of the reports. In the spirit of a participatory Church, the experience of leadership in the "servant model" needs greater attention for living synodality.

87. The challenge to become more participatory is often hindered by leadership styles that prevent (sometimes even exclude) others from living out their baptismal call to be authentic disciples. The servant model of leadership is hindered and sometimes counter-witnessing when priests tend to dominate and even come across as imposing, domineering, and authoritative over the laity. Reconfiguring the role of the laity includes expanding spaces for possible lay ministry through a variety of charisms, including counselling and employment guidance for the youth, care for the sick, education, and protection of children.

88. We recognize, too, the work of catechists in Asia who are not only teachers of faith but also leaders of the community in their own right. For centuries, they have been preparing the faithful for the sacraments and accompanying them in living the faith. We affirm, therefore, Pope Francis directive that Episcopal Conferences... render effective the ministry of Catechist (cf. *Antiquum Ministerium*, n. 9).

89. Acknowledging the tensions between clergy, religious men and women, and the laity, the theme of co-responsibility of all in the life and mission of the Church has been raised time and again in the reports. Many problems arise when the exercise of power is divorced from accountability and transparency.

Tensions in Decision-Making

90. It was noted that in some places, collaborative responsibility in the discernment and decision-making process was lacking; often left to only priests or bishops. The voices of the minority and even the laity are not considered in this process. At times, there is superficial dialogue and lack of consultation even in those structures recommended or prescribed by the Canon Law like the pastoral council and the finance council. Some Churches consider this a form of clericalism because it

is dominated by the clergy.

91. The lack of accountability and transparency in decision-making and financial matters in the Church has led to a further divide in walking together in the spirit of a synodal Church. Those who question these matters are sometimes excluded from the Church. The authoritative and domineering styles of leadership do not only exist among the clergy but there are also leaders among the laity that exhibit such traits. This tension continues to hinder the journey towards being a participatory Church in a synodal way.

92. In the Asian context where respect for leaders is an inherent value, there are times when the laity are overly deferential to the clergy and there is a high possibility that this respect can be abused, and power and control become the *modus operandi*. This further undermines the co-responsible in the mission of the Church, as well as with its governance.

Tensions in Priestly Vocations

93. It was also noted that the excessive critical view of the clergy has contributed to the decrease in vocations to the priesthood in some parts of Asia. There are areas in Asia where there is a growing need for priests to serve and for the faith to continually grow. The need for priests is real and for the spread of the Gospel. Scandals by priests and the unhealthy attitudes and behaviour displayed by the priests are also causing the decrease in vocations.

94. Together with this, some reports also acknowledged the influence of a secular and materialist culture on priests and even lay leaders. This often challenges the witnessing of Gospel values in the mission of the Church.

Tensions in Women's Involvement

95. In many of the Churches of Asia, the participation of women in the everyday life of the Church is significant. However, there is a lack of the presence of women in leadership roles. In some societies, their voices are hardly heard.

96. Some attribute this to the cultural differences and the traditional patriarchal structures of Asian societies. In some places, women in leadership roles are not very welcome due to their cultural mindset. It would seem that men make decisions or lead the group and the women simply implement the decisions or work under the guidance of men. The role of women is considered secondary or simply discarded as being an assistant to men, this includes women in consecrated life.

97. However, some countries report that the men are not in the Church, and in these circumstances, it is the women who take on leadership roles effectively.

Tensions about the Youth

98. A common phenomenon noted in the reports is the absence of youth in our

Churches. Given that they form a significant number in our population (approx. 65%), they are relatively absent in the life of the Church. Though some are present in the life of the Church, there is a need for faith formation, accompaniment and greater inclusion in leadership roles and decision-making processes.

99. Amid the generational gap between the old and the young, the Church as a needs to extend her loving embrace around the youth and reach out to those who are lost, confused, and have disconnected themselves from the Church. Though the reports state the youth are missing in the Church, perhaps a point to ponder is that the youth are possibly saying that the Church is missing in their lives.

100. While the youth are more tech-savvy in parts of Asia where digital access is more easily accessible, the reports also call for greater investment in the fields of media and social communications to be able to reach out to them for evangelization and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, there remains the challenge of engaging with the youth in the dialogue between the virtual world and the real world.

101. Gifted with a large population of young people, the Church in Asia could envision herself as a "digital tent" to be where the youth are and minister to them effectively. Synodality with the youth also means experiencing the tensions they are bearing in the fast-changing world today.

102. Notwithstanding the benefits of the digital world, the negative impact of social media was also highlighted - people spending more time with gadgets than with people; how it is used to spread hatred, prejudice, and fear in society; some say social media is swaying people away from the faith.

Tensions of the Poor

103. Like a mother in a poor Asian family with many children who struggle and at times not adequately cared for, the Church in Asia also struggles and painfully embraces a great number of poor and marginalised people who need special accompaniment in this process of synodality.

104. Various are the faces of the poor in Asia: the materially poor such as the minority ethnics, the migrant workers, urban slum dwellers, fleeing refugees, etc.; the socially poor, those often neglected by the Church and society, such as the uneducated, the indifferent youth, the persons with disabilities, persons deprived of liberty, those from lower castes, divorced and remarried, single mothers, elderly and infirmed, HIV positive persons, substance dependents, persons who identify as LGBTQIA+, etc.

105. We recognize however that the term poverty is relative, one can be materially poor but rich in culture, spirituality, and hospitality.

106. Despite some cultural barriers that may exist, the Church in Asia must desire to courageously direct her eyes on the faces of the poor, to lovingly recognize, acknowledge, and welcome everyone as children who now deserve our attention. We recognize the tensions to be inclusive and yet be faithful to the Gospel values and the moral faithfulness to the ways of the Church perhaps even a scandal if they are welcomed in the Church.

107. The Church must strive to find ways to incorporate the poor into her life and mission, so that, being healed, nurtured, and formed in *sensus fidelium* within the framework of our apostolic tradition and Catholic identity, they could be equal partners and respected companions with everyone else in the Church. As mentioned by several of the reports, some of these changes will require canonical revisions that would facilitate the inclusiveness of the Church towards the poor.

108. The Church must also be the voice of the poor. There are times when the Church remains silent about the plight and cry of the Dalits, tribals, indigenous people, and the poor. The tension of not wanting to cause trouble with the authorities or being silenced, the Church may have alienated these people and turned a deaf ear to the of the The voice of the Church must defend the voiceless and powerless.

Tensions of Religious Conflicts

109. Even though there is a diversity of religions across Asia, there are also growing religious conflicts and even persecution (subtle and direct) in some areas. The worsening of the culture of violence across Asia, partly due to the lack of recourse to a functioning justice system, is also unsettling. The politicisation of religions has made it difficult to practise the faith of minorities. Among the challenges include political oppression, dictatorial governments, corruption, and unjust laws.

110. The Churches in Asia are always having to walk this tightrope of balancing between being faithful to the Gospel and yet not putting the Christians in a position of being threatened. Even what is taken for granted in many places like giving a child a Christian name is sometimes an obstacle in another place.

111. There are times in situations such as these, what is required is patience and hope that things will change. The Church in Asia constantly deals with such tensions and there is a need for mutual support in walking together with courage and love.

Tensions of Clericalism

112. Clericalism, like in many parts of the world, is also a concern in Asia. Many of the responses indicate clericalism as a tension in their regions and some also state it as one of the causes of a lack of synodality in the Church in Asia.

113. However, it has been noted that clericalism means different things to different people. The word clericalism seems to cover a wide range of issues, while at the same time, some regions are more specific. Among the expressions of clericalism are the

lack of consultation in administrative matters, domineering attitudes and sense of entitlement shown by those in authority especially priests, overexertion of power on the people, etc.

114. Some root causes of clericalism were identified, e.g., the individual character or psychological immaturity, some hint at more systemic causes, and others point out the subculture of silence and impunity. Proper formation of bishops, clergy, and laity for a synodal Church may thus be among the primary responses to such abuses.

115. On the other hand, the clergy feel overly criticised by the laity so much so that some feel lonely, isolated, and scrutinised all the time. This further leads to demotivation among the priests and apprehension among young men who might be considering and discerning a vocation to the priesthood. Some attribute the lack of vocation due to the unreasonable demands that are being made by the people.

VI. Asian realities and divergence

116. Being aware that Christianity is a minority in Asia (it is estimated that Catholics are approximately 3.31% of the Asian population and in several places less than 1%), there is a great sense of love for Jesus and His Church. The joy of journeying together in this synodal renewal is palpable. Our faith energises our relationships not only among Christians but also with peoples of neighbouring faiths in our quest for harmonious living through a process of bridge-building. In places where discrimination and violence are more pronounced than in other places, faith in the Risen Jesus keeps us strong and hopeful amidst these adversities.

117. Asian spirituality, characterised by contemplation and respect for nature, is interwoven with a deep sense of piety and popular devotion. These devotions at times animate the faith and draw people to the Church, Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

118. Our embodied expressions of worship and prayer encompassing the human senses, dance, art, poetry, and silence sometimes find tension in the formal manner of celebrating the sacraments. Several reports pointed out the need to creatively rediscover the essence of the liturgy, that is, to draw people to God with Asian expressions of worship.

119. It was also noted that in some places, Catholics were more engaged in popular devotions rather than reflecting on the word of God, spiritual discernment, or personal prayer. Overall, the need for liturgies to be more alive and relatable - text they can understand, the music they can sing, and rituals they can relate to, were expressed in a variety of ways in the reports.

120. We recognize that the Asian *ethos* that has long been part of its peoples (for

example, reliance on God, communal interaction, relationality with God, self, other human beings, and the cosmos, etc.) is now being eroded by the globalised cultures of individualism, secularism, and relativism.

121. We are aware that tension exists between Asian cultures and our faith expressions in terms of languages, images and even concepts about authority and power.

122. There is a growing tension between traditional (spiritual) values and modernity even among the clergy, the religious, and the families. Some of the effects seen due to this global invasion are that faith is relativized, priests are drawn to a materialistic and individualistic way of living, and a lack of credible witnessing, which is among the reasons for the erosion of the spiritual life. In the end, the number of people not practising any religion will increase due to modernism, materialism, and secularism.

123. Family (nuclear and extended) is very important in many Asian societies. Filial allegiance extends to the point where many will make generous sacrifices for the sake of family unity and peace. The role of families in the synodal renewal of the Church and its witness to societies is therefore very important. They will be the first formation space for the synodal renewal that we are envisioning.

124. Several reports cite their concern for marriages and family life today domestic violence, unwed mothers, single parents, delayed marriages due to the dowry system, divorce and nullity, etc. Christian families break up due to a lack of awareness about the faith and anxieties brought about by poverty and economic conditions.

125. The contemporary tendency to excessive individualism further exacerbates this crisis in vocation, along with various economic trends that render embracing family life as undesirable for many. There are also tensions about belonging to the Church and their family relationships.

126. Amid such a vast array of challenges, the Church in Asia needs, more now than ever, to hear the voices of families, especially of interreligious-intercultural families that are becoming more of a norm than the exception in many places across Asia.

127. Coming from our communal *ethos*, the common life in Asian communities and neighbourhoods is the locus where the joys and struggles are lived. The common spaces are opportunities for informal dialogues and convivial living (dialogue of life). Fraught with socio-political, economic, and ecological challenges, we not only survive but there are situations where we thrive in the strength of this relationality at the grassroots.

128. In recent times, we also see a growing division among the peoples of Asia people divided based on caste, language, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, and

a growing intolerance within this divide.

129. Even if we are community-oriented people, the rapid economic growth resulting from material abundance has also resulted in more people suffering from emotional, spiritual, and mental impoverishment. In some Asian societies, the secular appearance and lifestyle in Church leadership also cause tension as it is opposed to evangelical poverty and a mission to be the Church of the poor in Asia.

130. In a continent as diverse as Asia, interreligious dialogue remains an integral characteristic of the Church in Asia. Despite bridge-building efforts, we noted that religious and social intolerance was on the increase, which leads ultimately to persecution and the worsening conditions of the lives of the people, especially religious minorities. In extreme situations, false blasphemy accusations and terror are the main issues faced by Christians.

131. The breakdown in democratic structures, including militarization and political oppression, challenges the lives of many people in certain countries.

VII. Gaps identified in the Asian responses

132. The FABC 50 General Conference in its Guide Document and Final Message had identified some concerns that were either not captured in the country's responses to the DCS or not given sufficient consideration. Studying all these documents side-by-side, we have taken the liberty to include the gaps that were identified and have included them in this report in the sure hope that these will be considered the 2023/24 Synod Assemblies.

Care for our Common Home

133. Ecological crisis always has an impact on vulnerable communities and the Asian continent is one of the places where the impact of climate change is alarming. Despite the possibility that Asia could lead the way in advocating care for the common home, the Asian responses did not sufficiently capture the intensity of the ecological crisis in this region.

134. There is a great need to listen more intently and profoundly to the cry of our land and our people, especially among the poorest who are most affected and to preserve the environment.

Sharing of Resources

135. Many countries in our continent with poor resources mostly depend on international financial assistance from donors and financial institutes. This surely

encourages the socio-economic uplift of the poor segment of society. However, the Asian Churches also need to be aware of the need to share our resources (even if it is limited) with sister Churches/countries in the region.

136. By sharing our resources, not only do we share our material gifts but also the spiritual gifts that we receive from one another which enrich us, e.g., the animation of Basic Ecclesial Communities and the charisms of ecclesial movements. We stand together, as a synodal Church, with one another as peoples of Asia.

Youth for the Present

137. The youth are often spoken of as the future, but the youth are also the present. Our *preferential option* for the young should include personal experience of love within the Church, holistic formation, vocation discernment, and accompaniment. The youth look for authentic and credible witnesses within the Church they need a synodal community to walk together.

138. By knowing who they are in front of God through their hopes, dreams, realities, struggles, and limitations that they face in life, they experience that they are supported and not alone in their path and can also encourage others to walk together in the journey of life.

139. The problems faced by the youth such as drug, gambling, and online addictions, breakdown of families, and mental health issues, were not sufficiently addressed. The are not able to contribute to this synodal journey. For this reason, a synodal Church must learn how to accompany these youth for their healing, growth, and discernment of vocation.

Family and Marriage

140. The family is the domestic Church that nurtures the life of society, and the family is also the of because it is here that the character is formed. However, the new challenges facing families include the breakdown of families, a lack of commitment to promoting life, fear of marriage and decreasing birth rates due to economic difficulties and ideological conditioning, and much more is shaping the family units today in Asia.

141. In some countries, abortion is masquerading as a "women's rights issue". In others, abortion is promoted as a means of population control and eugenics. There is also a disastrous culture of silence in cases of domestic violence, incest, honour killing etc. A need to promote the spirituality of family life to reflect its call as a holy sanctuary.

142. In some parts of Asia where communities are ageing, the care for the elderly must also be given consideration.

143. The rising number of marriages in Asia that are interfaith and intercultural

calls for greater pastoral attention as this can be both challenging and also an opportunity to grow in respect for other religions and cultures. Interfaith families can be the first school of interreligious dialogue.

Poverty, Corruption, and Conflict

144. Poverty across Asia is a major problem (World Bank estimates more than 320 million people in Asia live in extreme poverty). The Church has been at the forefront of working tirelessly among the poor and for their upliftment. Yet there is little mention of the growing poverty across Asia and how that impacts being a synodal Church.

145. We also recognize that unsustainable urbanization and systemic corruption are major problems in Asia and are somewhat connected to the poverty of the Asian people. This systemic corruption at all levels of society affects the lives of ordinary citizens. The responses to the DCS have not given this much consideration.

146. The Church in Asia is a demographic, socioeconomic, cultural, and political minority and therefore, we are becoming more vulnerable to progressively oppressive or fundamentalist regimes as well as to political conflicts. In such situations, what does it mean to be a synodal Church?

147. The disconnect between religiosity and morality is indeed concerning. Despite the connectedness of Asian people with a form of religiosity or spirituality, moral lives are sometimes not transformed by religious experiences. For example, one may be religious but corrupt at the same time.

Indigenous Peoples

148. Nearly 60% of the indigenous peoples, call Asia their home. Bearers of traditions that are rooted for thousands of years, the indigenous peoples manifest how humanity can live in harmony with creation. We acknowledge that many indigenous peoples have embraced the Christian faith, yet even in the Church wounded by tribalism and prejudice they struggle to be respected as fellow agents of evangelisation. Despite the large populations of indigenous peoples in Asia, very little is spoken about them in the responses.

Church in the World

149. The Church exists in the world and for the world. Yet many of the responses have been very insular looking within the Church only. A level of comfort that has left the Church to be only comfortable in addressing her affairs may have led to a lack of reference to how the Church transforms the world (Asia) so that all people will enjoy the fruits of the kingdom of God. The Church in Asia must constantly keep asking how can the missio ad gentes be recognized and lived in a synodal manner as one way of enlarging the space of our tent.

150. The Church cannot be self-referential and therefore must seek to engage in

renewing the world. One of the ways is the building of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) to bring about social transformation - care for the common home, and interreligious dialogue. The culture of dialogue with religions and encounter with cultures must be integrated into the life of the Church. The Church must move towards greater networking with others (organisations and institutions) for the common good of all.

Migrants, Refugees, and Displaced Peoples

151. The issues related to migrants, refugees, displaced people as well as human trafficking, etc. are fast growing in the Asian regions. The primary drivers for the movement of such large numbers of people include conflict, the desire for better economic opportunities, environmental destruction, victims of exploitation, etc.

152. The political instability in some parts of Asia has made people become refugees and asylum seekers. How does the Church become a to these people who seek peace, security, and harmony? In many of these places, they become missionaries of the gospel as they bring not only their lived experiences but also their faith. The migrants, refugees, and displaced people also give vibrancy to the life of the local Churches through their presence. The Church must seek to integrate and accompany them on this journey as the new evangelizers.

Peacebuilding

153. In countries where there are internal conflicts due to oppressive and dictatorial regimes, the Church must play an integral role in the work of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Among the many other roles of the Church, the peace and harmony of all citizens must be among its pastoral priorities.

154. Working towards peace and reconciliation could be among the new forms of evangelization. Apart from seeing the Church as a tent of inclusivity, the Church must also be a work of peace and reconciliation.

Safeguarding

155. The protection of minors and the vulnerable is a concern for the Church in Asia. Despite the low rate in the number of cases being reported (partly due to cultural reasons), it is a major concern. There is very little mention in the responses to the DCS on this matter. However, this must be prioritised in terms of training all Church personnel.

156. The Church in Asia must hear, watch over, protect, and care for the abused, exploited and forgotten children, wherever they are by creating safe environments and implementing protective procedures.

Role of Bishops

157. For obvious reasons, Bishops play an irreplaceable role in animating the synodal process in the local Church. As the primary pastor of the people of God, the

level of zeal and sincerity in which he embraces the synodal approach in his manner of leadership to a large extent sets the tone of the endeavour to rediscover this vital Christian practice among the clergy and laity whom he is called to serve.

158. His responsibility to affirm the authentic tradition of the Christian community is inspired by a willingness to witness a radical trust in the Spirit's life-giving activity in the life of this community: "synod is doing evangelization" (Pope Francis). Imitating the Good Shepherd in encouraging the flock to continual growth and conversion through desiring and knowing the Way and the Truth alone leads to life true life, life in abundance, life eternal.

159. In this manner, he remains faithful to his role and calling in the context of sustaining and strengthening Catholic identity, while charging others to engage in three of the essential aspects of Christian reality: *communion, participation, and mission*.

160. In joyfully accepting the authority of the leaders of the community, clergy, consecrated, and laity are strengthened in their vocations to know God, to love and serve Him in others. *Listening* to God in His Word, through His Church, and in dialogue with others, all members of the community share the responsibility of serving according to their baptismal character.

161. Bishops today can attest to the words of the early Christian pastor, St. John Chrysostom, who claimed that "Church and Synod are synonimous". These bishops lead God's people and are in turn encouraged, accompanied, and informed by the promptings of the Holy Spirit as expressed in the lives of all in the community.

162. No one is exempt or excluded from the responsibility to discern and embrace this common, baptismal call and it is Christ's will that no one is left unaided by that grace through which life is made more abundant and the world in which we live reconciled and sanctified.

163. In all the above gaps, the synodal way must permeate when addressing these gaps and the synodal journey must be at the heart of the life and mission of the Church.

VIII. Priorities from the Asian responses

164. The Asian responses were varied and diverse, encapsulating a variety of issues and challenges, each peculiar to region. However, there are some commonalities that we see in the responses, all of which point to a need for authentic prophetic servant-leadership that is dependent upon and leads to continuous conversion. It is evident that, to a large extent, the synodal journey is made more possible with the

awareness and willingness of the people of God to embrace this reality.

165. The following are 6 priorities that have been identified through a process of prayer and discernment with the hope that they reflect the desires of Asian hearts.

Formation

166. For a synodal Church, there needs to be an initial and ongoing formation at all levels, for all people, beginning with the families and Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs).

167. Seminarians, priests, bishops, and consecrated men and women must be formed to live synodal leadership styles, communal discernment, and decision-making the promotion of a culture of synodality that entails renewal of training of seminary formators, professors of theology, and the present seminary programme needs to be more life-ministry oriented.

168. The laity needs to be formed to take active roles, according to their baptismal call, to serve with generosity to God and a love for the Church and its people. Formation for a synodal spirituality must be at the heart of the Church mission and vision.

Inclusivity & Hospitality

169. The women, youth, and those marginalised or excluded, with special attention to the abandoned (e.g., street children and elderly), also significant pastoral care should be provided to divorced, remarried, single parents, broken families, persons with disabilities (PWDs), prisoners, persons who identify as LGBTQIA+, the elderly, substance dependents, commercial sex workers, etc.) the wounded and victimised, fractured families and those struggling with gender identity, the displaced and the persecuted, and a whole spectrum of many others must find their place in this tent (Church).

170. Structures may need to be revisited so that everyone feels a sense of belonging in the Church and each person becomes an ambassador of Christ, an ambassador of inclusivity and hospitality.

Missionary Disciples

171. In the context of Asia, we must learn how to prophetically witness and the Gospel to one another, which, first and foremost, entails actively living out one's faith founded on personal encounters and personal experiences with Jesus and contributing to the community of the Church as a communion of communities.

172. While recognizing that Christians are a minority in Asia, the incomparable witness of Asian martyrs provides a challenge and source of encouragement.

173. We must also learn to grow in dialogue, consultation, and communal

discernment. At the same time, respecting the sensitivities of other Asian peoples must also be at the heart of the Church. Interfaith families are becoming a common sight and therefore how do we bring Christ to others? We need to embrace a culture of encounter and bridge-building to bring Christ to the world.

174. In this post-pandemic era, the hybridization of the Church life (onsite and online) is a reality that we must embrace and maximise opportunities to evangelise, including the wider and more discerning use of technology in this endeavour, as our Christian mandate.

Accountability and Transparency

175. The call to be accountable and transparent not only in financial matters but also in decision-making processes and governance. This may necessitate the revision of some provisions of Canon Law. Those in leadership roles - whether clergy or lay, are also accountable for the formation of the laity and the youth.

176. A spirit of collaboration and co-responsibility must be promoted with each embracing the vocation and state of life and the manifold charisms in the Church.

Prayer and Worship

177. Our prayer and worship must reflect and touch the hearts of the Asian people. Liturgical celebrations must be more (participatory, inculturated, relatable, and convivial) so that everyone can find a sacred and safe space to worship God. The integration of culture in the life and worship of the Church must also animate the lives of the faithful.

Environment

178. In the care for the common home, the Church must be at the forefront in not only protecting Mother Earth but also healing her. As Jesus came to redeem and reconcile all things, the Church must seek to renew the face of the earth.

179. As members of the one Body of Christ, we are called to become a green Church and live in solidarity and respect, protect, defend, and nurture the oneness of all of God's Creation. Environmental concern is not merely ecological but also has a spiritual and social dimension as it affects everyone, the poor the most.

IX. "Taking off our shoes": the Asian Synodal journey

180. It is a common practice among Asians to take off our shoes when we enter houses or temples. It is a beautiful sign of respect; of how we are conscious of the others whose lives we are entering into. Moreover, it is also an expression of our deep

awareness of the holy.

181. It reminds us of what God told Moses (Exodus 3:5): Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground More importantly, off our makes us aware of the earth we are all called to protect and care for.

182. "Taking off our shoes" is also a beautiful symbol of our synodal journey as the Church in Asia. Characterised by diversity in cultures and religions, it reminds us to respect all as we listen and converse, discern and decide. It also means in authentic listening; we leave behind our prejudices and biases to welcome the other.

183. Shoes could be a symbol of status and by taking them off, we recognize that we are equal as human beings. Barefoot, we become aware and also identify ourselves with the poorest among us.

184. "Taking off our shoes" makes us also very conscious of the soil, the ground we are stepping on. The socio-political context of Asia is very challenging and how the Church moves in this context is of paramount importance in journeying with humanity. It makes us feel closer to the ground realities of the people of Asia.

185. "Taking off our shoes" as a synodal ecclesial image articulates our experience of the Church as relational, contextual and missional, journeying together in humility and hope.

X. Conclusion

186. The synodal journey that began in October 2021 is not a process that was new to the Churches in Asia. In many countries, there were already opportunities for listening and discernment to develop pastoral plans. However, these were only at the parish, diocesan or national levels. There have been both successes and challenges at these levels.

187. The synodal journey gave Catholics who participated in this process a better regional and universal understanding of the consolations and concerns of the different Churches. There was an acknowledgement that the consolations and challenges were not only unique to the different regions but also complex in their ways.

188. The process of discernment to a large extent invigorated the life of the Church through the active participation of many Catholics whose experience before this may have been on the periphery. For many people, seeds of hope were sown through this process while at the same time, we acknowledge that some were sceptical for various reasons.

189. This is a process that needs to filter into every level of the life of the Church. The process of synodality, that is, discernment and spiritual conversations, must be part of the life and ministry of the Church henceforth. Some Churches across Asia have already started implementing the fruits of having listened during the earlier phase of the synodal process.

190. While the change of structures is important to implementing the synodal changes, the aspects of relationality must not be forgotten on this journey as an integral part of being a synodal Church.

191. At the Asian Continental Assembly (24-26 Feb 2023), it was suggested that the *relatio finalis* from the Synod in October 2023 be released the soonest as possible so that conferences, dioceses, and parishes can begin to work on suggestions that may arise at the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

192. Given the diversity of languages across Asia, it will be beneficial that a summarised form of the relatio finalis be published too so that countries could work on the various translations, and this is disseminated to as many people as possible.

193. There should be sub-regional synodal conversations after the Synod gathering in October 2023. These gatherings can be a means for ongoing listening and discernment for the Churches in Asia and perhaps even an Ecclesial Synod in 2024.

As we offer this Final Document, the fruit of our listening and discerning, we implore the maternal protection and intercession of Mary, the Mother of Asia, in this synodal pilgrimage together with the rest of humanity.

FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE CONTINENTAL STAGE IN EUROPE

"How great is the beauty of a humble Church, a Church that does not stand aloof from the world, viewing life with a detached gaze, but lives her life within the world. Living within the world means being willing to share and to understand people's problems, hopes and expectations."

(Pope Francis)

European Continental Assembly: final remarks

We have experienced four days of listening and dialogue based on the resonances aroused by the *Working Document for the Continental Stage* within the Churches from which we come. As the European Continental Assembly, we realise that we have had a profoundly spiritual experience through the synodal method.

We give thanks to the Spirit who guided us for the gift we received and here we wish to share it. We deepened the insights that the ecclesial communities of our continent have gained through the synodal process, as well as the tensions and questions that the European Churches are facing[1]. Above all, we once again felt the pain of the wounds that mark our recent history, starting with those that the Church has inflicted through the abuses perpetrated by people who were performing an ecclesial ministry or office. We have mentioned several times the ruthless violence of the aggression war disfiguring Ukraine. We thought about the victims of the earthquake that devastated Turkey and Syria.

Our work has been rich and exciting, though not without its problems and difficulties. It has allowed us to look into the eyes of the Church in Europe, with all the treasures of the two great Latin and Eastern traditions that make it up. With an awareness that has grown over the course of the Assembly, we feel today that we can affirm that our Church is beautiful, showing a variety that is also our wealth. We feel that we love her even more deeply, in spite of the wounds she has inflicted, for which she needs to ask forgiveness in order to be able to move on to reconciliation, the healing of memory and the welcoming of the wounded. We are convinced that these sentiments also fill the hearts of all the people who have been involved in the journey of Synod 2021-2024 since September 2021.

Throughout the days of the Assembly, we went through a spiritual experience that it is possible to meet, listen to each other and dialogue starting from our differences and beyond the many obstacles, walls and barriers that our history puts in our way. We need to love the variety within our Church and support each other in mutual esteem, strengthened by our faith in the Lord and the power of his Spirit.

This is why we wish to continue walking in a synodal style: more than a methodology, we consider it a way of life of our Church, of communal discernment and of discernment of the signs of the times. Concretely, we want this Continental Assembly not to remain an isolated experience, but to become a periodic appointment, based on the general

[1] Of this work will give account a more articulated document that will be sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod as a contribution to the next steps of the Synod process, and mainly the drafting of the Instrumentum laboris of the Synodal Assembly taking place in October. Together with a lot of information on our work and videorecordings of all the plenary sessions, this document will be available on the website of the Prague Continental Assembly, https://prague.synod2023.org, and on the websites of the Bishops' Conferences that wish to make it public in the different national languages.

adoption of the synodal method that permeates all our structures and procedures on all levels. In this style, it will be possible to address the issues on which our efforts need to mature and intensify: the accompaniment of the wounded, the 'protagonism' of young people and women, the learning from marginalised people, etc.

The synodal style also allows us to address tensions from a missionary perspective, without being paralysed by fear, but drawing from them the energy to continue along the way. Two in particular have emerged in our work. The first encourages unity in diversity, escaping the temptation of uniformity. The second links the readiness to welcome as a witness to the Father's unconditional love for his children with the courage to proclaim the truth of the Gospel in its entirety: it is God who promises "Love and truth will meet" (Ps 85:11).

We know that all this is possible because we have experienced it during this Assembly, but even more because the life of the Churches from which we come bears witness to it. We are thinking here in particular of ecumenical dialogue, which have echoed strongly in our work, and also of inter-religious dialogue. But above all, we believe that it is possible because grace is involved: building an increasingly synodal Church is a way to concretely implement the equality in dignity of all the members of the Church, founded in baptism. It configures us as children of God and members of the body of Christ, co-responsible for the unique mission of evangelisation entrusted by the Lord to his Church.

We are confident that the continuation of Synod 2021-2024 can support and accompany us, in particular by addressing at the level of the Synodal Assembly some priorities:

- deepen the practice, theology and hermeneutics of synodality. We have to rediscover something that is ancient, belongs to the nature of the Church, and is always new. This is a task for us. We are taking the first steps on a path that opens up as we go along it;
- address the question of an all ministerial Church, as the horizon of a reflection on charisms and ministries (ordained and non-ordained) and the relationships between them;
- explore the forms of a synodal exercise of authority, i.e. the service of accompanying the community and safeguarding unity;
- clarify criteria for discernment on the synodal process and which decisions belong on which level, from the local to the universal.
- take concrete and courageous decisions on the role of women within the Church and on their greater involvement at all levels, also in decision-making and decision-taking processes;
- consider the tensions around the liturgy, so as to synodally re-understand Eucharist as the source of communion;
- foster the formation to synodality of the whole People of God, with particular regard to the discernment of the signs of the times with a view to carrying out the common mission;
- renew a lively sense of mission, bridging the gap between faith and culture

to bring the Gospel back to people's feelings, finding a language capable of articulating tradition and aggiornamento, but above all, walking with people rather than talking about them or to them. The Spirit asks us to listen to the cry of the poor and the earth in Europe, and in particular the desperate cry of the victims of war who demand a just peace.

Loving the Church, the richness of its diversity, is not a form of sentimentalism for its own sake. The Church is beautiful because the Lord wants her to be so in view of the task he has entrusted to her: to proclaim the Gospel and invite all women and men to enter into the dynamic of communion, participation and mission that constitutes her raison d'être, animated by the perennial vitality of the Spirit. To build our European Church means then to renew our commitment to carry out this mission, even on our continent, in a culture marked by the many diversities we know.

We entrust the continuation of our Synodal journey to the Patron Saints and martyrs of Europe!

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus!

Final Document
1. Introduction: The Experience of the European Continental Assembly

1. The European Continental Assembly met in Prague within the framework of a journey initiated in 2021: the Synod 2021-2024 entitled *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*. The fruits of the first phase of the Synod, dedicated to the consultation of the People of God, which involved millions of people, have been summarised in the *Working Document for the Continental Stage* (DCS). This was in turn submitted to our local Churches – as well as those of each of the other continents – with the aim of gathering their resonances and facilitating a dialogue among the local Churches in Europe.

2. It was the first time in Europe that the People of God – bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, lay men and women - gathered to listen to one another and dialogue in an atmosphere of prayer and listening to the Word of God[2]. It was a new and unexpected experience. The joy of being part of the Church, which we had previously experienced in the diocesan stage, flourished and multiplied. Everyone had the opportunity of getting to know realities different from the one in which they live.

[2] CCEE and UCESM (Union of European Conferences of Major Superiors) we invited communities of contemplative life from all over Europe to support the European Continental Assembly through prayer, in a special way with continuous silent Adoration.

Together we discovered our common adhesion to Christ. Sometimes we experience tensions and uncertainties, but we realize that trusting the Lord, we can go on walking together. After four days of listening and dialogue based on the resonances aroused by the *Working Document for the Continental Stage* (DCS) within the local Churches from which we come, as the European Ecclesial Assembly, we realise that we have had a profoundly spiritual experience through the synodal method. We give thanks to the Spirit who guided us for the gift we received and here we wish to share it.

3. We deepened the insights that the ecclesial communities of our continent have gained through the synodal process, as well as the tensions and questions that the European Churches are facing. Our work has been rich and exciting, though not without its problems and difficulties. It has allowed us to look into the eyes of the Church in Europe, with all its treasures, starting with those of the great Latin and Eastern traditions that make it up. In this journey of mutual listening, we realised that we can be united in diversity: *Diversity, which is not lacking – in history, culture, traditions, socio- religious contexts – is a great wealth. We have experienced the beauty of dialogue at 360 degrees, not only East and West, but also North and South, let us not forget: from Cyprus and Malta to the Nordic countries. We are exchanging precious gifts that generate fraternity and dispose us for mission* (Free intervention by an invited guest).

4. With an awareness that has grown as the Assembly unfolded, we feel today that we can confess that our Church is beautiful, a bearer of a vital diversity that is also our wealth. We feel that we love the Church even more deeply, in spite of the wounds it has inflicted, for which it must beg forgiveness in order to be able to pursue the path of reconciliation, heal memories and welcome the wounded. We are convinced that these sentiments also fill the hearts of all the people who have been involved in the journey of Synod 2021-2024 since September 2021.

1.1. The Composition of the Assembly and the Organisation of its Work

5. The Churches in Europe are characterised by a great variety of languages, cultures and rites. In all, the Assembly was composed of 200 people: 140 delegates from the 39 members of the CCEE[3] (each one could nominate up to a maximum of four), to which were added 42 guests from the General Secretariat of the Synod, the CCEE Commissions, and a number of institutions, networks, associations and movements of the Catholic Church active on the continental level. In addition, each member of CCEE was invited to name up to ten delegates (numbering 269 persons) who participated online and contributed to the online working groups. In order to serve the work of the Assembly, members of the CCEE Secretariat and the General Secretariat of the Episcopal Conference of the Czech Republic, as well as the Redactional Committee of this Document and the Media Team attended the meeting[4].

[3] As far as CCEE members are concerned, the name of the country is simply indicated, except: the eparchy of Mukachevo, Ukraine (with the distinction between Greek-Catholic and Latin Church), and the two multi-national Episcopal Conferences: Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Iceland) and the International Bishops' Conference of Saints Cyril and Methodius (Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo). Working groups are indicated through the language they used.
[4] The complete list of participants is available in Annex A.

6. After the publication of the DCS, each local Church had been invited to work with the document and provide feedback. In plenary the delegation of each member of the CCEE shared the feedback to the DCS gathered from the Churches within their territory. These reports were inspired by the guiding questions formulated in n. 106 of the DCS. Each local Church as well as the episcopal conferences organised the collecting process of reactions to the DCS and its presentation in the manner most suitable and appropriate to their context and circumstances.

7. The European Continental Assembly in Prague worked in five languages (English, French, German, Italian, and Polish). Following the opening session, the work[5] was divided into three units, each of which was structured as a broad spiritual conversation: delegations taking the floor in the plenary assembly; sharing resonances in working groups; collecting and expressing reactions on the shared points in the plenary (group reports and free interventions). Delegates participating online were divided into groups that worked on a platform. They provided their contribution to the Assembly in a special session (online group reports).

8. Out of a deliberate option for transparency and with the aim to allow as many people as possible to participate in the journey, all the plenary sessions of the European Continental Assembly in Prague were live streamed. The recordings remain available on the YouTube channel of the CCEE Press Office.[6] The presentations of the delegations, other interventions, speeches and homilies, as well as the reports of the working groups, are available on the official Website[7] of the European Ecclesial Assembly in Prague. In order to hear the voices of the participants as much as possible on their own terms, the current Document provides quotations from the contributions shared. They aim to represent the richness, breath and lifelines of the exchange. The quotations were chosen because they express in a concise, powerful or precise way sentiments expressed in a number of contributions. They are not inserted to endorse a specific position.[8]

9. The presidency of the CCEE entrusted a Redactional Committee specifically with the task of drafting this Document. The work began by listening to all the contributions, reports and interventions presented during the Assembly and was based on the outline suggested by the General Secretariat of the Synod. An initial draft was read out during one of the sessions on the last day of the proceedings in Prague, and was approved by the Assembly. Reactions and proposals for modifications of this text were collected, both during the plenary session and in written submissions, were examined by the Redactional Committee and after necessary editorial work the document was completed.

10. The purpose of this Document is solely to provide a concise account of

[5] The detailed programme of work can be found in Annex B.
[6] https://www.youtube.com/@CCEEMediaoffice/streams
[7] https://prague.synod2023.org/en/
[8] It should be noted that the reports submitted to the Assembly are oftentimes themselves already a translation of one language into one of the five working languages. This posed a specific challenge when using quotations.

the work of the European Continental Assembly. It offers the contribution of the Churches in Europe to the dialogue of the Church worldwide and to the drafting of the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Synodal Assembly to be held in October 2023. It, therefore, voices the main intuitions and consonances recorded, as well as the divergences and tensions that did not fail to emerge, ahead of identifying the priorities to be submitted to the discernment of the Synodal Assembly which is currently being prepared. The European Continental Assembly acknowledged this report to be faithful to the work carried out. The Document does not offer solutions or theological interpretations, but rather intends to hold the tensions brought forward by the local Churches. It is not therefore to be interpreted as the expression of a final position nor as the indication of operational strategies of the European Churches concerning issues upon which discernment will take place in the subsequent phases of the synodal process.

11. After briefly outlining some basic elements of the context in which the local Churches in Europe live and work, in which, therefore, the Prague Continental Assembly should also be placed, the text will go on to identify seven intuitions that may underpin the path towards a synodal Church in a European perspective, and therefore seven tensions which the local Churches feel challenged by in order to continue their journey; it will then conclude with the formulation of what the Churches in Europe considers to be the priorities for the work of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023.

1.2. Some Features of the Context in which the European Churches operate

12. During the working sessions of the Assembly, we heard the news of the dramatic earthquake that hit southern Turkey and northern Syria on 6 February 2023. Tens of thousands of people lost their lives. The Assembly prayed for and expressed its solidarity with those particularly affected by the earthquake.

13. Europe is deeply affected by the pain and suffering of the war of aggression unleashed against Ukraine a year ago. The Assembly was deeply touched by the presence of people from the affected regions. The situation raised new questions: *We would do well, together with the whole Church, to reflect on how to show Christ in war and post-conflict conditions. How to reach people affected by violence and rape with the Good News?* (Ukraine, Latin Church).

14. The local Churches in Europe acknowledge the wounds caused by sexual and other kinds of abuse in its own midst. The report of Ireland echoed others when is stresses that the courageous voice of the victims *went to the heart of what is necessary for our Church: conversion* (Ireland). As the trustworthiness and credibility of the Church are at stake, there is a need to address both the cases of abuse and the wounds they cause, as well as the issue of their management by the Church authorities.

15. The synodal experience takes place within the peculiar context that

characterises the Church in Europe, starting from the diversities that run through it, which at times create tensions between its parts: between Eastern and Western Europe - a legacy of the division of the continent into opposing blocs at the end of the Second World War - , as well as between North and South, between countries that have a strong Catholic tradition and others where Catholics or even Christians have been a minority for centuries. Nevertheless, the work of the Assembly reveals a picture of Europe and the European Churches that is much more diverse than the traditional stereotypes of large homogeneous opposing blocs. The confessional pluralism that has characterised Europe for centuries is today the ground on which ecumenical initiatives of many kinds flourish, starting with ecumenism of praxis.

16. The religious context of contemporary Europe is marked above all by the phenomenon of secularisation: *our rich European Christian tradition also entails knowledge, which we carry in a very secularised context. Within this context, we need to pave new paths towards the desire to 'meet everyone with the burning lamp of the Gospel* (Malta). *A negative attitude that condemns the world and society is sterile. We have much to offer the world but we also have much to receive from it. Openness to the world can help us to better understand the Gospel. […] The whole synodal process invites us to understand the signs of our time, also the signs of contemporary secularized society* (Belgium). *Current challenges include the need to engage in a dialogue with contemporary culture and thought, on issues such as artificial intelligence, robotics or gender identity issues (LGBTQIA+)* (Portugal). Despite difficulties, the synodal process is considered to be a chance within a secularized culture: *By enlarging our tent, we must be able to accompany as many people as possible on the path of the Christian experience* (Monaco).

17. Churches in Europe also have to deal with the problem of migration. It is caused by wars or disastrous economic situations. It removes members from Christian communities, impoverishing them and making them almost irrelevant. Moldova remarks that there are communities *which are in danger for various reasons, first and foremost poverty and the phenomenon of migration, of disappearing and seeing the transmission of the faith tradition interrupted.* Elsewhere, communities struggle in coping with a sudden influx of migrants, who may soon constitute a large majority: *The new reality of the Catholic Church in Greece: [...] Some parishes have a foreign majority (95% in the three parishes in the centre of Athens, in Rhodes, in Mykonos), with a small presence of Greeks. [...]Other parishes show a multinational makeup. Only on islands with a century-old Catholic presence are all Greeks. The problem is worsened by the fact that thousands of immigrants live in towns, villages and islands without the presence of a Catholic parish priest, and therefore without a Catholic Church life* (Greece).

18. On several occasions it was emphasised that the Churches in Europe are Churches of martyrdom. Some suggested to draw up a common European martyrology *to spread the memory of the martyrs of our continent and let ourselves be guided by their witness in order to grow in faith and fidelity to our Christian and*

Catholic identity (Free intervention of an invited guest).

19. Amidst such complex challenges, there is a need to revitalise listening to the Word of God: *It is essential that the Church gives the Word of God all the space it deserves, reintegrating the spiritual dimension into its ordinary life, in all its pastoral and also its governing activities* (France).

2. For a Synodal Church in a European Perspective

20. The discussion and exchange starting from the DCS have led to the identification of seven points of reference for the path of building a synodal Church in a European perspective. These are shared intuitions from which we can all draw inspiration and ideas for implementation in specific local contexts: 1) the spiritual dimension of synodality, in a perspective of a continuous conversion to Christ; 2) the rediscovery of the common baptismal dignity and its implications; 3) the essential between synodality and mission; 4) dialogue as a way of life of the Church; 5) the commitment to overcome prejudices and reconcile memory; 6) preferential attention to families, women and young people; 7) the adoption of the synodal method for all ecclesial processes.

2.1. Journeying with Christ, filled with his Spirit

21. The lifestyle of Jesus Christ, his kenotic existence in the service of humanity, is a path that every Christian and every Christian community is invited to undertake: *Conversion, understood as interior and exterior conformation to Christ the servant, should be the first and last criterion of the synodal journey, which shapes the style of the Church of the future (Turkey). The term 'synod' itself refers to the person of Jesus Christ: In our synodal journey, the image of the Church as a community of all the faithful of Christ was emphasised. The faithful who are with Christ, who said of himself: I am 'hodos' = the way (also: the truth and the life). […]. Christians are 'synodoi' (Ignatius of Antioch). Thus, synodality is first and foremost 'con-Christianity'. And the 'synodoi' are all 'con-Christians'. That is, precisely because with Christ, and only on this Christological basis, all the baptised are 'synodoi' in the time of salvation, in the following of Christ and in service to their brothers and sisters, in their pilgrimage towards the risen Christ* (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

22. In a complementary manner, numerous interventions in the plenary and group works pointed to the Holy Spirit as the main protagonist and driving force of the synodal journey. This was emphasised by the Czech theologian Tomáš Halík in his spiritual introduction: *Above all, it is through spirituality - the spiritual experience of individual believers and of the whole Church - that the Spirit gradually introduces us to the wholeness of the truth*. We experienced this directly during the Assembly in

Prague, when we meditated with a Pentecost icon shared by the Slovakian Delegation: all those in attendance are united, even if the colours of their clothes are different. The image reflects what has been experienced: the diversity of opinions expressed is not an obstacle to the declared desire of all to be faithful to Christ and participate together in building a single Church of unity in diversity guided by the Holy Spirit, *cum Petro et sub Petro*.

23. Proceeding along the synodal journey requires *maintaining a spirit of continual discernment so that the Church can always be a place of personal and communal encounter with Jesus and his Gospel, and a starting point for mission* (Portugal). If Christ is our model and the Spirit is the source of power that inspires us, an attitude of conversion and the care of the spiritual dimension are indispensable to remain attentive to their voice. At the heart of a synodal Church can therefore only be a personal relationship with God: *Only when we have a personal experience of God the Father can we be brothers and sisters in Christ to one another, going into the world with the content of the Gospel and revealing the richness of faith* (Slovenia). Nurturing this relationship requires engaging in a journey of conversion that also involves the communities as a whole and beyond: *We believe that the foundation of all our actions, desires and proposals must be a personal and communal conversion and communion with Christ, with each other and with our brothers and sisters* (Spain).

24. Fidelity to Christ must also be lived as a spiritual union with those who have given their lives for the Gospel: *The martyrdom of men and women, consecrated or not, teaches us that communion is possible despite hard trials; that being faithful to God is the most beautiful witness that can be offered to humanity of all times (Albania). Indeed, Christian martyrs did not give their lives for a custom, but for Truth: for Christ* (Hungary).

2.2. Rediscovering the Common Baptismal Dignity

25. *In baptism we are grafted into Christ* (Slovenia). Numerous reactions to the DCS emphasise the link with Christ through baptism and the consequences deriving from it: *We are all called to holiness and share responsibility for building up the Church, the Body of Christ* (English language working group). *Therefore: We must recognise and reaffirm our common baptismal dignity as the basis for renewal of life and ministries in the Church. Every baptised person must become more aware of their identity, dignity and vocation in Christ. [...] Each vocation must be better understood and more widely appreciated if we are to cultivate the collegial nature of the Church* (Scotland). Many found the synodal process a very useful opportunity for a lived reappropriation of that notion: *The intuition that emerged strongly in this synodal journey was the rediscovery of the baptismal dignity and the common responsibility derived from it for the edification and mission of the Church* (Italy).

26. The equal dignity rooted in our common baptism has been pointed out several times. This theological affirmation takes on a more concrete and urgent dimension when it prompts us to reflect on the place and role of women in the Church: *The*

present synodal experience is an important sign of hope for many and encourages them in the common search for new credible paths. This includes the recognition of the dignity and vocation of all baptised people, especially women (Switzerland). In other words, the involvement of women is not a substitution for male scarcity, but a responsible implementation of the theology of the common priesthood of the faithful (Czech Republic). The challenge is even more crucial with regard to young people.

2.3. Synodality Serving and Enhancing Mission

27. Synodality has a constitutive missionary dimension. Discovering the dynamism of evangelisation and renewing themselves, our local Churches grasp that synodality and mission are interdependent and a permanent task for the Church. Synodality entails journeying together at different levels; it is a way and style of being a missionary Church and constitutes the framework of our participation in the divine mission: *If we take seriously the principle of synodality, then mission cannot be understood as a one-sided process, but rather as accompaniment in a spirit of dialogue, a quest for mutual understanding. Synodality is a process of learning in which we not only teach but also learn*. (Tomáš Halík, Spiritual Introduction).

28. Walking as a missionary synodal Church we meet companions whom we learn to love and appreciate because together we are called to bear witness to the love of God in a wounded world. The expectations of the people towards the Church are immense. The faithful want to shape this missionary Church and they want their opinion, their life experiences, their concerns, their suffering to be heard.

29. Being a missionary Church means at the same time to listen as followers of Christ, to see the existential wounds of people, humanity and creation, and to act to redress them: *A synodal Church can help to redress and bind these wounds. It can help us to be reconciled with ourselves, with God, with one another, and with creation* (Ireland). The DCS's emphasis on the diaconal character of a missionary synodal Church was warmly welcomed. To express its importance, the image of the Church as a field hospital often recurs.

30. Currently, there are many wounds in Europe and around the world: the war in Ukraine, people's existential crises, the degradation of the environment, the pandemic, and the wounds caused to people by the Church through abuse and any kind of violence, exclusion, or humiliation. *Many voices express gratitude for the document's focus on the pressing crises of the present. We think in particular of the existential crises of the protection of creation, climate justice, wars, poverty and disease. As the Church in Switzerland, we can credibly engage in these crises if we also work on our own internal problems and solve them* (Switzerland).

31. Synodality supports the Church in the process of becoming increasingly missionary, but it also quickly reveals obstacles and tensions that must be overcome or endured along the way. A synodal Church adopts different criteria for evaluation;

it does not avoid dialogue, but seeks it; it does not devalue, but strives to come out of its own security and question itself; it opens up spaces for experimentation and seeks subsidiary solutions, if necessary.

2.4. Growing as a Church in Dialogue

32. For the Church, dialogue is a way of life, with solid trinitarian and ecclesiological foundations, which must shape our relationships at all levels. This affects the relationships within and among our local Churches and concerns ecumenical, interreligious, and social relationships as well as interactions with all marginalised and wounded people.

33. Our local Churches are marked by a rich diversity, which is not always simple to live: people of different nationalities and ethnic groups live together, as well as faithful belonging to both Eastern and Western traditions. The Churches of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine express the challenges: *In a minority context, an additional difficulty is represented by the difference of cultures among Catholics belonging to the same ecclesial community, who experience the separation of traditions, languages and closure in the sense of belonging that generates division* (Moldova). Nevertheless, *diversity must not be seen only as a problem, but as a resource (the rites of the different Churches, the liturgy, the history and traditions of the national Churches in Europe, etc.). All these realities call for a transformation of our hearts, of the language we use in relation to today's culture. We all feel involved in the journey of encounter, which begins with our metanoia* (Italian language working group).

34. With respect to relations with other Christian denominations and religious faiths, it has been pointed out that in many parts of Europe, Catholics are a small minority and have a rich experience of what it means to think and live ecumenically, alongside Protestant or Orthodox Churches. Many local Churches are involved in dialogue with Judaism and in interreligious dialogue, especially with Islam (e.g.: Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania): *The ecumenical effort of the Catholic community in relation to Orthodox Christians (there are very few other Christians in the country) and the work on dialogue with Muslims as well as with the Jewish community are part of the life of the Church in a religiously and ethnically mixed society* (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

35. The Churches in the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe are aware that they find themselves on the border with the Orthodox world or live together with the faithful of the Orthodox Church, who count for the majority of the country's population. Living together has not always been easy and there are still wounds to heal. The local Churches want to face this task: The synodal path has rekindled ecumenical awareness. *The Greek Catholic Church has the ecumenical vocation in its DNA and painfully feels the lack of Christian unity. We are not simply at the geographical border with Orthodoxy, but above all with our Orthodox brothers and sisters with whom we share the same ritual and cultural heritage. Naturally, we want to intensify our involvement in ecumenism with all confessions, but especially with*

our sister Church, showing a spirit of initiative and creativity, overcoming the wounds and injustices of the past through a genuine healing of memory (Romania).

36. The Churches of Western and Northern Europe benefit from their good ecumenical relations with the Protestant Churches. It was emphasised that praying as well as journeying together, should not be limited to the annual celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, but should go further, identifying new possibilities. The Latvian delegation, for example, told us about the tradition of an ecumenical Way of the Cross, which has been held in Riga on Good Friday for 18 years now and was also organised during the pandemic with the participation of the Lutheran and Baptist communities.

37. The style of dialogue also concerns relations with the secularised society: *In Europe [the] change takes a specific form due to the confrontation with an increasingly secularised society. In reality, homogeneous Christian societies no longer exist. It is not good just to observe this situation or to experience it as a threat and as something to be opposed to. As a Church, we live in the world, but not necessarily in a Christian world. This requires a change of mentality and a true conversion on our part* (Belgium). At the same time, in the face of secularism and pluralism, some express concerns that the teachings of the Church will be diluted and for example that the traditional understanding of marriage and family will change. These voices plead for the Church not to be worldly, even if it remains in dialogue with the world.

38. The local Churches in Europe are aware that it is necessary to enter and remain in dialogue with society. Dialogue with the world helps the Church to be missionary, to know and understand the sufferings and wounds of people and creation, and to act accordingly, first of all inside our communities: a tension has been detected *between the socio-ecological changes we demand from society in order to live together peacefully in justice, and the lack of our own capacity for conversion towards more justice, such as practicing a second-class status of women.* (English language online working group).. For the commitment to justice, peace and reconciliation, time is running out. It is insufficient to only name issues; there is an urgent need for discernment to be followed up with action.

2.5. Facing Open Wounds, Overcoming Prejudices, Reconciling Memories

39. The Church has inflicted deep wounds and at the same time has been deeply wounded. Many reports pay tribute to *women and men who have courageously come forward to speak out about sexual, institutional, emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual abuse by members of the Church* (Ireland). They also bring to the fore how the wounds caused by abuse have eroded the very credibility of the Church. Expressing disappointment for the dismissive and non-empathetic treatment of these people by the Church authorities, some ask: "*To what extent is a distinction still made between the members of the institution and the institution itself?* (Nordic countries). Others see the responsibility for the cover-up of abuse cases as both individual and systemic: *There are serious individual faults; too many clergy members abused their*

power and those responsible, not least the bishops, covered up the atrocities. But there are also systemic causes of the abuse of power. We cannot deny them. We are determined to draw the spiritual and structural consequences (Germany). Some call for more decisive steps to address the problem in a more transparent way: *abuse is an open wound and will remain a barrier to communion, participation and mission until it is fully addressed* (Ireland).

40. *Only when we listen to the voices that are often not heard, can we grow and discern. We wish especially to hear the voices of specific groups within the Church: the poor people, the marginalized people, those who feel left out or not welcome, the LGBTQ community, divorced and remarried people, migrants, and people whose lives did not turn out as they hoped for* (The Netherlands). The link between synodal reform and concern for victims and marginalised people in the Church must be maintained: *In the struggles for the future of the Church, we want to put concrete people and their suffering first* (Multilingual working group). The sick and people with disabilities are often mentioned too. A number of delegations express an urgency to take steps, because many people and groups *feel rejected, degraded and discriminated against in our Church, often unfortunately rightly so. They want safe encounters and honest dialogue at eye level. Time is pressing: We see the need for a real conversion!* (Switzerland)

41. During the Assembly, not only differences of opinion emerged, but also mutual accusations. Nevertheless, for the Churches of Europe, the path of encountering and mutual trusting is still open: *We underline the joy of being on the same path, between countries and Churches of Europe, of being able to discover that we are all living different sufferings and experiences but common in the love of Christ* (French language working group). The Prague Assembly is not the end of this journey, but just a step beyond the beginning: we all need time for a deeper understanding of what others are saying, which is sometimes difficult for some to accept, and which requires further reflection, study, discernment, and listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit who wants to lead us to a common future: *Let us walk together in the way the Spirit of God leads our Church: in many places, with many people, in many forms. It is a kairos of the Church to discover and shape its own synodality* (Germany).

42. The meeting and sharing among the delegates, particularly during the group work, made it clear that the differences in worldviews do not only run between East and West, North and South. Despite real differences between local Churches, it is not possible to draw a simplistic picture of a Europe anchored in old divisions. The report from Luxembourg mentions *the great gap between those who seek reform or even transformation and others who are afraid of change to the point of rejecting it. May these gaps make us curious to discover each other's arguments, may they make us vigilant to respect each other in order to build the future of our communities together, and not against each other, seeing in diversity a wealth.*

43. The call to conversion has resounded in the context of mutual prejudices on the

part of individuals or even entire communities, including local Churches. We all need to *recognise the diversity of living environments and historical experiences* (Croatia) to cleanse ourselves of the historical memory that prevents us from approaching one another with an attitude of openness and trust. *Reading the DCS we are fascinated by the global diversity of the realities of our common faith in Christ. The listening-expressing relationship has become more balanced, and we have all become more aware of the value of each one's specific way of expressing ourselves* (Romania).

44. Some delegates openly expressed the need for all of us to convert, purify and heal our memories in order to reconcile our local Churches and become more credible for secularised societies. We all need to confront our hard theological and pastoral positions to better respond to contemporary challenges. *The process of secularization has not caused the disappearance of Christianity, as some expected, but its transformation* (Tomáš Halík, Spiritual Introduction). There is a need for a kenotic ecclesiology, so as not to be afraid of the death of certain forms of Church: *Mission overcomes many problems, because it means going out of oneself. In the danger of losing, there is a greater possibility of receiving* (Italian language working group).

2.6. Attending to Families, Women and Young People

45. Many contributions underscored the need to support families. They are responsible for transmitting, strengthening, celebrating and living, the faith. Furthermore, they are also agents of evangelisation: *The most important place of formation is the family, which is in crisis for various reasons: pastoral efforts towards families must be emphasised* (Slovakia). *The family is the fundamental unit of society, in which we learn tolerance and mutual acceptance, and to which we can return to in times of crises. We are all called, therefore, to work for marriage and the family.* (Hungary). This commitment also has an ecumenical and interreligious dimension as Albania underlines: *The five religious denominations (Islam, Bektashi, Orthodox, Evangelicals, Catholics) officially recognised by the State have together formed an Interreligious Council. Beyond the monotheism that characterises us, what unites us most, and for which we think we can offer something to the people of today, are the human values we feel we share* (Albania). A special reference to families is made here.

46. The contributions of practically all the delegations devoted space to the topic of the participation of women and their role in the Church. *Many women communicated their pain at the denial of their participation in the life of the Church and spoke of feelings of exclusion and discrimination. Women play a crucial role in the life of the Church, but many men and women spoke of a Church that 'excludes' the fullness of women's gifts* (Ireland). This is one of the most frequently recurring points in all reports and finds expression in similar words. Belarus emphasises *the greater attention given to the role of women in the life of the Church. On the basis of the sacrament of Baptism, as members of the People of God with equal dignity, they must take their rightful place in the implementation of the Church's mission and*

activities. (Belarus) Luxembourg calls for *strengthening the role of women and their participation at all levels of Church life, finally taking into account their charisms and talents*.

47. Delegations call for being more attentive to young people, which are the present and not only the future of our Churches. *More than ever, young people are looking for belonging, authenticity and autonomy. Many suffer from depression and loneliness and no one really cares about them and listens to them. Young people are already in our Church now, not only in the future* (The Netherlands). Slovakia laments the *absence of young people in the life of the Church*, because they can teach the Church how to be a missionary Church. The Church needs young people *who accept this mission of Christ, who give witness, who conduct a dialogue, who present to other communities and nations all these values that we bring into our lives as young Catholics* (International Bishops' Conference of Saints Cyril and Methodius).

2.7. Building the synodal method into Church structures and processes

48. As the European Continental Assembly progressed, the awareness of the depth and fruitfulness of the method of spiritual conversation, also called by some the synodal method, came to the fore: *The synodal process is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who calls us to active listening, deep dialogue and community discernment through the methodology of spiritual conversation* (Spain). As the direct experience of the work of the Prague Assembly also testifies, spiritual conversation triggers a profound dynamic in the people involved: it allows people to be listened to and asks from them to learn to listen by leaving their prejudices behind, accepting different ways of expressing oneself, which at times may hurt. Above all, it stimulates deep personal and communal listening to the Word of God, community prayer and conversion. People realise that they listen to their 'brothers and sisters in Christ', but even more so, that they listen to the Spirit, who is the true protagonist. People are invited to be driven by the Lord's style, and not their own ideology, in order to identify together the steps to be taken. This is what the term discernment refers to, though for some it still needs clarification. With appropriate adaptation, the synodal method can also be applied to other areas of togetherness, especially in the social, interreligious or ecumenical context.

49. Synodality should not remain an abstract and formal idea. Hence, the synodal method *needs deepening, formation and institutionalisation* (Austria). On the one hand, a more thorough elaboration of a theology of synodality is needed; on the other hand, many emphasise the importance of "*formation in synodality, for clergy and laity together*" (England and Wales), especially through learning-by-doing processes. We can grow in a synodal style through practice, under the guidance of the Spirit and with the accompaniment of skilled people. Thus, the Maltese delegation asks: *Given the clear difference we observed between processes in which the 'spiritual conversation' was central and those that seemed to replicate normal surveys, what skills and what spirituality are needed for synodality not to remain just a concept, but to become an inspiration for our structures, so that they really become spaces of community discernment in which God's will is truly at the centre?* (Malta)

50. The use of the synodal method is, therefore, called to become structural, entering into the ordinary life of the communities *as the correct approach to each ecclesial meeting and to the implementation of local pastoral plans* (Moldova) to the point of shaping a new style of being Church. According to the Slovak delegation, it is a priority to *bring the synodal spirit into the life of local communities – to introducing active listening and spiritual discernment in decision-making / taking processes.* For this reason, there is a strong call to attend to canon law reforming the structures and processes that promote and protect the synodal method. One of the priorities is to make *parishes a place of true 'synodal culture' where all are invited to participate, to manifest themselves, to make their contribution to pastoral action, in councils or assemblies, assuming an effective co- responsibility* (Portugal). It is also a way to make the Church less clerical, cold and bureaucratic, as some, especially the young, are asking for.

51. It is a matter of continuing to learn how to be a synodal Church, building on previous experience, but not without being satisfied with the steps already taken, however beautiful they may be, by bearing concrete witness that it is possible to live tensions without seeing them as irresolvable oppositions that crush us. That is why *formation in the concrete practice of synodality and authentic listening to the other and to the Holy Spirit is necessary* (The Netherlands).

3. The European Churches Facing Synodality: Questions and Tensions

52. At the heart of the synodal process is the identification of the tensions that run through the Churches in Europe. As suggested by an Austrian delegate, tensions can be opportunities, but it depends on how one deals with them: they can be swept under the carpet, turned into a conflict with losers and winners, or become the road to synodality, which then requires opening up spaces for experimentation. *Europe has a history of religious conflict, but tensions are reduced when we listen to each other, so let us thank God for this process of synodal listening* (English language online working group).

53. Multiple tensions of various kinds are often a source of great concern. The image of the tent proposed by the DCS, however, makes it clear that they are not necessarily negative: without tension, the tent collapses, while too much tension damages it. Tensions risk turning into polarisations, but *polarization is wounding the Church, the body of Christ* (English language online working group). Yet, *Tensions can be overcome if the tent is a safe space where everyone feels they can speak and be heard. Spiritual conversation has been a useful practice in this regard* (English

language online working group). There is, therefore, an important challenge: *to inhabit tensions* (French and Italian language working groups). *Tensions allow us to have an opportunity for change in a more creative way, and together we can look for ways to succeed in doing this* (English language working group). Along these lines, some prefer to speak of complementarity or the ability to maintain a balance between polarities. This is how the seven tensions brought to the fore by the Prague Assembly should be grasped: 1) the relationship between proclaming the truth of the Gospel and witnessing to God's infinite mercy; 2) the articulation between fidelity to tradition and aggiornamento; 3) the liturgy in the life of the Church; 4) the pluralism of understanding mission; 5) the ability to exercise the co- responsibility of all in the light of the diversity of charisms and ministries; 6) the forms of exercising authority in a synodal Church; 7) the articulation and unfolding of diversity and unity and the local- global dynamic.

3.1. Truth and Mercy

54. To express the tension between truth and mercy, some delegations resort to the DCS (nr. 30): *The dream is of a Church that more fully lives a Christological paradox: boldly proclaiming its authentic teaching while at the same time offering a witness of radical inclusion and acceptance*. Others, using a different language, speak of a tension between pastoral care and doctrine, to be addressed through an intensive dialogue involving the whole People of God.

55. In any case, the attitude of openness and welcome suggested by the image of the widening of the tent is considered a fundamental characteristic of a Church that is truly synodal and knows no boundaries: it is a token of its coherence. There is recognition of the urgency of a real closeness to all those who are poor, excluded, victims of injustice and prejudice, whose dignity is trampled upon: *It is not enough to proclaim that they are welcome, but we must discover with them their place in the Church* (Czech Republic). At the same time, the risk is perceived that this may lead to a watering down of the demands of the Gospel, whereas *the Church needs to communicate Christian truth authentically and clearly* (Hungary). Furthermore, fear is expressed that *considering pastoral solutions related to these issues could be a prelude to 'doctrinal changes'* (Poland).

56. Slovenia expresses two requirements highlighted often: *Young people want a Church close to people, including those on the margins, open to the issues of separated and remarried persons, LGBTQIA+ people. But they also want the Church to make it clear that not everything is acceptable! So the Church should listen, but also tell the whole truth with great love!* (Slovenia).

57. Both emphases are a way of responding to the need for authenticity of the disciples who wish to follow in the Lord's footsteps: *The convergence between the DCS and the discernment of the local Churches reinforces the concern for a Church open to all because its eyes are fixed on Christ: young people, the poor and excluded, people with disabilities, homosexuals, the divorced and remarried, everyone must*

feel that they are expected in the Church and that they have a place in it because they are members of the same body, that of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12) (France).

58. Welcoming all as a sign of God's unconditional love and the proclamation of the truth of the Gospel are both demands rooted in the Church's unique mission: *God is the Truth, therefore he wants every person to be able to know this Truth and live it. [...] Jesus Christ alone is the only Lord and Saviour of the world. And the model of all interpersonal relationships is God in the Trinity of Persons* (Ukraine, Latin Church).

59. This tension cannot be resolved once and for all, but must be inhabited responsibly, resisting the temptations of ideological approaches and instead taking a step in the direction of greater spiritual depth: *The tension between pastoral and doctrine [...] can correspond to that between love and truth. Rather than opposing them, should we not rather articulate their complementarity in the sense of Psalm 85,10 ´Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet'?* (French language working group). The path is that of a contemplative gaze that allows us to get to know the Lord Jesus better and the way in which he was able to articulate the two drives: *the fundamental truth of Jesus Christ is a moment of grace and mercy because mercy leads to truth* (English language online working group). This contemplative attitude is the basis for necessary discernment: *Unconditional acceptance does not prevent discernment in order to articulate mercy and truth in specific situations* (France).

60. Hence the need for a *formation in truth and mercy: a formation that holds in tension the authority of Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium and personal experience* (England and Wales). But even more fundamentally, we encounter here a call to personal and communal conversion: *While striving to enlarge the space of its tent and to be more inclusive, in what way should the Church modify itself, its doctrine, or its praxis? And to which extent should it ask its members to modify their heart and mindset, calling everyone for conversion? A shared journey of conversion becomes one of the first forms of inclusion* (Malta).

3.2. Tradition and Aggiornamento

61. *Perhaps the most pervasive tension in Europe is the growing divide between the Church and secular culture. To bridge this gap, the language of the Church must be accessible to all, without diluting the Gospel message (Scotland). We must realise that the language of faith as used in the Church is often very different to what people understand and use in everyday life in today's society* (Netherlands). As a consequence, the question *What does Jesus Christ want from his Church today?*, formulated by the Portuguese delegation, was repeated several times and in different forms.

62. The fear of breaking away from tradition particularly emerged when dealing with differences among theological sensitivities on the relationship between reference to tradition and reading the signs of the times. *The gap […] between tradition and modernity is becoming increasingly wide and more and more aggressive. This is particularly painful in the area of liturgy* (Nordic countries). Indeed, for liturgy – and

not only liturgy – it is important to use a language that adheres to tradition while being significant for the people of our time.

63. Many delegates called for quick and radical changes following the meeting between theology and contemporary culture: *We must become a Church of presence, a Church that listens and is listened to. Transforming the Church without just turning around ourselves, having a view for the world. […keeping] a double dynamic: a process of internal reform and a response to the challenges of today's world while renewing and maintaining our Christian identity* (Luxembourg).

64. Others expressed the concern that adopting changes would risk the integrity of the Church's teaching. For example, the Romanian delegation *hopes that the Church will be open to dialogue with the world without becoming of the world. That Church members speak boldly and uncompromisingly on matters of faith and morals*, Some remarks voiced the fear of inappropriate reforms of the Church, which may dilute the message of the Gospel: *We believe it is not right for the Church to conform to the world just so as not to feel persecuted, or considered unfashionable* (Albania).

65. Living the tension between tradition and aggiornamento without being crushed requires the ability to articulate the dynamic between the two poles: *We all would like to develop and implement new ideas, but we need to find a balance between Church traditions and new thoughts (Estonia). The pressing problem seems to be finding a wise consensus among the divergences and pastoral solutions that, without compromising doctrinal consistency, will allow a more adequate response to contemporary pastoral challenges* (Poland). In order to succeed, it has been stated that *serious attention must be paid to the theology of the living Tradition (DV 8) which includes, yes, a historical memory, but also an accurate discernment and judgement aimed at the new challenges of our society. The starting point, therefore, is found in listening to the Holy Spirit and discerning the signs of the times (GS 4), which courageously proceeds beyond historical experience* (Czech Republic). Synodality cannot be manipulated and bent to support ideological stances, nor does it consecrate all opinions expressed during the consultations. Rather, it is a dynamic way of listening to one another, humbly and opening our hearts to what the Holy Spirit suggests.

3.3. Liturgy as a focal point to observe tensions in the Church

66. The centrality of the liturgy, which gathers and fosters all the life of the Church, makes it a mirror in which the community – including its tensions – is reflected. Significantly and challengingly for discernment in Europe, liturgy is very often mentioned in connection with complex tensions or with pastoral difficulties. Instead, the joy of the liturgy in general and of the Eucharist in particular is rarely expressed. Perhaps this is so obvious that it goes without saying, but it is worth questioning.

67. From a fundamental point of view, it is possible to detect the link between

Church and liturgy, between ecclesiology and the theology of liturgy: *The liturgical dimension in the Church is a place of strong tensions. These tensions are part of a deeper tension of an ecclesiological nature. Ecclesiological tension often arises from a vision of the Church based on one's own expectations* (Italian language working group). In this context, the tensions and sufferings concerning the ancient form of the Roman liturgy should be understood, with explicit references by France, England and Wales, and Nordic countries to the pre-conciliar liturgy according to the 1962.

68. Several times the liturgy is mentioned in relation to the sacraments of Christian initiation, and in particular with Confirmation, which poses a great challenge in those contexts where it does not correspond to a deeper insertion into the life and mission of the Church, but to a distancing. In several countries, there are calls for reflection and action for a renewed liturgical language, and more profoundly for a renewal that articulates the mystery of faith and liturgy, on the one hand, and the relationship between liturgy and life, on the other. *Some of the faithful note that in general in Bulgaria, priests and the Church do not use contemporary language, while times have changed and the churches are half empty* (Bulgaria). Elsewhere, there is also a tension between the desire for spirituality and an overly formal liturgy. A particular problem concerns the homily. *This is linked to the need to pay attention to the formation and support of priests, who must be close to the People of God, also expressing the closeness of the whole Church through the simplicity of preaching, which must be there everywhere* (Mukachevo).

69. In conclusion, *liturgy is the space where we let God call us as one people and empower us by His Spirit to join in Jesus' mission. We need to deepen our understanding on how the way we celebrate our liturgies can further form us as a synodal Church* (Malta).

3.4. Understanding the Mission

70. At a deeper level, the above tensions are linked to the understanding of mission: *We are being convoked for what? Some might mix belonging to the Church with retreating into a comfortable cocoon. Others can imagine it more of a space where everyone can mix and match without any sense of commitment or conversion. For some of us, it's not clear what mission entails. And if it's all ministerial, how are we to understand the specific gifts of the ordained within the one holy People of God?* (Malta). A process of maturation is needed concerning the implications of these tensions: *Generally speaking, it seems that there is a need for a more complete appropriation and assimilation of concepts such as ´missionary nature´ and the ´missionary dimension´ of the activity of the Church* (Ukraine, Greek Catholic Church). In the tension around the understanding of mission, different interpretations become visible: some local Churches consider that the task of a missionary Church is the strengthening of catechesis and the growth of religious practice; others understand mission as going out into the world to make God's love tangible for all people, especially for marginalised and those who were hurt by the Church; others again add that the Church should be a home for all people, especially the young. In short, one

perceives a tension *between being locked in one's own community (elitism) and the need to go out on mission* (Slovakia).

71. A tension in the understanding of mission is also evident in the contributions from local Churches that are severely affected by cases of sexual abuse. How can the Church be missionary when it has inflicted severe suffering on many people? It touches on the credibility of the Church. Acknowledging the pain of the victims, the serious tensions are recognised and voiced. Finally, also among the mission-related tensions, *the fear is expressed that the synod process will remain without concrete structural consequences, which are seen as a prerequisite for a credible mission* (Austria).

3.5. Co-Responsibility of All, in the Diversity of Charisms and Ministries

72. *The synodality of the Church also requires recognition of the gifts and charisms of each member of the faithful, the equal dignity of each, seeking the symphonic articulation of the different vocations within the Church. It is necessary to recognise the authority of the pastors and the mission they have received. It is equally necessary to recognise the sensus fidei of each believer, whether cleric or lay. Rather, the ordained ministers can be understood as serving the baptismal life, granting each baptised and confirmed believer full participation in the life and mission of the Church* (France).

73. One of the most visible manifestations of common priesthood and synodality is the exercise of specific ministries and leadership, as well as participation in the governance of the Church at all levels. It is a way of realising the co-responsibility of all the baptised for the mission of the Church, based on their common baptismal dignity. This is why we speak of a ministerial Church as a concrete challenge, first of all for our ability to imagine concrete forms for its realisation. The synodal process leads to the desire of *a fraternal Church with an exercise of authority that is adapted to it and excludes every form of abuse of power, a synodal Church without clerical deviations* (Belgium) in the exercise of all ministries, ordained and non ordained: *In an 'all ministerial' Church, rethink the task and identity of priests (Italy); or, with a different emphasis: The involvement of the laity is an opportunity to complement, but not replace, the mission of ordained persons* (Hungary).

74. In this perspective, the Prague Assembly reaffirms that *the priestly ministry is a great gift from God for the Church* (France) and in various ways expresses a deep concern for priests. It voices their wish for *a positive image of priests* (Austria) and the faithful's concern for the wellbeing and loneliness of priests. *Young people observe that priests for the most part are poorly trained to work with persons, but are also often alone and without the right interlocutors* (Slovenia). On the other hand, there is a lack of reflection on the ordained diaconate, except in those cases where its opening to women is envisaged.

75. Some contributions also point to the existence of questions concerning the

limits of access to ordained ministry: *The historical variability of the figure of the priest must be open to debate about the ordination of married men* (Czech Republic). Another concern is the ordination of women to the diaconate, even though this is not a simple topic. *There are also tensions concerning so-called divisive issues, such as women's access to the sacrament of Orders, ordination of married men* (Portugal). In particular, *opinions are divided on the ordination of women to the diaconate/ priesthood* (English- language working group). According to Luxembourg, *The question of women's access to ordained ministries must be studied in depth*.

76. More broadly, the question of the place of women in the exercise of authority came up in many delegations. *The question of women's priesthood is not a hot topic, but we have had many discussions about women's participation in decision-making* (Lithuania). For several groups it is even a condition for a more fruitful Church in Europe. *Without doubt: the participation of lay people and especially women at all levels in the Church is felt as a priority […] the Church needs the voice and specific leadership and community building qualities of women* (The Netherlands).

77. In any case, a great convergence appears: *Promote the real and effective co-responsibility of the People of God, overcoming clericalism. It is important to promote lay ministries* (Spain). This is not just a question of the place of women in the Church, but an understanding of the diversity of ministries as an expression of the synodal nature of the Church.

78. This calls for a deepening of the issue of collaboration between priests and laity in the mission of the Church: What is *still missing is not only the experience of a community of life, but also a healthy collaboration between priests and laity* (Lithuania). Many interventions identify it as a place of tension or frustration, even going so far as to see it as a tension between institutions and charisms. Therefore, *it seems important to model cooperation and the assumption of ministries on the basis of capacities* (Nordic countries).

79. For this collaboration to be fruitful, there is an insistence on the need for specific formation, for seminarians (initial formation), for priests (ongoing formation), and not only: *The formation of all the baptised is indispensable to help them rediscover the meaning of their vocation and their task in the Church, in a logic of co-responsibility and not of substitution* (Italian language working group). This formation must be permanent and involve priests and laity together, which requires the creation of spaces and opportunities for experimentation. Lastly, the Turkish delegation was the only one to mention the training of priests from abroad, a phenomenon that affects almost all European countries, *who must learn the language and culture very well in order to be able to incarnate and embody the Good News in the local culture* (Turkey).

3.6. The Exercise of Authority within a Synodal Church

80. The contributions addressed various aspects of the exercise of authority in

the Church. They express that a true ecclesial and missionary renewal aimed at by the current synodal process is rooted in two principles: all specific authority in the Church proceeds from Christ, and is guided by the Holy Spirit. *Any real renewal and strengthening of synodality of and in the Church must start from the fundamental principles of the Church itself, from the foundations on which the Church was founded by Jesus Christ our Lord* (Nordic countries). The consequences touch the very nature of the Church, in which the Holy Spirit is still at work today. *The Church is essentially synodal and essentially hierarchical. The tasks and challenges involved can be described as 'decision-making' and 'decision- taking'. There must be no winners or losers. […] The Holy Spirit is often the third option* (Austria).

81. *There are rigidities to be overcome: excessively top-down ways of understanding the exercise of authority, forms of clericalism at various levels (and not only among priests), forgetting that when something concerns everyone, it should be discussed with everyone. Those who have a responsibility in the community have the task of involving and valuing everyone's contribution, because we all have something to learn from each other* (Italy). Moreover, *the common priesthood of all does not contradict the ministerial priesthood, and vice versa. We already experience joint deliberation in the synodal process. How do we also take decisions together?* (Germany).

82. This must result in profound changes: *A synodal institutional model should be built for the exercise of the ecclesial power and authority, with structures and bodies that reflect the spirit of synodality [….] and that do not have only consultative functions* (Mukachevo). *Synodality seems to require a profound change of mentality in the Church and especially in all those who exercise a responsibility in it* (Belgium). At the same time, *the faithful must be more aware that they are part of the Church and that they are needed for the work of the Church, remembering that the diversity of charisms without a hierarchical order becomes anarchy, just as the strictness of the hierarchy without a living charism becomes dictatorship* (Mukachevo).

83. This change must be reflected in concrete decisions, which the Church shall have to discern. *This will demand the courage and wisdom of the Spirit to review and inspire any necessary doctrinal, structural, canonical, and pastoral changes, without destroying communion or losing sight of the person and teaching of Jesus Christ* (Ireland). Surely the bishops are key players in this change towards a renewed and synodal exercise of authority. *We believe in the value of episcopal ministry* (Italy).

84. Authority must be deployed in a more fraternal and participative governance: *In order to experience better governance in the Church, many are calling for a rethink of a more participative governance, which gives room for listening and discernment, conceiving authority as an act of love and service* (France), but *a tension between authority and ministry* is also pointed out (Multilingual working group). European societies also have some specific needs: *to be a trustworthy and credible partner in the public arena and with the people, the European Church must meet the standards*

of functioning and governance acquired in society (DCS 62). *Hence the need for transparency, accountability and participative leadership* (DCS 79) (Belgium). For this, *mechanisms of regular consultation between clergy, laity and religious should be established or renewed, ensuring transparency, better communication and co-responsibility* (Scotland).

85. The most essential feature noted by many contributions is the link between authority and listening. The theological tradition refers to it with the notion of *sensus fidei fidelium* (the sense of the faith of the faithful). The Synod 2021-2024 places renewed emphasis on it and this *a cause of great joy, encouragement, and hope for all who love the Church as the People of God* (Ireland).

3.7. Unity in Diversity: Between Local and Universal

86. In Prague, the Churches of Europe had the privilege of experiencing unity in diversity. *The diversity in the Catholic Church is a richness, as we know there are two lungs, the Eastern Catholic Lung and the Western Catholic lung, each has its own way of thinking, its own way of speaking, even of governing* (Cyprus). The synodal journey provided an opportunity to realise and appreciate this diversity: *Although coming together and engaging in dialogue has not always been easy, many Russian Catholics have perceived the synodal process as enriching and helpful. It has enabled them to discover that the Church, in Christ, is one family and that being multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-institutional is a wealth* (Russia). There is thus a call to *take more account of the diversity of ways of living in the faith, which, in our opinion, is expressed well in the appreciation of traditions, both ritual and theological, that are at the same time united on the foundation of the one faith of the universal Church* (Mukachevo). The Eastern Churches have preserved institutions that give expression to synodality: *They can bring a lot of positive elements to the understanding and unfolding of the Church's synodality, especially through the adaptation of already existing provisions of the governing of the Church sui iuris* (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church). However, the Eastern Churches too are invited to renew existing institutions and recover institutions that have disappeared or fallen into disuse. *Required is not only the desired synodal conversion in the communion of the Church, but also the possible revision of some canonical norms so as to better reflect the identity of this Church and facilitate and support its mission both in its canonical territories and in the diaspora* (Romania).

87. The call to live unity in diversity also arises when the Churches face topics that concern a specific context at a specific time and which might, therefore, demand a contextual response: this is the question of decentralisation in a Church that is both local and universal. There is a need for clarity and transparency on who can decide which issue should be handled locally, regionally or universally. On each level the discernment should occur in a synodal way. Numerous contributions ask for appropriate institutions and canonical structures to assist the Church in putting synodality into practice.

88. In light also of the positive experience of the Prague Assembly a specific proposal was made to establish an Ecclesial Assembly for Europe: *It could take place in 2025. Sixty years after the Ecumenical Council proclaimed the Pastoral constitution Gaudium et Spes, this Ecclesial Assembly could gather to share 'the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time'. We could listen to the cry of the poor and the Earth in Europe and the world, we could pray and work together for Justice and Peace.* (Invited guest).

4. Perspectives and Priorities

88. Throughout the days of the Assembly, we went through a spiritual experience that led us to realise, for the first time in our Church in Europe, that it is possible to meet, listen to one another and dialogue starting from our differences and overcoming the many obstacles, walls and barriers that history has placed across our way. We need to love the diversity within our Church and support one another in mutual esteem, strengthened by our faith in the Lord and the power of his Spirit.

89. This is why we wish to continue journeying in a synodal style: rather than a methodology, we consider it a way of life of our Church, of community discernment and discernment of the signs of the times. Concretely, we want this European Continental Assembly not to remain an isolated experience, but to become a regular event, based on the general adoption of the synodal method that permeates all our structures and procedures at all levels. Doing so will allow us to address the issues on which our efforts need to mature and intensify: the accompaniment of wounded people, the protagonism of young people and women, openness to learning from marginalised.

90. The synodal style also makes it possible to deal with tensions from a missionary perspective, without being paralysed by fear, but drawing energy from them to continue along the path. Two in particular emerged in our work. The first encourages unity in diversity, escaping the temptation of uniformity. The second associates readiness to welcome others (as proof of the Father's unconditional love for his children) with the courage of proclaiming the truth of the Gospel in its entirety. It is God who promises 'Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet' (Ps 85:10).

91. We know that all this is possible because we have experienced it during this Assembly, but even more so because the life of the Churches from which we come bears witness to it. We are thinking, here in particular, of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, the echoes of which resonated strongly in our work. But above all, we believe that it is possible because grace is involved: indeed, building an increasingly synodal Church is a way to give concrete expression to the equality in dignity of all the members of the Church, founded in baptism, which makes us as children of God and members of the body of Christ, co-responsible for the unique

mission of evangelisation entrusted by the Lord to his Church.

92. We are confident that the continuation of the Synod 2021-2024 can support and accompany us, particularly by addressing some specific priorities at the October 2023 Synodal Assembly:

- deepen the practice, theology and hermeneutics of synodality. We need to rediscover something that is ancient and belongs to the nature of the Church, while always being new. This is a task for us. We are taking the first steps along a path that opens up as we walk it;
- address the meaning of an all-ministerial Church, as a horizon in which to place the reflexion on charisms and ministries (ordained and non-ordained) and the relations between them;
- explore forms for a synodal exercise of authority, namely the service of accompanying the community and preserving unity;
- clarify the discernment criteria for the synodal process and at what level, from local to universal, decisions are to be made.
- take concrete and courageous decisions on the role of women within the Church and on their greater involvement at all levels, including in decision-making and taking processes;
- consider the tensions around the liturgy, so as to consider, from a synodal perspective, the Eucharist as the source of communion;
- care for a synodal related formation of the entire People of God, with specific attention to discerning the signs of the times, with a view to carrying out the common mission;
- renew the living sense of mission, overcoming the rift between faith and culture in order to once again bringing the gospel to people's heart, finding a language that can articulate tradition and renewal, but above all that can walk with people instead of talking about them or to them. The Spirit asks us to listen to the cry of the poor and the earth in our Europe. In particular the desperate cry of the victims of war call for a just peace.

93. Loving the Church and her rich diversity is not a form of sentimentalism for its own sake. The Church is beautiful because the Lord wants her to be so, in view of the task he has entrusted to her: to proclaim the Gospel and to invite all women and men to enter into the dynamic of communion, participation and mission that constitutes her raison d'être, animated by the perennial vitality of the Spirit. Loving our Church in Europe, therefore, means renewing our commitment to carry out this mission, also on our continent, in a culture marked by the many differences we are well aware of.

94. Let us entrust the continuation of our synodal journey to the Patron Saints and Martyrs of Europe!

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus!

Concluding Note from the Bishops

We thank the Lord for the experience of synodality which has seen us all - bishops, priests, consecrated and lay men and women - side by side for the first time on a continental level. We rejoice because during these days in Prague we found that the moments of prayer lived together and even more the work of the Assembly have been a profoundly spiritual and truly synodal experience. Mutual listening, fruitful dialogue, and the story of how our ecclesial communities lived out the first phase of the synodal process and prepared for this continental meeting are an unmistakable sign of our unique belonging to Christ.

The national reports, the group work, and the many interventions that we have heard converged into the final document presented to the Assembly. It will be the contribution of the Churches in Europe to the drafting the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Synod. We thank those who have shared their experiences frankly and with respect for different sensitivities. We are also grateful to the Redactional Committee for the great work done in drafting the document.

As a fruit of this synodal experience, we bishops are committed to keep living and promoting the synodal process in our diocesan structures and life. This experience of care for the whole Church in Europe heartened us in our commitment to faithfully live out our universal mission. We are engaged in supporting the indications of the successor of Peter, our Holy Father, to become a synodal Church nourished by the experience of communion, participation, and mission in Christ.

We want to walk together, as holy People of God, both lay persons and pastors, pilgrims along the roads of Europe to proclaim the joy of the Gospel which springs from the encounter with Christ. We want to do it together with our brothers and sisters from other Christian denominations.

We shall work tirelessly to enlarge the space of our tents so that our ecclesial communities become even more places where everyone feels welcome.

Prague, February 11, 2023
Memory of the Blessed Our Lady of Lourdes

FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE CONTINENTAL STAGE IN MIDDLE EAST

"The centre of the Church is not herself. We have to leave behind undue concern for ourselves, for our structures, for what society thinks about us. This will only lead us to a "cosmetic theology"

(Pope Francis)

"The name of the Church is Synod"[1]

Foreword

1. The Catholic Churches in the Middle East (Coptic, Maronite, Greek-Melkite, Syriac, Chaldean, Armenian and Latin) held their Synodal Continental Assembly in Bethania (Harissa, Lebanon) from February 13th to 17th, 2023. The participants were from Egypt, the Holy Land, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and the Arabian Gulf. Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, General Relator of the 2021-2024 Synod on Synodality, and Sister Nathalie Becquart, Undersecretary of the Synod, were also present. In addition to the Patriarchs, the delegations included bishops and priests, religious men and women, and laypeople of all ages. The total number of participants was 125, including 40 lay and consecrated women (married and single) and 40 laymen (adults and young people of all ages, married and single), as well as people with disabilities. The Assembly was also attended by friends from the Orthodox and Protestant Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), as well as agnostic men and women. Some representatives of Muslim denominations also took part in the opening session.

2. The Synodal *Document for the Continental Stage* mapped the path of this Synodal Assembly. It was a Pentecostal moment during which all its members allowed themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, so much that prayer was the foundation on which the axes of daily reflections were built, both during the plenary assemblies and the group work. Mutual listening was the reference paradigm, while participation reflected the spirit of communion that reigned among the members of the Assembly. This communion reached its fullness in the Eucharist, which was celebrated each day according to one of the rites of the Eastern Churches and crowned each day's work. Moreover, the meditation of the Word of God and the spiritual conversations created an atmosphere of fraternity, trust, courage and responsibility during the deliberations, through which the participants attempted to shed valuable light on the fundamental question: "*How can the Church become more synodal?*"

3. The careful and meticulous organization of the Assembly created a relaxed and serene atmosphere that constituted a valuable motivation for hard and serious work. The credit for this goes to the immense effort made by the Secretary General of the Council of the Catholic Patriarchs of the East, in collaboration with the organizing committee and other committees that prepared and accompanied the work of the Assembly.

[1] John Chrysostome, *Explicatio in Psalmum* 149: PG 55, 493.

1. "He pitched His tent among us" (Jn 1:14): The Word of God amid His People

4. The presence of the Incarnate Word among us and in us did not cease, from the opening prayer until the end of the proceedings, to guide our steps during this Synodal Assembly. We listened to and celebrated the Word, and we meditated on what His Holy Spirit inspired us to do today. We realized that the People of God living in the Middle East are constantly being called to walk under the guidance of the Word and in the strength of the Spirit, in the midst of challenges, changes and misfortunes, animated by the hope of seeing this world transfigured into the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of peace, justice and joy, where God's love is bestowed, without distinction, on all human beings.

5. God invites His Church to form first and foremost a single community, who listens to His Word, who walks under His guidance, who discerns what the Word reveals in order to share it when the Church goes out to meet every human being, and who remains faithful to their mission. Going out into the world is the reason for the Church's existence; it is her vocation. The Word precedes the Church, and traces for her the path according to which, thanks to the inspirations of the Spirit who leads her, apprehends the needs of her People and of the world. In the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John, the Word emanates from the Father and "pitches His tent" among us; indeed, He pitches His tent in us – in His People and in His Church. Through His incarnation, the only begotten Son accomplished the sacramental presence of God, making it real and tangible, for God's dwelling place is no longer restricted to any one place: it has become concrete in His mystical Body and in the union of its members. The more this Body remains united, harmonious and open, the more it allows the "Word" that is in it to come out to meet every man and woman.

6. The expression "pitching His tent" sums up God's entire journey with His people, from the metaphor of the Ark of the Covenant or the Tent of Meeting in the Old Testament, to the Book of Revelation, the crowning book of the New Testament, where God pitches His tent in the New Jerusalem. God's journey with His People is thus completed in glory, as He spreads His tent above His People and in their midst, once and for all and until eternity, by the virtue of His Incarnate Word. In turn, the Church also pitches her tent, in response to God's presence and action in her, and moves on until she reaches her dwelling place, which is, as we learn in the Book of Revelation 12:12, the heavenly house: "Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you who have pitch your tents in them!" This exhortation to joy recapitulates the celebration of salvation and the praise of the hymn of ultimate victory, as a sign of Christian hope, overcoming all our fears, anxieties and uncertainties, and transcending all tangible, perceptible and visible reality.

7. Throughout the history of salvation, God accompanies His people and offers them His Word and Spirit – all that He has and possesses. However, in the New

Testament, God's journey with His people is accomplished in an unprecedented way; through the incarnation of His Son, who manifests God's indefectible and undeniable love to mankind. There lies the eternal covenant, the perennial communion, because through Jesus Christ the union between God and human is completed once and for all (*Ephapax*). The synodality that we aspire to live fully will only reach its paroxysm through the communion by which God introduces us, as His People, to His divine Trinitarian life and to our communion with one another, provided that we gather around the Word and the Body of the Risen Lord, and that we work according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in order to achieve communion with the world through the proclamation of the Good News and the bond to the cause of human dignity.

II. The synodality of the Church: nature and signs

8. Synodality is not a casual thing in the life of the Church. It is a sign inherent in her nature. True synodality is, for us, members of the mystical body of Christ, identification with Christ and imitation of His way of life. Since Christ is risen, He "being, in very nature, God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!" (Phil 2:6-8). It was among us that He pitched the tent of His divinity and His humanity, and led us from death to resurrection, thus opening the way to divine life. He accompanied us on the path of life and was attentive to our trials, sharing our joys and offering us His love to the end. For us, Christ is the Way (Jn 14:6). That is why the first Christians were called "fellow companions," "followers of Jesus" (*sequela Jesu*, the following of Jesus).

9. The Church is synodal through her very nature, for it is not only an institutional and juridical body, but first and foremost the mystery of Christ who works among and in those who believe in Him (*Lumen Gentium*, 1-5). This work is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit, who was given to the Church on the day of Pentecost to accompany her in her mission and to direct her "with hierarchical and charismatic gifts" (*Lumen Gentium*, 4). In this way, the faithful walk in the footsteps of the Risen Christ, listen to His word and unanimously discern His will in the light of the Holy Spirit, agreeing in dialogue on the modalities of its accomplishment *hic et nunc*, according to the context and the requirements of the Kingdom.

10. The synodal Church is the Church of unity, catholicity, holiness and apostolicity. These four signs constitute the Church of God in a place, in a "*humus*", i.e., in a history, geography, culture, language, challenges, traditions, poetry, stories, etc. Our Synodal Church is the Church of the Arab East, as it was portrayed by the late Father Jean Corbon: A Church announcing the mystery of Christ, and a faithful witness of the

Good News, even to the point of martyrdom. It is true that she carries the deposit of faith and transmits it in "jars of clay" (2 Co 4,7), enduring suffering, fragility and fear; yet she keeps alive the spirit of hope. It is undeniable that synodality consolidates unity, manifests catholicity, leads to holiness and safeguards the bond of apostolicity and mission. This can be seen in the common journey of a people united by the Word of God, His will and His divine economy; a people sanctified by the Holy Spirit, who constantly renews in them the life of the Risen Christ; a people that gathers without any distinction, because "in Jesus Christ there is no longer slave nor free" (Gal 3:28), because the whole of humanity forms the family of God; a people who, throughout the centuries, has never ceased to bring the Good News from the Apostles and the Churches to the world in a flexible spirit of creativity that adapts to the changes of context and circumstances. Synodality is based on the work of the Holy Spirit, who transfigures us hic et nunc into the new People of God, the mystical Body of Christ, the living Temple of the Spirit.

11. Our Churches find themselves in the midst of a struggle for survival and active presence, in order to meet the challenges of unity in a world divided and undermined by egoism and self- centeredness; the challenges of holiness in a world that has lost its spiritual and human values; the challenges of catholicity in a world dominated by discrimination, and whose behavior is marked by unacceptable racism; the challenges of apostolicity in a world where over- mediatization obscures the evangelical values of love, justice and peace. These challenges take on an extremely serious dimension in the Middle East, where armed conflicts, violence, hatred and war are exacerbated. A common journey of the Churches, in a spirit of authentic synodality, is the only way to guarantee the proclamation of the Good News and the coming of the Kingdom of God. This process requires a common journey of the People of God and an active collaboration in order to heal the wounds, to console the sorrows, to be in solidarity in the trials, to purify the memory, and to collectively elaborate decisions and put them into practice.

III. Synodality in our Eastern Theological Tradition

12. The theology of our Eastern Catholic Churches has always emphasized the meaning of synodality, referring to the mystery of the grace of salvation, the Trinitarian life and the earthly communion with the human race – a communion concretized in the summons of the People of God and their exhortation to gather in what was once called in Hebrew *Kahal*. In His plan, God sees His People as partners; a people made up of men, women and children, of strangers, responding to God's call and flocking from all sides to worship Him, to listen to His Word, to discern His will and to act according to His precepts.

13. All of our Eastern Catholic Churches, with the exception of the Latin Church, have been established according to a patriarchal and synodal structure (see *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 7- 11). However, synodality is first experienced, within these Churches, in the Liturgy, in the worship of the One and Triune God. No synod can be held if it is not inaugurated and closed by the celebration of the Eucharist – a sign of communion and unity, taking place in the presence of the People of God who explicitly approve and accept the resolutions taken. Unfortunately, for historical reasons, the synods of the Eastern Churches have become over the years simple annual assemblies limited to the participation of the bishops, following the example of the National Episcopal Conferences – although these synods are clearly distinguished from them by their nature, power and status conditioned by the reception of the whole People of God. It is undeniable, therefore, that the return to synodal practice, concretized by the presence of representatives of the entire ecclesiastical world, is more in keeping with the Pope's exhortation to revalorize the theology of the People of God, to rekindle the sense of faith (*sensus fidei*), and to assume common apostolic responsibility in accordance with what is recommended in the second chapter of the constitution *Lumen Gentium* (9-18). In virtue of such a return, communion, collective work and commitment to the common mission will be revealed in a more radiant clarity.

14. As we mentioned above, our Eastern Catholic Churches have their origins in synodality, namely in the regional councils or synods which, according to historians, appeared in the region of Asia Minor in the second half of the 2nd century. Following the Council of Chalcedon, they were established as patriarchal churches according to the provisions of Justinian's Code in the 6th century. Over the centuries, patriarchal canon law evolved, especially following the restitution, from the 18th century onwards, of the union of our Churches with the Roman Apostolic See. Since the middle of the 19th century, this patriarchal code was considerably affected by the confessional regime or system of *Millets* (confessional communities), according to which the laity participated as members in synods. Nevertheless, the interference of politics and personal interests led to the exclusion of the lay faithful from the synods, which paved the way for the emergence of a form of clericalism that emphasized the grip on power and authoritarianism in the process of promulgating decisions. Today, thanks to the exhortation of Pope Francis, we intend to re-emphasize the decisive role of all the members of the same ecclesial body, thus promoting the concrete application of synodality in all its dimensions.

15. Synodality in the East is indispensable for the management of plurality in all its forms. It is an ecclesiastical *praxis* approved in the synods of our patriarchal Churches, where the decision of the *protos*, or first, is conditioned by the assent of all, and where the outlook of all the members does not contradict the decision of the *protos*, in accordance with Canon 34 of the Apostles. This *praxis* also commands the Assemblies of National Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops who, in this region, work together to accomplish the same mission through the implementation of a common pastoral plan. The creation of the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the East (CPCO) has strengthened this cooperation, and shows the importance of the process of common

journey, which has been expressed above all in the Pastoral Letters addressed, from 1991 onwards, to the faithful of the different Churches, revealing and analyzing the most salient issues related to their presence and the proclamation of the Gospel in the Middle East. However, what characterizes this process of common journey within our Eastern Catholic Churches is precisely their joining in 1990, as a united ecclesial family, through the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), in order to live in communion with all their Christian brothers and sisters of the region, to engage together in addressing the difficult challenges they face and in common dialogue with Muslims, Jews and other parts of Middle Eastern society, and to journey together towards a worthy and effective proclamation of the Gospel.

16. In this common journey, our Churches were nourished by the universal Church and their communion with the Roman Pontiff. They thus contributed to the building of the catholicity of the Church, enriching it, thanks to their ecclesiastical, theological, patristic and cultural patrimony, by their presence, contribution and participation in the Roman Catholic councils and assemblies. They constantly reminded us of their value as a witness to the unity of Christ's Church, thus evoking the motto coined by Pope John Paul II: "The Church must breathe with her two lungs [the East and the West]!" (cf. *Ut unum sint*, 54). Indeed, our Churches can find in the synodal process a unique opportunity to renew themselves in fidelity to our Master, the Risen Lord, and in submission to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and to what He breathes into them today.

IV. The experience of the Continental Synodal Assembly

17. The participants in the Synodal Assembly expressed the difficulty of communicating under the harsh conditions that have affected, and continue to affect, the countries of the region, especially in terms of disruption, conflict and war. Taking charge of the priorities related to the survival and safeguarding of the Christian presence in the Middle East had a profound impact on the synodal process, common reflection, mutual listening, and especially the attention given to those who seem to live on the margins of ecclesial life, in conditions of estrangement and distance. To take a recent example, the earthquake that devastated parts of Turkey and Syria, and which has afflicted the minds and hearts of all the members of the Assembly – who carried the inhabitants of these devastated regions in their prayers and reflections, throughout their meeting with their representatives. They also did everything possible to express their communion and solidarity with the victims and their families. Today, the Synodal Assembly has rekindled hope for a new impetus to our Churches and their members to take up, with renewed vigor, a common journey of witness and mission, especially in a context of diverse cultures, religions, currents of thought, and the conditioning of each country, society, and people. Where its directives have been observed, the

synodal process has enabled the members of our Churches to experience a common journey, to encourage mutual listening and freedom of expression, especially on the part of women and young people (A.C.P.B.L[2], §1.1, p3).

18. The syntheses prepared and presented by the Churches during the Synodal Assembly, as well as the deliberations in the reflection and working groups, unanimously underlined the crucial importance of the following issues: Unity in Diversity; The Liturgy, Our Life; The Call to a Creative and Revitalized Ecumenism; A Church of Openness to the Other and to Differences; Communion and Hope in the Midst of Suffering: The Journey Toward a Humble Church; Renewal of Structures for a More Synodal Church; and finally the Media, Digital Culture, and their Contributions to Making the Church More Synodal.

IV.1. Unity in diversity: a source of wealth or an obstacle?

19. Since its birth, the Church of Antioch has experienced a diversity of ecclesial and liturgical ways of life, and has been open to the civilizations of the peoples who have taken up residence there, to their languages and traditions. Similarly, the Churches of the region have lived their unity in diversity, placing themselves at the service of the proclamation of the Gospel and the witness of the faith (A.C.P.B.L, §1.5 -p4). Their unity did not mean uniformity and fusion (E. Ch. I, p3). Rather, it meant a real sharing of the same good, a concerted response to the issues raised, and a common facet of the challenges to be met (A.C.H.E, p1). The foundation of this unity is the same baptism, communion in the same body of Christ, and the call to the same mission (A.C.P.B.L, §1.4, p4). Consequently, the one and plural Church is a Church constantly renewed by the Spirit of God, who confers upon it all kinds of charisms, ministries and structures, and strengthens it by the unity of initiation accomplished in its midst and by the integration of all members, without any exclusion (A.C.H.E., p2).

20. Within the Patriarchal Church, unity in diversity is manifested in the communion of the same synod, where the dioceses assume, in sharing, the responsibility of management and pastoral care, and cooperate in the care of the People of God, through the unity of liturgy, history, identity and hierarchy. This unity extends to communion with the Catholic Churches of the same country and region, resulting in the establishment of structures of synergy and partnership, such as the Assemblies of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops established in each of the countries of the region, or the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the East. The aim is to foster cooperation in a common pastoral space, in the service of the same Gospel proclamation, and without losing each of the Churches' identity, historical, and illustrious tradition, which ratify unity in diversity, manifest the richness of plurality and its decisive role in the expression of the same faith, and concretize the catholicity of the Church, whether it be at the level of the Eastern Catholic Churches, with the Roman Catholic Church, or with the Orthodox and Protestant Churches of the Middle East.

[2] See List of Acronyms and References, p. 17.

21. Men and women, sons and daughters of our Churches, are competent beings, endowed with various charisms and talents which they willingly place at the service of the unity of the Church and its renewal (S. C. I., §17, p3). For this reason, it is incumbent upon the ecclesiastical authority, in close collaboration with the whole people, to discern well the various charisms and ministries surrounding them, so that all people may assume a common responsibility in different areas of ecclesial life (E. Ch. I, §21, 23 p10-11). In this regard, the role of the charismatic movements in Egypt was highlighted, especially their impact on the consolidation, through common worship and prayer, of fraternal bonds among young Catholics (A.C.H.E, p2). Others praised the efforts of religious orders to live authentically the evangelical virtues (E. Ch. I, §5 p4), recommending to appreciate the ministry of priests at its core value, especially in the present difficult circumstances (S. C. I., §15, p3). They also spoke of the mission of married priests and its positive impact on the family, children and youth. A request was made to re-examine the requirements for the preparation of married men to the reception of Holy Orders, and to reconsider its theological, juridical, pastoral, human and social aspects (A.C.P.B.L., §3.13, p8).

22. However, maintaining unity in diversity is not easy; rather it is the gift of the Holy Spirit. In order to manage diversity within unity, enormous efforts and sacrifices must be made in a spirit of humility, fraternity, repentance and fidelity to Christ. The members of the Synodal Assembly had to point out certain grievances that are detrimental to the achievement of unity within each Church, leading to the dissension of the People of God and its dispersion, such as the tensions felt between clergy and laity and the aggravation of the gap that separates them from one another (A. P.E.C.L, §1.7, p4), as well as the abuses and ethical transgressions committed by the clergy, consecrated persons and laity in search of a life of luxury and wealth. These behaviors caused many young people to leave the Church (A.C.P.B.L., §2.3, p. 5-6), provoking a state of weariness and despondency among the priests who, because of the constraints, are seeing their numbers decrease (A.C.P.B.L., §1.7, p. 4).

23. Failure to address certain tensions would eventually lead to the disfigurement of this rich diversity, as well as to the misuse of hierarchical power, and thus turn us away from a spirit of communion and sharing. The exercise of ordained and non-ordained ministries is intended to build up the body of Christ harmoniously. Where power is not exercised in a spirit of service, trust between the faithful and clerics is eroded (C.C.C.S.., §6, p2), and so the clerical spirit will prevail to the extent that bishops, priests and consecrated persons begin to abuse their power (A.C.H.E., p3). Assembly participants expressed dissatisfaction with ecclesiastical authorities who monopolize power and make decisions without consulting the faithful (S. C. I., §21, p4), and complained about the lack of coordination between ordained ministers and their lay partners (C. Ch. I., §8, p5). Others also noted the lack of coordination and cooperation between religious orders and dioceses (C. Ch. I., §4, p5). Such things lead to the exacerbation of a negative spirit, the alteration of the spiritual sense of communion (A.C.H.E., p3), and the questioning by the faithful of the relevance of the decisions issued by the ecclesiastical authority, when the latter monopolizes the power

of decision to the detriment of the spirit of service, thus hindering the understanding of unity in diversity.

IV.2. The Liturgy, Our Life

24. The Pastoral Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* affirms that "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's supper." (SC 10). Indeed, Liturgy is the life of the Churches in the East; its celebration constitutes the fundamental axis of ecclesial life (C. Ch. I., §13, p8). The high point of liturgical celebrations is undoubtedly the Eucharist, for it builds up the Church, the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12).

25. While recognizing the splendor of the liturgies and spiritualities proper to the Eastern Churches (A.C.O.H.L.), the reports underlined the tensions created because of the sometimes- literal practice of the traditional liturgical rules, to the detriment of the faithful and their active participation in the work of adoration and prayer, as well as in the sacraments. Among these tensions pointed out were the emergence of aberrant devotions of religiosity and unhealthy phenomena related to apparitions (C.C.C.S.., §3, p3); the problem of any form of renewal of traditional liturgical models (S. C. I., §17, p3); the non-adherence of the new generation to the convictions related to the liturgical rites and symbols (C.C.C.S.., §1, p4), because of a deficiency in liturgical formation (S. C. I., §16, p3). In addition, the divergent sensitivities concerning whatever order governing the liturgical celebration sometimes led to dissensions that weaken communion and erode confidence in the Church's maternal love. There is also the problem of the style, content and purpose of the homily; the disharmony in the choice of hymns; the absence of an inspecting body to verify the content of the texts, and define the nature of their use in the Church in the form of recitation and song. Some participants recommended abandoning liturgical puritanism, being open to the process of evolution of liturgical prayers and their adaptation to the aspirations of the faithful, especially the young (A.C.P.B.L, §1. 2, p3), thus emphasizing the need for a liturgical reform capable, on the one hand, of taking into consideration the safeguarding of tradition and, on the other hand, of opening up to modernity (A.C.P.B.L, §2.4, p6). Hence the urgency of allowing the Liturgy to adapt to the emerging realities and their context, in order to be able to regenerate it (C. Ch. I., §2, p3; (A.C.H.E, p5) in conformity with the requests involved in the process of returning to the roots.

IV.3. The Call to a Creative and Revitalized Ecumenism

26. The synodal Church is ecumenical because it is the accomplishment of the common journey of the People of God (C. Ch. I., §19, p10), a journey that cannot be completed without encountering the brothers and sisters of the other Churches (A.C.P.B.L, §1.3, p3-4). "In the East, we shall be Christians together or not be" (CPCO, 1st pastoral letter, 1991). For the Christian presence is dependent on the witness of

each faithful and each Church, based above all on the common witness of Christians as a whole. It is undeniable that the ecumenical movement in the Middle East has contributed to the emergence of a dialogical reality that favors collaboration and dynamic interaction between the Churches (E.S.I., §6, p2), as well as a common human pastoral care in the service of charity, through the deployment of concrete spiritual and ecclesiastical experiences (A.C.P.B.L., §3.7 p7). Some participants saw the experience of mixed marriages as a positive factor that could consolidate relations between the Churches (E.S.I., §6, p2), while others saw it as a risk factor and a source of conflict (Coptic Church). The participation in the Assembly of some Orthodox and Protestant friends was an enriching experience that confirmed the importance of living together and of the untiring search for visible unity.

27. For the Christians of the East, unity is a matter of life and death (Patriarch Maximos IV). Therefore, the adhesion of the Catholic Church to the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) was a clear expression of her desire to achieve unity in diversity, through gathering and collaborating in various areas of ecclesial life, especially the *diakonia*, and also through coexisting with other citizens of different religions and confessions. The Council contributes greatly to the spreading of an ecumenical spirit among the Churches, the accentuation of rapprochement and of a common pastoral work, and the strengthening of a common witness. For this reason, the ecumenical movement in the Middle East is seen as the unique model of a common journey that transcends the frameworks and limitations of the single church family; a model also of commitment to communion among the Churches, in all their diversity and despite their doctrinal, liturgical and canonical differences.

28. The withdrawal into the confessional identity, the fear of opening up to a different otherness (S. C. I., §3, p1), the lack of transparency (A.C.O.H.L., §5, p2), and the spread of proselytism, exercised especially by certain new evangelical communities under the pretext of offering financial, medical and food aid in the midst of the economic crisis that is acutely affecting the standard of living, are dark realities which disrupt inter-church relations and are detrimental to the ecumenical spirit (A.C.P.B.L., §2.8, p6). In addition, there were tensions and discordances affecting the relations between the Churches of the West and the Churches of the East (C.E.C. S, §2, p3); the problem of ecclesiastical canon law, which is torn between unity and decentralization; political interference in ecumenical affairs (Latin Church), leading some participants to evoke the metaphor of the "ecumenical winter" (A.C.H.E, p4), following the ecumenical golden age that prevailed in the sixties and seventies of the past century.

IV.4. A Church of Openness to the Other and to Differences (enlargement of the tent space)

29. In the Middle East, which is experiencing serious political, security and social tensions due to the Sunni-Shiite conflict in Iraq, Yemen and Syria and the hegemony of fundamentalist movements and organizations in some countries, Christians feel the danger of being uprooted, deportation and the threat of annihilation of their heritage

(A.C.P.B.L., §2.11, p6). The reports provided by the Catholic Churches in the Middle East and coming from the work of the Synodal Assembly highlighted the emergence of various tensions: fear of renewed violence (S. C. I., §2, p1); risk of dissolution into the predominant Muslim culture (S. C. I., §13, p3); impact of religious extremism on Christian presence (C. Ch. I., §9, p3); inability to create new methods and strategies to listen and break down barriers (C. Ch. I., §10, p6); lack of an environment conducive to dialogue (E. Ch. I, §11, p7); indifference and loss of interest in the other (C. Ch. I., §24, p11); unfruitfulness of attempts at dialogue and rapprochement in certain cases (E. Ch. I, §18, p9) ; and the problem of the settlement of Palestinian refugees and displaced Syrians with a Muslim majority, leading to a dysfunctional experience of freedom of faith in general, and of the free and regular practice of Christian religious rites in particular (A.C.P.B.L, §2.10, p6). However, despite all this, the openness of the local Churches to others, whether different in faith, culture, concepts and/or choices was clearly reaffirmed. Emphasis was also placed on the need for listening, dialogue and coexistence, because the tent, i.e., the Church, which God has set up in the heart of mankind and the world, is wide enough to welcome all, without any exclusion.

30. The concept of the other is not limited to women and men who belong to other Churches, nor to other religions! The "different other" could be the one closest to each person. Through her fidelity to Christ, the Church pursues the same work of redemption, insofar as she manifests her love to every human being without distinction or discrimination. She cannot exclude anyone, because if she does, she would lose her identity and her mission to pursue redemption through Christ. The participation of the faithful with special needs, either in prayer or in reflection groups, was an eloquent expression during this Assembly of the size of the Church's tent. In this regard, the participating members, among those with special needs, emphasized the characteristic of their participation in the life of the Church and her mission, according to their own capacities (A.C.P.B.L, §1.11, p4). In any case, it will be necessary not only to safeguard the dignity of these persons, but also to organize formation and awareness sessions in parishes, schools, institutes and universities. Hence the importance of training competent guides and counselors capable of accompanying these people and their families.

31. The Church will become more synodal as she strives to promote coexistence and dialogue with other religions, in order to manifest the true and unique face of God (C. Ch. I., §6, p5). Listening is the first step in welcoming the different other (C. Ch. I., 9, p6). In this regard, the reports and deliberations of the working groups paid tribute to the initiative of Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of the al-Azhar Mosque, who signed and published together the *Document on Human Fraternity*. Its positive concrete repercussions were welcomed, as was the impact of the meeting of the Holy Father Francis with Ayatollah al- Sistani in Najaf (S.I. § 13, p. 3), and the crucial effect produced by the visits made by Pope Francis to the countries of the Middle East, manifesting the positive and promising character of the dialogue with Muslims.

32. The opportunities for dialogue are intensified and consolidated through the participation in institutions and colloquiums promoting understanding (C. Ch. I., §18, p10), meetings and gatherings of the faithful belonging to different religions, and the collaboration with all religious bodies aiming at establishing common bases for dialogue (A.C.H.E, p2). Emphasis was placed, therefore, on the importance of formation in dialogue, of promoting initiatives of openness to the faithful of other religions, of concretizing human fraternity (A.C.P.B.L, §1.5, p4), and of the importance of creating new methods of dialogue that could contribute to transferring it from administrative offices to parishes and to realities of every day (A.C.P.B.L, §4.2, p8).

IV.5. Communion and Hope in the Midst of Suffering: Toward a humble Church (the mustard seed, Mk 4:30-32)

33. The Churches of the Middle East were born amid suffering and persecution, and it is in blood that their history was written. The hagiography of the martyrs formed the largest part of the *Synaxarium*, and became a source of inspiration for many believers, who drew from it an energy of hope to survive and persevere. Their relics remain to this day a source of blessings and miracles. Yet, this reality also provoked the emergence of tensions and challenges, the first of which is emigration (C. Ch. I., §3, p4), and which were raised frankly by the consultations within the Churches and the syntheses of the working groups throughout the Synodal Assembly. The reports and interviews denounced a fundamental problem from which our Churches suffer, and which is becoming more and more critical and dangerous, namely the massive emigration of young people, which leads to the emptying of the Churches of their capacities and resources (A.C.P.B.L., §1.7, p4), and to the dispersal of families (C. Ch. I., §2, p1). This problem has degenerated into an existential threat (E.C.S., p1-2).

34. Despite the tireless initiatives taken by Pope Francis to safeguard Christian presence in the region, and despite the efforts of their Beatitudes the Patriarchs and bishops to maintain the best relations with civil authorities and leaders of other religions, fears are growing about the return of waves of violent fundamentalism; the resurgence of emigration; the challenges of welcoming immigrants and displaced people (A. H.C.E, p4); the preservation of the identity of immigrants, their traditions and rituals, as well as their ecclesial belonging on the one hand and the relationship with the Latin Church and their integration in the countries of immigration on the other hand (A.C.P.B.L, §2.9, p6). Some of the participants also raised sensitive issues faced by believers living in Middle Eastern countries, among others those of armament, compulsory military service, liberation theology (C.C.C.S., §2 p4), as well as the fidelity of Christian leaders to spiritual values in the exercise of their political function, especially when making decisions about war and peace (A.C.P.B.L, §3.6, p7).

35. The recommendations presented in the reports and the work of the various teams can be summarized in three points:

- For the Church, to open up to others and to listen to different opinions have broadened horizons of hope, united Christians in the witness of their faith and nourished their sense of belonging to the Church (A.C.P.B.L, §1.1, p3);

- To trust in the initiatives of local Churches and National Assemblies, without waiting for solutions from abroad (C.A.S.P of 14.02.2023);
- To witness that consecrated life offers a good model for living in integrity and hope amid suffering (S.C. Dulcis).

IV.6. In Favor of a Renewal of Structures for a More Synodal Church

36. It has become clear to the Assembly that the Eastern Churches are synodal in structure. For these different structures to be put at the service of communion, partnership and mission, they must be constantly renewed, especially by activating them at different levels: the Pastoral and Diocesan Councils, the National Assemblies of Patriarchs and Bishops, and the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the East. This way, these structures can become more contributive, professional and transparent, and will not hinder the transmission of the message of the Church to all. Some laypeople proclaimed their desire to live in partnership within the Church, to share the responsibility and burden of mission with their bishops and priests (A.C.P.B.L, §4.4, p8). They recommended that the work of the financial committees and those who are responsible for providing relief and assistance to the needy, the poor and the afflicted be monitored (C. Ch. I., §11, p22).

37. To answer the call of His Holiness Pope Francis to build a more synodal Church, the Eastern Catholic Churches are working to approach cultural pluralism with greater awareness and esteem for the other, especially as they accompany young men and women who feel estranged from the Church, so that this feeling does not turn into indifference over time. Several participants in the Assembly spoke of the reluctance of laypeople to participate at times in the life of the Church, because of lack of transparency and tyranny of authoritarianism of some clergymen (A.C.P.B.L, §1.8, p4). Other participants also pointed out the predominance of the institutional character within the Church, which at times alters the foundations of ecclesial, priestly and monastic service, because of their deviation from the spirit of free mission and personal witness. Some ecclesiastical institutions have sometimes acquired an organizational character from which the rich have benefited more than the poor (A.C.P.B.L, §2.6, p6). Some have thus expressed the need for the Eastern Catholic Churches to review the concept of ecclesiastical leadership, its tasks and principles, and to adopt modern foundations of administration and governance. The renewal of ecclesiastical structures requires special attention and must grant greater attention to the pastoral care of families, women and youth.

Pastoral care of the family

38. The participants in the Assembly saw the need to educate families; to teach children how to pray, how to read the Holy Bible and how to listen to the Word of God (A.C.P.B.L, §4.1, p8). In this education, it is with boldness and transparency that the new ethical questions must be given the attention they deserve (A.C.P.B.L, §4.4, p9). To this end, the participants recommended that special programs be devoted to married and engaged couples (C. Ch. I., §5, p5), and that the Church accompany spouses and families who encounter difficulties because of cultural changes. The Church will thus

be committed to dealing with the phenomenon of family disintegration, and will work to protect and strengthen the family, for it is the nucleus of the Church and society (A.C.P.B.L., §3.2, p7).

39. Churches have recently observed an increase in the number of separated couples, of those who prefer to change their denomination or religion to divorce, and of women who resort to abortion (A.C.P.B.L, §2.13, p7). They see the LGBTQ+ community sometimes participating in the transfer of ideas and concepts from Western society and the spread of gender theory in the world of electronic communication and social networks, as well as their impact on youth (A.C.P.B.L, §2.12, p6).

40. Access to the sacraments in some of the above-mentioned cases is often a problem in the Churches. The question is how to properly discern in such situations in the light of the Word of God and according to the elements offered by the Church's teachings. Some believe that for the Catholic Church, it is necessary to define the concept of sexuality and the moral issues that go with it, while others emphasize topics that help to avoid problems and difficulties, by finding new ways to support families through ecclesial institutions (C. Ch. I., §14, p8), providing appropriate preparatory programs for the sacrament of marriage (C. Ch. I., §17, p10), communicating with families who are away from the Church (C.C.C.S.., §1, p4), and seeking to exclude no one in the synodal process.

Vocation and role of women

41. The participants in the Assembly confirmed the vocation and role of women in the life and mission of the Church, as constitutive, active and pioneer members of the synodal process (A.C.P.B.L, §3.3, p7). Their participation in this process is the result of their commitment to the mission of the Church, despite their distance from the decision-making bodies, which led the Office for the Pastoral Care of Women in the Maronite Church to suggest a special Synod for Women, which constituted a first in our Eastern Churches in its theological, academic, pastoral and social implications and approaches (A.C.P.B.L, §3.14, p8). This synodal journey has taken on an ecumenical and global dimension, including members of other churches and even Muslims.

42. During the discussion in the reflection groups, the debate focused on the question of the vocation and role of women in the Church, on their participation in administration and governance. The participants of the Assembly asked the Church to take clear and uncompromising initiatives in this regard (S. C. I., §16, p3). This requires prophetic courage, especially since the question of women's ministry was discussed (A.C.P.B.L., §1.14, p5). However, before addressing this issue, it is necessary to provide theological, ecclesial and technical formation to the women involved, before some of them assume an active role in administration or receive an ecclesial ministry such as that of deaconess in works of charity (A.C.P.B.L, §1.16, p5).

Youth ministry

43. The Assembly stressed the importance of young people and their role in

the life of the Church, as well as their accompaniment and formation, especially for those who have turned away from ecclesial communion (A.C.H.E, p3). Members also insisted on the need to accompany victims traumatized by the moral aggressions that some clergymen and laity have inflicted on them, as well as on the help to be given to them to face the challenges that they encounter (A.C.P.B.L, §2.3, p5-6).

44. The Assembly expressed the need to encourage and support initiatives that invite young people to meet and work together for the proclamation of the Good News, among which are, for example, the preparatory meetings of young people to accompany the Synodal Assembly; the University Pastoral prayer meetings according to the spirituality of the Taizé Ecumenical Community; the National Youth Days; the ecumenical synodal experience that brings together young people from the countries of the Middle East under the aegis of the group *We Choose Abundant Life* and the foundation *Pro Oriente* (For the East); as well as other meetings and gatherings. Today, young people need to find in the synthesis of this Synodal Assembly evidence of the Church's commitment to sensitive orientations, recognizing her weaknesses in her ability to address delicate issues that require a prophetic word and an explicit position. The transparency and sincerity with which Church leaders behave at all levels will help young people to rebuild their self-confidence, following the requirements necessary to purify their memory and to find the path to repentance. All of this contributes to renewing youth ministry and drawing them to Jesus Christ, as Pope Francis affirms in his apostolic exhortation: "Christ lives" (chapter 7). In this way, the Church becomes more synodal (Y. ACPBL).

IV.7. Media, Digital Culture and their Contributions to Making the Church more Synodal

45. The media and publicity are at the base of the Church's mission to preach the Good News of salvation to the world: she has therefore been a pioneer in the conception of methods, techniques and media and information means to proclaim the Good News of the Resurrection. Since antiquity, handwritten copies of the Holy Bible and prayers have been used in our Eastern Churches as a tool for dissemination and written information. Then the icon, which conveys and figures the scriptural facts of salvation, was adopted as a means of visual transmission. Subsequently was born, in the Syriac Rite Churches, the process of using popular melodies and replacing their texts with the prose and poetry of the Holy Fathers, including the eminent figure of St. Ephrem the Syriac, the Harp of the Holy Spirit. This process is considered an audio-media tool.

46. The Eastern Churches have followed the development of the media. They are establishing specialized institutions in various countries and strengthening their structures through Catholic media centers, supervised by episcopal committees. Given the importance of this sector, the action of serving the Good News and the "new evangelization" will depend on the good use that the Churches make of communication and digital culture. During the synodal consultations and the work of the Assembly, the following elements were highlighted: to show the importance

of the media as an effective communication tool for conveying the Good News (C. Ch. I., §12, p7); and to affirm that Christian media experts, clergy and laity, must assume the responsibility of witnessing in favor of Christian principles and values (A.C.O.H.L.), opposing concepts and ideas that offend human dignity, nourish the spirit of estrangement from God and contribute to the spread of moral decadence (A.C.P.B.L., §3.18, p8). The need to train experts in the field of Christian communication and media was also confirmed (A.C.P.B.L, §4.3, p8). The conclusions of the Churches and the debates of the Assembly warned against the repercussions abuse of social media can have on the faithful, in particular on young people (A.C.P.B.L, §2.7, p6).

V. How can our Eastern Catholic Churches become more synodal?

47. "The name of the Church is Synod." This definition sheds light on how we might understand the very nature of the Church, as well as the unity of her members and the complementarity of their roles, and their union in Jesus Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. The Church is, in history, the People of God that walks together towards the accomplishment of the Father's Kingdom. But how could this synodality develop? And what would be the means of its accomplishment?

48. During the Synodal Assembly, through prayers, spiritual conversations, debates and discussions, proposals that could help the Churches to be more in line with their deepest nature and to become more synodal emerged. Here are the most important ones:

a. *To bring about a change in the mentality of all*, laity and clergy, in order to assume the universalism of salvation through Christ and to provide all with the adequate means to better understand and accomplish it. This requires that each baptized person live and recognize themselves as a member of the People of God, through word, committed action, example of life and witness.
b. *To recognize the complementarity between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood* (diaconate, presbyterate, episcopate), both of which participate in the one Priesthood of Christ and are interrelated (*Lumen Gentium* 10). To adopt spiritual discernment as a method to promote listening, walking together and the ability to recognize God's will.
c. *To affirm that every baptized member of the faithful has a "sense of faith"* and that the Church carries out her mission through the universal call to holiness, until Christ is "all in all" (1Cor 15:28).To commit ourselves to walking together, despite all that this requires in terms of stripping ourselves of all our possessions, and to be open to others to accept them as they are.
d. *To work for the renewal of liturgical life in the Churches*, taking care to preserve the essentials of the Holy Tradition and at the same time to adapt the liturgical offices to the present needs of the People of God, which are dependent on

the contexts and circumstances proper to the different countries and societies. Insofar as the life of the whole People of God is organized around the Liturgy, it is imperative to uphold the designated roles of each member and align their formation and development with their individual gift and ministry.

e. *To purify the ministry of priests of all weaknesses* and shortcomings present in some of them, because they are incompatible with the holy vocation and service in the image of Christ, the Servant *par excellence*. This purification requires a review of the means and criteria for choosing candidates for the holy orders of deacon, priest and bishop. This implies not being satisfied with merely ascertaining their scientific and theological competence, nor their managerial and administrative know-how, but above all their capacity to respect their holy commitment and to live a life of virtue that is a sign of pastoral commitment and love of Christ to the point of martyrdom.

f. *To make an irreversible commitment to the restoration of the visible unity of the Church*, and to promote ecumenical relations between the Churches and ecclesial communities in the Middle East. In addition, to develop new initiatives towards other Churches, especially in the areas of cooperation and common witness. To improve the efficiency of the role of the Catholic Churches in the Middle East Council of Churches and to seek to unify the dates of feasts (spiritual conversations). The experience of the pastoral agreements regarding ecclesial identity, common catechism, solemn communion and mixed marriages (Agreement of Charfet-1996) could be considered a model for such initiatives, especially for the unification of the date of the celebration of Easter.

g. *To recognize the value of religious, cultural and human diversity in the Middle East*, and to confirm the choice to live together in order to open a new page in relations with Muslims and Jews, as well as with adherents of other religions, agnostics and those who declare themselves not to belong to any particular religion, philosophical trend or ideology. To work for the purification of memory and to engage in authentic and bold dialogue based on charity and mutual respect. Only in this way will our Eastern Churches be able to contribute to the pastoral care of reconciliation for the common good and the future of the peoples of the region.

h. *To abandon any form of exclusion of women from participation in the life of the Church*, especially in making ecclesial decisions. Our respective Churches should begin to reflect seriously on the re-establishment of the diaconate for women. The conclusions of the Synod for Women, initiated and implemented by the Maronite Church, are eagerly awaited, with the objective of enabling women to be more active and present in the life of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

i. *To trust young people and believe in their gifts and capacity to contribute to the various responsibilities of the Church*, especially in the service of proclaiming the Good News. This requires pastoral accompaniment that consists of listening attentively to them, accompanying them and assisting them in the discernment of their vocation.

j. *To have faith in the participation of people with disabilities and in the value and*

importance of their constructive role in the life of the Church. Their human and spiritual experience should be welcomed, as well as the expression of their hope, which can inspire the healthy.

k. *To adopt the principles of good governance and transparency in the administration of Church institutions*. Many voices have been raised among the faithful of the Eastern Catholic Churches to re-examine the methods of governance and administration, especially in processes of decision-making. These voices have called for a vision of power as one of the concrete expressions of charity and service.

l. *To avoid minority complexes and to banish the fear associated with it*, due to multiple hardships suffered through persecution, immigration and other difficult situations, in order not to succumb to temptations and to preserve Faith and Hope. To work to enable Christians to take root in the territories of their respective countries and to contribute to stemming the current process that is emptying the East of the Christian presence and risks changing its demographic identity. This requires close cooperation with the civil authorities. Furthermore, for our Churches to incarnate the Church of Hope in the Middle East, there is a need to revive the prophetic spirit that listens to the Will of God and works for its accomplishment, for God is the true Master of History. This is how the witness of Hope can remain until the end of time.

VI. Priorities

49. From all these synodal conclusions, three priorities emerge that deserve, from the point of view of the Eastern Catholic Churches, to be presented at the first plenary assembly of the next Synod (October 2023):

a. To help the particular Churches to promote the catholicity of the Church in a harmonious relationship between Unity and Diversity, while preserving the specificity of each of them. To reflect and act on the contribution and role the Eastern Catholic Churches can have in the communion of all the Churches.

b. To clarify the structures of communion and the juridical links between the Catholic Patriarchal Churches and the Successor of Peter in the See of Rome. To reconsider the nature of their relationship with the various dicasteries of the Roman Curia, which are at the service of communion within the universal Church.

c. To define and promote the most appropriate structures and mechanisms to concretize synodality in the life of the Church and of the People of God, while considering the multiplicity and diversity of religious and socio-cultural contexts throughout the world.

Conclusion

50. In the joy of a meeting that celebrated the One Church, and despite the sadness provoked by the loss of many after the deadly earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, we were given the grace to celebrate the Continental Synodal Assembly of the Catholic Churches in the Middle East and the Arabian Gulf. Together, we listened to each other and to the message that the Spirit is giving us today. All the participants in this Assembly expressed their joys and hopes, as well as the fears and the challenges they face. This has encouraged them to undertake concrete initiatives for which they have invested themselves in their respective Churches. Moreover, their participation made synodality a tangible experience and a space for free expression, especially for women and young people, as well as for many people whose voices were no longer heard; or for people with disabilities; and finally, for all those who found themselves on the margins of pastoral life. The experience of this Synodal Assembly has been a kind of remedy for many difficult situations within each Church, and for strained relations between the different Churches. It clearly recognized two dimensions without which the Church would lose the reason for her existence and her soul in the East: the ecumenical dimension, which concerns relations with sister Churches, and the dialogical dimension, which ensures openness and encounter with other religions.

51. It is clear that the People of God in the Middle East are called to be witnesses to their faith, through their life and their Hope, despite the complexity of the present context. The call to renewal, to journey together, to dialogue and to discernment is an urgency that admits of no postponement. To gather, without delay, the fruits of synodality, is done in view of the constant commitment to walk together behind Christ and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the People of God, animated by the will to promote human fraternity. This is how the Eastern Catholic Churches will succeed in responding to the call of His Holiness Pope Francis to achieve what God wants for His Church in the third millennium: to be more synodal.

FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE CONTINENTAL STAGE IN OCEANIA

"To listen to our brothers and sisters speak of their hopes and of the crises of faith present in different parts of the world, of the need for a renewed pastoral life and of the signals we are receiving from those on the ground. Finally, it offers us the opportunity to become a Church of closeness."

(Pope Francis)

Introduction

This document reflects the voices of the People of God in Oceania in response to the Working Document for the Continental Stage. It includes a Pastoral Reflection by the bishops of Oceania gathered at the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO) Assembly in Fiji (5-10 February 2023), on what they have heard from their people.

Description of Oceania

1. The vast continent of Oceania is a sea of islands, large and small, situated in the Pacific Ocean, which occupies one third of the planet. Oceania has a unique feature that no other region shares. The international dateline passes through the middle of this continent. The position of the dateline means that each new day begins and ends in Oceania. The prayer of the Church, the first Masses of the day, happen in Oceania, each day. The last prayers and activities of daily life also happen in the countries of Oceania.

2. Oceania is rich in diversity. There are 21 countries, from small island states to large land masses, with a wide range of ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups. The region is rich in a natural abundance of flora, fauna and marine life. There is wide variance in access to resources, communications and community infrastructure across the region. For all countries, the impact of the ecological crisis is a considerable threat and preoccupies the political, economic, social and ecclesial discourse. The global commercial expansion in and around the region poses a threat to the survival and existence of the livelihood, culture and home of the many diverse and unique minority indigenous groups of people in Oceania.

3. Rising sea levels threaten the very existence of the small island states in Oceania and, increasingly, catastrophic floods, cyclones and fires are a reality in many countries. Our region is the focus and location of geopolitical conflict between world powers and is impacted by colonial and neo-colonial dynamics driven by transnational economic entities. Like all other continents, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant impact on lives and livelihoods, as well as Church life.

4. The Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO) comprises four episcopal conferences – the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (CBCPNGSI); the *Conferentia Episcopalis Pacifici* (CEPAC); the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference (NZCBC); the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC); and representatives of the Eastern Catholic Churches (ECC).

5. The countries in Oceania are: American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna.

Context of Episcopal Conferences and Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania

6. Common organisational and ecclesial principles coexist alongside the richness and diversity in the episcopal conferences across Oceania. In the Eastern Catholic Churches there is a variety of administrative arrangements with some operating within a single country and others in multiple countries, or across the continent. Our region includes both developed and developing countries – as a result, there will inevitably be different issues to be addressed, pastorally and as a matter of urgent advocacy.

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE (ACBC)

7. According to the 2021 Census, Australia's population was around 25.4 million, of which almost 5.1 million (20%) identified as Catholic. In recent years, the number of Australians not identifying with any religious group increased to almost 10 million in 2021, and now comprise 38.9% of the population.

8. Almost one in five Australian Catholics (19.9%) were aged 65 and over, while 17.9% were aged under 15. Twenty-seven per cent were born overseas, of whom four in five were from non-English-speaking countries. Just over one in five Catholics (21.5%) spoke a language other than English at home. Around 2.7% of Australian Catholics – or almost 136,000 people – identified as Indigenous Australian.

9. The Catholic Church in Australia comprises 28 geographical dioceses, seven of which are archdioceses. There are also five Eastern Rite eparchies and two ordinariates, each of which covers all of Australia, and beyond, in some cases. All bishops, eparchs and ordinaries meet twice a year, working through 11 episcopal commissions and are supported by numerous advisory councils. There are around 175 religious institutes whose members live in community and adhere to a way of life under vows. Most are governed under their own constitutions, but in some cases by the local bishop. They work in a diocese with the consent of the bishop.

10. A particular feature of the Catholic Church in Australia is the range of ministries it undertakes and for which it has responsibility. It is the largest non-government provider in welfare and education, with Catholic schools educating just over one in five Australian children, and Catholic hospitals and aged care facilities caring for the sick, vulnerable and elderly. Increasingly, the governance of these services is by Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (MPJPs) – entities established in canon law with a specific function, such as stewardship for ministries. They have been created by religious institutes who have transferred their ministries to canonical stewards.

EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF THE PACIFIC (CEPAC)

11. CEPAC comprises 16 jurisdictions – 14 dioceses (five of which are archdioceses) and the Prefecture Apostolic of the Marshall Islands and Missio Sui Iuris of Funafuti and Tokelau are also members of CEPAC. There are 750,000 Catholics in a region of

some 2.3 million people. This Catholic population is supported by 485 priests and 126 deacons (some of whom are affiliated to religious orders), 133 brothers and 666 religious sisters.

12. The tradition of Basic Christian Communities (BCC) is alive in many parts of the Pacific with groups gathering to pray and read the Bible – often with sparse contact from a priest or religious due to seasonal and geographic challenges.

13. The Catholic Church coexists alongside majority Protestant and evangelical Christian communities in many Pacific countries.

EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES (ECC)

14. The Eastern Catholic Churches of Oceania comprise five Eparchies (dioceses) — the Ukrainian, Melkite, Chaldean, Syro-Malabar and Maronite Churches. There are also other Eastern Catholic Churches who do not presently have an Ordinary of their own churches, including the Coptic, Armenian, Russian, Syriac and Syro-Malankara Catholic Churches. The Eastern Catholic Churches collaborate on exercises such as a response to synodality, but are not formally associated in a single entity comparable to an episcopal conference.[1]

15. There is a wide array of experiences amongst the Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania.[2] They operate as autonomous entities and are flourishing. They are made up of diverse liturgical and theological heritages, in both the Antiochian-Syriac and Byzantine traditions. Each of the Churches also presents unique cultural perspectives. This diversity is marked by the different components that form the identity of each of these Eastern Catholic Churches including:

I. special liturgical and theological heritages,
II. Chalcedonian Churches faithful to "the mystery of salvation";
III. Patriarchal Churches, many with a unique ascetic and monastic aspect; and
IV. Churches in full union with the Apostolic Roman See.

16. In the Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania there are:

- Two Eparchies of East-Syriac Liturgical Rite:
  - o Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle of Melbourne for the Syro-Malabar faithful (13 Parishes, 82,000 Catholics)
  - o St Thomas the Apostle of Sydney for the Chaldeans (7 Parishes, 70,000 Catholics).
- Two Eparchies of the Byzantine Liturgical Rite:
  - o St Michael the Archangel of Sydney for the Melkite Catholics (13 Parishes, 52,000 Catholics)

[1] In addition to being members of the Episcopal Synod of their respective *sui iuris* Churches, the Eastern Catholic Bishops are also members of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.
[2] In 2016, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference issued a document on the presence and reality of the Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia, and how the wider Church can relate to them - https://www.catholic.org.au/images/pdf/2016_Eastern_Catholic_Churches_in_Australia.pdf

- o Sts Peter and Paul of Melbourne for the Ukrainian Catholics (10 Parishes, 7,046 Catholics).
- One West-Syriac Rite: St Maroun of Sydney for the Maronites (14 Parishes, 161,370 Catholics).

NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE (NZCBC)

17. There are almost half a million Catholic-affiliated people living in Aotearoa New Zealand, making up 10% of the total population. The Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination and largest faith group. New Zealand is an increasingly secular country; in the last Census, undertaken in 2018, almost half of all people in New Zealand stated they had no religion (48.6%), compared to 34.6% in 2006.

18. The population of New Zealand is increasingly diverse, with a large migrant population. Māori, the indigenous population, make up 16.5% of people, with the Asian population 15.1% and Pacific peoples 8.1%.

19. There are six dioceses in New Zealand. The Archdiocese of Wellington is the metropolitan Archdiocese. The Catholic Church in New Zealand also consists of many Catholic religious orders and lay organisations, some that are undertaking significant pastoral ministries. NZCBC has embraced the bicultural relationship (Māori and Pakeha [non- Māori]) in respect of the mana [authority, spiritual power, mandate] of the people of the land.

20. Within the territory of the dioceses of New Zealand, there are also Eastern Catholic parish communities that fall under the pastoral care of Eastern Catholic Eparchies in Australia.

CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND THE SOLOMON ISLANDS (CBCPNGSI)

21. Papua New Guinea (PNG) is an island country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. It encompasses the eastern half of New Guinea, the world's second-largest island. It is a diverse country with more than 800 languages and 640 islands. The spectrum of PNG society now ranges from traditional village-based life, dependent on subsistence and small cash-crop agriculture, to modern urban life in the main cities.

22. It has a total population of 8.9 million (Worldometer of United Nations Data) out of which 95.5% are Christians. Catholics comprise 25.1% of the population and are the largest church.

23. The neighbouring country of Solomon Islands (SI) has a population of 732,000 (Worldometer of United Nations Data) and 20% are Catholics. There are 63 distinct languages in the country, with numerous local dialects. English is the official language, but Solomons' Pidgin is the lingua franca for the majority of people.

24. There are 19 dioceses in PNG and three dioceses in SI. Both countries belong

to one Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands (CBCPNGSI).

25. Both PNG and SI have a mix of expatriate and local priests and religious working in parishes and other ministries such as schools and hospitals.

Discernment Process in Oceania

26. In the first stage of the Synod on Synodality from 17 October 2021 until 15 August 2022, there was an open invitation to all the baptised to engage in a process of prayerful discernment, spiritual conversation, reflection and deep listening using a Preparatory Document and *Vademecum* (Guide) prepared by the Synod Secretariat. In Oceania, each of the episcopal conferences, the Eastern Catholic Churches and many religious institutes, lay movements and other groups and individuals contributed to the local discernment. Each episcopal conference and the Eastern Catholic Churches prepared a response which reflected the discernment process and outcomes in their jurisdiction.

27. Of the 114 episcopal conferences around the world, 112 submitted a national synthesis to the Synod Secretariat by the deadline of 15 August 2022. In addition, over 1,000 responses were received from religious institutes, lay movements, other groups and individuals. To discern the issues in these responses, some 30 people from a range of backgrounds and expertise were invited to a monastery in Frascati outside Rome from September to October 2022 for two weeks together of prayer, reflection, discernment and synthesis. At the end of this process, the Council of Ordinaries, which governs the Synod Secretariat, joined the Frascati group to familiarise themselves with the Working Document for the Continental Stage (DCS), and approve it.

28. The release of the DCS on 27 October 2022 was the start of the second stage of the Synod: the Continental Stage. In preparation for this stage, the FCBCO created the Oceania Taskforce. This Taskforce worked alongside the Suva Assembly Taskforce to ensure the two planning processes were integrated. The Oceania Taskforce requested that the FCBCO also create a Discernment and Writing Group (DWG) to take the fruits of the responses from the five jurisdictions and create a draft submission for episcopal consideration at their Assembly scheduled for early February 2023. The DWG comprised a diverse range of people from across ecclesial, geographic, age, sex and experiential backgrounds.

29. The four episcopal conferences and the Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania were well prepared, despite the concurrence of the discernment period with Christmas and summer holidays in the Southern Hemisphere. In addition, the FCBCO had been planning their regional assembly for some years which had been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was rescheduled to 5-10 February 2023 in Suva, Fiji,

and the FCBCO agreed to include discernment on synodality as part of their program, necessitating a draft submission in time for their consideration ahead of the Assembly.

30. From late October to mid-December 2022, the episcopal conferences and Eastern Catholic Churches undertook a discernment process with representatives of the People of God (with an emphasis on reaching those at the margins). The prayerful process enabled participants to discern the DCS through the lens of their lived experience of the Church in Oceania. A process of discernment and synthesis was conducted in each jurisdiction in mid-December, and responses were sent to the Oceania Taskforce by late December.

31. Similar to the approach taken in developing the DCS, the Oceania Discernment and Writing Group gathered in a retreat-like mode to authentically and prayerfully discern together the common themes across the five responses from Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (PNG/SI) and the Eastern Catholic Churches (ECC) and to identify differences, gaps and priorities for the consideration and finalisation of the FCBCO members at their Suva Assembly. Some members of the Oceania Taskforce attended the FCBCO Assembly to present the draft submission and support the episcopal discernment process, leading to the bishops' pastoral reflection on the document.

32. The Oceania submission was finalised at an online meeting of the FCBCO Executive and the members of the Discernment and Writing Group prior to sending the submission to the Synod Secretariat by the deadline of 31 March 2023.

Experience of Synodality

33. Responses to the DCS were generally positive in relating people's experience of synodality as God's will for the Church in the third millennium. There were, however, a few negative views, but with quite different reasons for this negativity.

34. There was fundamental resonance that synodality is grounded in the primary sacrament of Baptism, noting that "Baptism is not an abstract concept but identity. The synodal process is further encouraging and aiding towards this experience to a more deep and enriching level with the emphasis to create an environment where every baptised individual and people of good will feel at home in the Church. The synodal way is a way for the Church to reach out to everyone and it is a way to create a welcoming atmosphere for all its children" (PNG/SI, 2.2). The very opportunity to participate in responding to the DCS was experienced with gratitude: "There was great gratitude for the [synodal] process, being able to speak freely and to be listened to. 'Young and old, women and men, so glad to have this chance – they must be heard.' The participation of so many people was commented on by many" (New Zealand, 10).

35. The ancient vision and practice of the Church as synodal was affirmed: "Synodality has been a large part of how the Eastern Catholic Churches have functioned for a long time. There is much to be learned from the Eastern Catholic Church about synodality" (ECC, 6). Another element of the positive experience of discerning the DCS was people encountering the global nature of the Church (for some for the first time); it expanded their view of "Church" and of the many common issues across the Universal Church.

36. There were, however, some negative responses regarding synodality. For some, this disquiet expressed itself in doubts that the bishops would in fact consider the fruits of discernment and with that a fear that the synodal work would not make any real difference in the end. For others, there was concern that synodality will harm the Church. Both these reasons were captured in the New Zealand document: "There were some fears and cautions expressed during the process. People are waiting to see if their voices have been heard, or if they will be lost as the process reaches the Rome Assemblies. Some are anxious and even angry about people talking about change and see the synodal process as potentially 'wounding the Church'" (New Zealand, 14).

37. The breadth of experience is reflected in another response: "Many participants were greatly impressed by the global calls for a synodal Church. This resonated with local experiences because some dioceses and parishes are growing in synodality by listening to diverse voices, being open to new approaches, and including a diverse range of people in leadership and ministry. At the same time, other regions remained 'inward-looking', with a passive laity and clergy" (Australia, 32).

38. On the whole, however, all regions of Oceania saw the DCS as capturing a truly global experience of synodality. This was seen as a welcome direction for the Church's inner life and mission in the third millennium: "The synodal process of prayerful discernment, spiritual conversation, deep listening, and respect for each person and their views is a powerful process. Most people see synodality as the way to move forward in their own spiritual journey, individually and collectively, and agree with the DCS: 'In fact, it is the way of being Church. The Holy Spirit is asking us to be synodal [DCS, 3]'" (New Zealand, 15). This positive embrace of synodality is also captured in the report of one diocese of the Pacific: "Reflecting on the Working Document for the Continental Stage, it is clear that the Church needs to make a radical decision to bring a sense of welcome and inclusion among its members, even those outside of the faith. The Synod can be the catalyst … to promote collegiality, unity, and synodality in our Church and society" (Pacific).

Fruits of the Discernment

Common Themes, Issues, Insights

TENT METAPHOR

39. In the larger countries of Oceania, the image of the tent (Isaiah 54:2) was received with enthusiasm and joy, seeing it as very relevant for a Church which is deeply wounded by the abuse crisis. "The tent is a much humbler building than great edifices, such as cathedrals, so enlarging space in the tent is a very good image to use" (Australia, 58).

40. The tent image did not have the same resonance among the Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania, as some of their people have been "forced by difficult circumstances, including war, persecution, and economic hardships, to settle in other countries" (ECC, 2). For some of their members, tents are associated with impermanence, lack of safety, and even refugee camps, while they seek safety and permanence in their new lives in Oceanic countries.

41. The tent also did not have a strong resonance in the Pacific countries of Oceania. For people who live on small islands, the DCS description of the Church "as a tent, indeed as the tent of meeting, which accompanied the people on their journey through the desert: called to stretch out, therefore, but also to move" does not accord with their experience as *tagata o le moana*, people of the sea, who have travelled throughout history in boats as they moved through their region (Pacific).

42. Care is needed to ensure that continuing with the image of the tent does not exclude people for whom the tent has little resonance, or for whom it may be an unwelcome image because of their life experiences.

43. The DCS description of the tent as an image of the Church means that all those who are baptised are inside the tent, whether they are active participants in the tent community or not. People such as those in an irregular marriage situation are not able to take part in aspects of the sacramental life of the tent community, but they are not excluded from the tent. Similarly, people who do not participate in Sunday Masses are not outside the tent. All the baptised are in the tent, whether they are active participants in the community or not.

44. There are many reasons for non-participation: "Many Church members such as gay and lesbians, feel that they are outsiders and not part of the Church. The poor, because they cannot afford decent clothes, are also scorned. Some feel unwanted because they are not members of the ruling clique in the parish. New people in the Church feel they cannot help in the Church as it is taken over by selected families" (Pacific).

45. In parts of Oceania there is a very visible gap between the poor and the rich,

between ethnic groups, between migrants and those who consider the country to be theirs, and between people from different islands in the same country or diocese. These societal issues are experienced within the Church: "The gap between the poor and the rich is visible and emphasised even more by priests who offer special treatment to the rich and well-dressed. Different races compete for dominance in parishes, making it almost impossible for racial minorities to participate. Discrimination because of gender seems to be a lingering struggle within the Church, particularly towards the LGBTQIA+ community" (Pacific). There are concerns in the responses about "gatekeepers" in the Church who are perceived to exclude, either overtly or in more subtle ways, those they deem unacceptable.

46. Reflection upon the tent image has sharpened our focus on barriers to participation and inclusion. In doing this it has exposed and named the reality of the situation the Church is facing globally: "The DCS reports a rather inconvenient truth about the Church: her children are divided and scattered, some are lost, and some intentionally walked away. Walls seem to separate people making it harder for everyone to live in true communion with God and people" (Pacific).

BAPTISM AND SACRAMENTS

47. The responses affirmed that Baptism is the source of common identity, that this needs to be recognised as such, and that Baptism calls all members of the Church to communion, participation and mission. "[P]eople are gaining a deeper appreciation of the sacrament [of Baptism], not just as their entry point to the Church, but as the basis of their participation in ministry and mission" (New Zealand, 36).

48. Some responses also argued that the call for all the baptised to be recognised is as yet unrealised: "There is a yearning for the acceptance that all the baptised are called to full, active, and equal participation in the Church" (New Zealand, 38). "One theme that resonated with many was the growing recognition of the baptismal dignity of all, as well as the realisation that the Church's mission of making Christ present was a responsibility shared by all the baptised; however, greater formation for a deeper understanding of this reality was critical to empower people" (Australia, 34).

49. Obstacles to the full realisation of our baptismal call were recognised in the responses. For instance, some argued that greater participation is needed for the laity, especially women. The New Zealand response argued that the Second Vatican Council emphasised Baptism as the source of our communion and participation (New Zealand, 36). This fruit of the Second Vatican Council, however, has not been realised because the understanding of "The Church as the People of God… was undermined by structures that did not facilitate this new model" (New Zealand, 37).

50. The responses highlighted the centrality of the Eucharist to the experience of community and what it means to be Church. The ECC highlighted their "common love of the liturgy – which is steeped in beauty, richness, and authenticity (ECC, 10)", in which participants "experience our Lord in a mystical and monastic way" (ECC, 18).

The Pacific response emphasised: "The liturgy, especially the Eucharistic Liturgy, the source and summit of Christian life, which brings the community together, making communion tangible, enables the experience of participation and nourishes the momentum towards mission with the Word and the Sacraments" (Pacific).

51. The Australian and Pacific responses noted: "calls for a more synodal and participatory style of Eucharistic celebration, liturgies that are inclusive of other cultures and relevant to young people, a broader understanding of what it meant to be Eucharistic in essence, and a greater outreach to Catholics who have lost appreciation for these rituals" (Australia, 35; Pacific).

52. There was a statement that ecumenical relationships are affected by Church teaching. There was a view that "there needs to be more Eucharistic hospitality to members of other churches in place of the exclusive line currently practised" (New Zealand, 70).

53. The Australian and New Zealand responses noted the desire by some for the Third Rite of Reconciliation to be used (Australia, 52; New Zealand, 71). Some women said that the Sacrament of Penance places "a lay person in an inferior position to the priest" (New Zealand, 71).

54. The PNG/SI response noted that while there were calls in other parts of the world for greater recognition of same-sex relationships, "Same-sex marriage (DCS, 39) is disturbing the Catholics and those who consider it a sin. LGBTQ is not accepted by the tradition and the society of PNG" (PNG/SI, 3.2).

55. Eucharist and marriage coalesced around the issue of communion for the divorced and remarried, particularly in the New Zealand response, which said that "Although Amoris Laetitia opened potential pathways for the divorced and remarried to receive communion, these are perceived as narrow and difficult" (New Zealand, 69). The Australian response referred to the exclusion that the divorced and remarried feel (Australia, 44;57) and the need for greater compassion.

56. Finally, lay prison chaplains in New Zealand observed that, having accompanied "some of our most disadvantaged people on a life-changing faith journey [they then] have to step back when sacraments are required" (New Zealand, 85).

57. Polygamous marriages are a social reality in some parts of our region and need attention, whereas this is not the case in other parts (PNG/SI, 4.3). Issues related to marriage appeared in various ways throughout the responses. The Australian response recognised that there was a gap in the DCS: "the absence of any mention of the role of marriage and family, particularly in the transmission of faith" (Australia, 26).

58. It noted that "A number of participants called for a re-examination of the Church's position on married men becoming priests, and on the requirement for

celibacy." It also raised concerns about the "lack of understanding of the [permanent] diaconate" (Australia, 49). While the issue of women's ordination was raised in the Australian response, the New Zealand response noted that "there was no request for the consideration of ordination of women as priests, although one group asked for their [women's] ordination as deacons" (New Zealand, 65).

INCLUSION

59. All the responses supported calls for the Church to be more inclusive, particularly of those whose relationships present challenges to participation in the Eucharist. They also desired a more inclusive approach to people living with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and others who were marginalised and neglected, such as the elderly, terminally ill, street children, orphans, criminals, addicts, prostitutes, widows, and victims of rape, abuse and domestic violence. There was also a desire to welcome those with "diverse thinking", "non-practising Catholics and unbaptised people" (Australia, 44).

60. There was particular emphasis on the need for the inclusion of the poor in the Pacific region, where poverty was seen as a discernible force dividing the Church: "In many cases, the poor are sometimes reduced to an opportunity to raise funds for seasonal outreach and photo opportunity to make the Church look good" (Pacific; PNG/SI, 2.4).

61. Lack of inclusion of people with diverse experiences of sexuality and gender appeared to affect community life even in small island nations: "The LGBTQ community resonates very strongly in the Mariana islands, a reality that was not evident in the past" (Pacific).

62. However, as noted in para 54, people with diverse experiences of sexuality and gender are "not accepted by the tradition and the society of PNG" (PNG/SI, 3.2). Nevertheless, many responses called for greater inclusion of people in this group, particularly "to recognise and give them a space for ministry, for participation, and involvement in the life of the Church" (Pacific).

63. In Australia, the inclusion of First Nations peoples was named as a priority: "Our listening needs to include the Uluru Statement, our Church elders [to] include our Aunties and Uncles caring for Country" (Australia, 46).

64. From the perspective of Eastern Catholic Churches, the call to being inclusive meant creating an environment of hospitality and welcome within their churches to invite Catholics from other liturgical rites to experience their liturgy, theology and disciplines (ECC, 18) as full and complete expressions of the Catholic faith. However, this call to hospitality to include other Catholics in experiencing the venerable Eastern Christian traditions also means that Eastern Catholics must hold on to what is truly theirs and not assimilate rituals. The Eastern Catholic Churches have a duty to show that to be Catholic does not mean one has to be Latin.

65. While all the responses called for the Church to focus on inclusion and representation of those in the excluded groups, there were calls for "radical inclusivity" from a few groups, urging the Church to be "brave, bold and innovative", rejecting the notion of being "a 'gatekeeper', excluding those Christ would welcome into the tent" (Australia, 28). However, challenges were identified in the call to proclaim authentic teaching (PNG/SI, 4.5), alongside being called to respect others, avoid judgment and take a compassionate and pastoral approach (Australia, 44).

CHURCH TEACHING

66. Some participants raised concerns that "the rules and regulations of the Church were at odds with the Gospel message, and that greater weight should be given to the 'primacy of conscience' and supporting people in a compassionate and pastoral manner to develop a more mature relationship with God" (Australia, 54).

67. There was also a "call for the Church to reform some areas of its theology, teaching and dogma related to the formation of seminarians and the professional supervision, development and support of priests" while, for some participants, the priority was to "address afresh the whole concept of the priesthood in the Church, including that of the laity" (Australia, 75).

68. While there was consensus on the need for an enhanced role for women in the Church, the issue of women's ordination was only explicitly raised in one submission, so that "acting on the inequalities of women called for equal, just and full participation of women in Church governance, mission and ministry" and "recognising their admissibility to any role, such as deacon, priest, or representative on decision-making councils" (Australia, 60). The New Zealand submission noted that "there was no request for the consideration of ordination of women as priests, although one group asked for their ordination as deacons" (New Zealand, 65).

69. Some aspects of Church teaching were perceived as "exclusionary or hurtful" and understood to "cause people to walk away from the Church or deter them from returning". These include teaching on sexuality, contraception, the situation of the divorced and remarried, and intercommunion with other Christian denominations whose Baptism we recognise (New Zealand, 117).

AUTHORITY AND DECISION- MAKING

70. A synodal Church needs a cultural and structural change in Church leadership (Australia, 61; New Zealand, 79; PNG/SI, 4.1). Leadership in a synodal Church must be re-thought, lest the current problems with clerical power and authority are simply transferred to lay people who are participating in shared decision- making. To avoid this trap there must be "formation of individuals as leaders dedicated to God's Word, who can facilitate dialogue, are trained to listen and discern, and are appointed to serve rather than assume power over others" (Australia, 62).

71. In the responses from the Oceania conferences, there were many comments

from participants who expressed their love for the faith and their desire to continue to belong. They were grateful for the pastoral care they received from clergy and were aware of the challenges they faced: "We are grateful for all the Church has given us and the way we have been supported" (Australia, 36).

72. There were also deep concerns about governance and decision-making in the Church, at parish, diocesan, national and global levels. The renewed emphasis on Baptism in the synodal process revealed "a deep desire for acceptance that all the baptised are called to and capable of full, active and equal participation in Church" (New Zealand, 76). There was a perception that canon law creates a power imbalance between bishops, clergy and lay people which could undermine the embedding of synodality as the way of the Church in the future (New Zealand, 82).

73. Shared governance and decision-making, involving both laity and clergy, were seen as necessary if we are to be a truly synodal Church. Current governance structures and the power they give bishops and priests are seen as "one of the mechanisms which exclude lay voices, and women's voices in particular" (New Zealand, 80).

74. Dominance of governance and decision-making by the ordained is seen by some as fostering clericalism and impeding laity in the exercise of their gifts. "Clericalism separates the clergy from the lay people and gives the clergy a superior role over the lay people, limiting the full participation of lay people in the decision-making in the parishes, dioceses and higher levels of the Church hierarchy" (PNG/SI, 2.5).

75. Frustration was expressed by some lay people at being shut out of decision-making, especially when they often have a better understanding of the needs of the people. "Our attitude needs to shift from hierarchical to communal. For example, a priest may have a theoretical knowledge of raising a family, but parents are the ones who live out this life" (Pacific).

76. Clericalism and abuse have triggered distrust among the people towards the hierarchy of the Church. Greater openness and accountability have allowed the people "to see the truth about the Church, that bishops, priests, religious, and lay workers are flawed. However, they do whatever they can to do good and become responsible workers in God's vineyard" (Pacific).

77. Clericalism is not confined to the ordained but is also found among lay people who support and facilitate the exercise of power by the clergy. That power and "superior role" the priest assumes is the antithesis of the servant leadership people yearn for and need from their priests: "Their servant leadership should lead to humble service" (PNG/SI, 5.1). The people know a good pastor when they have one: "The people's desire is to witness a true pastor moulded in the heart of Christ" (Pacific). This can be particularly the case in traditional ceremonies following priestly ordination where the newly ordained priest is accorded treatment befitting that of a high chief

(Pacific).

78. The effects of clericalism are widely felt in dioceses and parishes: "Clericalism in clergy and lay people perpetuates abuse of power and isolates groups, stymies evangelisation efforts, and impedes youth engagement, servant leadership development and the implementation of necessary change" (Australia, 30).

79. The challenges for ministry reported by clergy and religious include "grief and powerlessness" in the aftermath of the clergy sexual abuse crisis, the increasing demands on their time due to the pressure of priest shortages and the experiences of "loneliness, isolation and burnout", particularly among "the elderly, those in country dioceses and those who come from overseas" (Australia, 31).

80. There was a call for leadership to be more participatory with "a less exclusive role given to bishops" (New Zealand, 81). The selection process for bishops is considered to be opaque (PNG/SI). "People want to know how the current process works and want to ensure that the selection is the product of genuine discernment involving a wide range of people, clergy and lay. There is a desire for specific scrutiny of a potential bishop's record on abuse, and a close examination of his attitude towards abuse" (New Zealand, 81).

81. It was noted that "people see canon law, not Church teaching, creating a power imbalance between bishops, clergy and lay people which has major effects in relation to authority and governance in parishes and dioceses. People are aware that there have been changes to canon law in recent years and know that this is possible" (New Zealand, 82).

82. In the absence of a priest, lay people have shown in Oceania that they can take ownership of both the pastoral ministry and governance of their local Church. For example, "during the crisis of Bougainville (PNG), for almost 10 years the families and the Basic Christian Communities kept the faith alive in absence of effective clerical presence" (PNG/SI, 2.12). The importance of the Eucharist in Basic Christian Communities and family life was emphasised: "[Basic Christian Communities] can empower and strengthen the families through the holy presence of Jesus in the Eucharist" (PNG/SI, 5.4).

THE CHALLENGES OF MISSION

83. There are multiple challenges in Oceania for "bringing God's kingdom to a contemporary world" (Australia, 40). A primary difficulty is the lack of agreed understanding about what mission is and the vast number of perspectives on its meaning: "The word 'mission' was mentioned many times, but as in earlier parts of the synod process it is not clear what 'mission' means when people talk about it. It does not seem to have a concrete or active form for many people. There is a need for shared understanding, and work needs to be done in this area" (New Zealand, 104).

84. There was a strong emphasis on "mission" being the responsibility of all the baptised: "The Diocesan Synod creates in each one of us a mission-driven and mission-focused attitude and spirit. Mission is no longer a monopolised endeavour of the clerics and religious, but a shared journey within all peoples. This shared journey implies sharing in the brokenness and woundedness of others" (Pacific). The Church was seen as "a mission-driven institution that Jesus Christ himself designed" (Pacific).

85. The mission activity of the Church was hindered by "discrimination based on matrimonial/relationship status, financial status, customs/traditions (gender and age status), and disability status" (Pacific). The lack of formation in understanding the baptismal call to evangelise and proclaim God's love in unity with others was also a barrier to transition from a "maintenance Church" to a "missional Church" by establishing communities that "join with all humanity in journeying together" (Australia, 69).

86. The diversity of liturgical rites and cultures in Oceania was seen as important to our unique contribution to the mission of the Church: "The Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania must preserve their identity and be recognised by the wider Catholic community as being more than just ethnic communities, but rather, *sui iuris* Churches who through their rich spiritual tradition can contribute to the mission of the Church" (ECC, 19).

87. The richness of the synodal experience should ultimately "lead us to experience the person of Jesus within the Church and to share this good news to others; it leads us to mission; mission to evangelise; to preach the good news" (PNG/SI, 5.7).

ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

88. The ecological crisis was emphasised as an urgent issue for the whole Oceania region, for all of humanity and for the earth community. "If we are people of the Tent then we must understand the importance of the earth as our common home, respecting the ground, the sea and the environment within which we assemble the Tent" (New Zealand, 93).

89. From the Torres Strait Islands of Australia to the Solomon Islands, and the small island states of Micronesia and Polynesia, the ecological crisis and rising sea levels are a real and present existential threat: "Islands in the Pacific are relatively smaller and scientifically proven to be getting even smaller due to the rising ocean water level. Climate change, the driving force that ignites catastrophic typhoons, heatwaves, drought and flooding, directly affects people" (Pacific). Highland and inland communities in our region are also directly affected by these phenomena.

90. The responses from New Zealand acknowledge that integral ecology and care for creation "is not an area in which the Church's teaching is lacking" but note that "there is a need for formation and prophetic witness, and encouragement to act" (New Zealand, 93). Australian respondents also relayed concerns regarding the

Church's responsibility for "stewardship of creation"; however, some "reported on the work being undertaken in their particular community" (Australia, 50).

91. As Pope Francis presents in *Laudato Si'*, the interconnectedness of ecological, social and economic justice means the "mistreatment of our planet disproportionately affects the poor" (New Zealand, 92). The People of God in Oceania want to listen to the cry of the earth and the ocean, the land and waterways, as well as the cry of the poor, and to "collaborate with others who share a common purpose" (New Zealand, 95).

92. The ecological crisis must be understood as a mission field in which the whole Church, globally and locally, must be engaged given the "urgent struggle to preserve our planet and its life, and to provide economic justice for its people" (New Zealand, 114). The fact that the "threat to human life posed by climate change to the island nations in the Oceania region caused significant anxiety to some participants" in Australia is a promising sign of solidarity and a renewed understanding of mission (Australia, 50).

INCULTURATION AND LOCALISATION

93. Oceania is expansive, yet the numerous nations and cultures flourish in their connectedness to the land, ocean, creatures and indigenous spiritualities. While numerous Catholic missionaries to the region have shared the gift of their faith, this has sometimes undermined the contribution of the local culture to the Gospel. The Church in Oceania today is both encouraged and challenged by inculturation as Christianity and indigenous spiritualities often co-exist in the everyday lives of people.

94. Inculturation of the Christian faith positively impacts liturgical celebrations: "Cultural differences connect strongly as well among the islands in the Marianas, and the Pacific in general. This is visible in churches during Eucharistic celebrations. The colours, music and language freely shift to celebrate the Lord through various faith expressions" (Pacific, 10). Others in Australia have similar experiences: "Some groups described positive and enriching experiences of Church and parish life such as multicultural engagement" (Australia, 36).

95. Indigenous perspectives are also used to re-envision and contextualise the meaning of Church. For example, a Te Ao Māori worldview could see the Church as *tūrangawaewae*, a place to stand "where we feel connected, empowered and accepted" (New Zealand, 18).

96. There are challenges when people are unable to see the compatibility of traditional cultures with Catholicism: "How can the Church keep her reverence to the sacredness while at the same time make it accessible for the faithful? In our culture, our sacred sites are kept away from the people to maintain its sacredness. Likewise in the Church, we try to keep the sacredness from being profaned. The question is how to keep the sacredness of the Church while at the same time making it accessible to

the people" (PNG/SI, 4.4).

97. Real difficulties emerge when specific indigenous ways of being are in stark contrast to Church teaching: "Cultural beliefs and traditional practices such as sorcery and polygamy continue to be a big challenge to Christian values and teachings. For example, cultural polygamous marriages are still practised in PNG while the Church is against it" (PNG/SI, 4.3). In some parts of Oceania, the Church is also severely lacking in its genuine engagement with indigenous peoples: "The Church's role in recognition of and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples was highlighted. In particular, the need to ensure that attention was paid to the spiritualities of the Indigenous peoples of Australia and in Oceania was prominent" (Australia, 46).

98. Overall, it is important to emphasise the importance of cultural diversity to the life of the Church: "We must start by being fully ourselves. It is only in our distinctiveness that we can make any kind of contribution to the larger society. It is only by being what we are that we retain a reason for existence at all" (ECC, 16).

WOMEN

99. The theme of women's roles and participation in the Church resonated strongly across Oceania, though women's experiences varied across the region. The DCS was praised for naming global concerns about women's roles and vocations in the Church, and many groups in Australia and New Zealand expressed strong concern about the lack of women's participation in Church leadership and governance structures, including the diocesan marriage tribunal (New Zealand, 41-42). A minority concern was expressed that women were still barred from the permanent diaconate and ordained ministry. Although many women serve in leadership and governance roles that do not require ordination, this was a significant issue affecting Church life in these countries.

100. Other groups stated that they had not experienced a lack of equality for women in the Church. One group of young lay women, for example, saw themselves as equals with a unique role in the Church, whereas a group of priests described their experiences with women being present and influential in parish bodies and ministries (New Zealand, 41). Similarly, the PNG/SI response stated that women play a "very active role in the life of the Church" and that there is a growing positive change in terms of equal participation in Church work (PNG/SI, 2.6).

101. Some responses were concerned about women being treated as "cheap labour" (DCS, 63) and two responses called for women to be adequately remunerated for their work (Australia, 29; PNG/SI, 2.6). Other issues identified in the responses affecting women in the region included family and domestic violence, abuse, sorcery-related violence, divorce and remarriage, women being shunned for crimes that men are forgiven for, those alienated by Church teachings on sexuality, and misogyny and sexism particularly perpetrated by the clergy (Australia, 47).

102. Many responses reaffirmed the call for Catholic women to be valued as equal

members of God's People, stating that "the continued exclusion of women from aspects of Church life was disempowering" (Australia, 29). There was a call for more emphasis on "using the gifts and experience of women in discerning and providing advice, guidance and challenge in decision-making beyond the managerial and parish roles many women occupy" (New Zealand, 42), as well as a need for greater listening, particularly to the realities and needs of poor, marginalised and neglected women (Pacific).

YOUNG PEOPLE

103. The absence of young people participating in the Church features in nearly all of the Oceania responses, which reveal great anguish and profound worry about the future: "We are only ever one generation from dying. It only takes one generation to say NO. The Church is fragile. Our young people – God is on their hearts, but they don't feel drawn to the Church … They have their prayer groups in their *whares* (houses)" (New Zealand, 45-46). There was also reference to young people who are very committed participants in their faith communities. "Irrespective of the challenges that our Church is conflicted with during unprecedented times, it remains a home, providing strength, warmth, and optimism. This would not be possible without the leaders and volunteers who are constantly ready to serve" (ECC, 11).

104. Our baptised young people are in the tent, but many are not participants in the life of the tent community. Reasons given for this vary. Some young people feel they are inside the tent, but invisible and ignored. Others feel unable to participate due to a fear of being judged or not fitting in (New Zealand, 47). Their local parish can appear to be "owned" by older people, with power being exercised in ways that make young people feel that it is not a place for them (Australia, 37-38).

105. The response from PNG/SI spoke about young people leaving their parish communities to join other churches (PNG/SI, 2.13), and others "being pulled away from spiritual and faith programs by the strong attraction of the secular activities, social media and modern technology, which is causing distraction to the traditional youth formation programs in BCCs, parishes and dioceses" (PNG/SI, 4.7).

106. Young people see the urgency of the ecological crisis, which is of intense interest and concern to them, but do not see its urgency being recognised in their local Church. Many also struggle with aspects of the Church's teaching on sexuality: "LBGTQIA+ issues are also of intense interest to young people, who have to work through them at a personal level and among their friends. Responses have indicated that the Church's teaching on this and other aspects of sexuality are a major barrier for many young people in maintaining their connection to the Church" (New Zealand, 49).

107. There are very few ideas about how to respond to this genuine crisis for the Church. Nevertheless, one Pacific diocese has found a way to engage with marginalised young people: "Some young, marginalised, excluded and some of

those who are not in good standing with the Church are welcomed in choirs, prayer groups and catechesis as catechist assistants. Young people are listened to more today because there are more youth groups in parishes" (Pacific). Other suggestions included accompaniment and formation for leadership using "platforms that allowed them to utilise their skills and passions" (Australia, 76).

108. In contrast to those who feel the Church needs to "modernise" to remain relevant (Australia, 38), some young people are seeking a stronger proclamation of the faith of the Church. They believe that personal conversion is needed rather than institutional change (New Zealand, 55). In the Eastern Catholic Churches' response, a young woman described her faith journey and the support she had received at all stages to share her gifts and to remain faithful and engaged with her Church community (ECC, 11). In other responses, some young people described feeling persecuted and alone while promoting strong faith-based values (ECC, 13; Australia, 38).

109. Concern was expressed by some young people about feeling excluded by the language of the DCS: "The DCS is largely inaccessible to young people, in terms of language, process and practical application. New terms such as, 'dialogical sharing', 'fraternal conviviality' and the Eucharist as a 'generative tension' are not accessible to young people" (New Zealand, 47).

110. While there is a deep concern about the loss of young people as individuals, their disengagement from the Church in numbers is also seen as preventing the embedding of synodality as the way of the Church: "How do we impart synodality to the young, as the future of the Church, when there are so few young people in the Church today?" (Australia, 48).

111. There was a call to investigate "how the faith needs of young people could be met and how youth could be better formed and provided with platforms that allowed them to utilise their skills and passions" (Australia, 76).

FORMATION

112. There are calls for formation of various kinds throughout the region. The formation of seminarians and priests received special attention, with the observation that this needs to be holistic: "spiritually, socially, psychologically, mentally, emotionally and economically" (PNG/SI, 5.1). In some dioceses, women already do work in this area (Australia, 66; New Zealand, 102). Formation for marriage and family life is also a fundamental need (ECC, 18; Australia, 77; PNG/SI, 5.3). Catholic educators need "more appropriate" formation (Australia, 77). Formation for young people is essential, but difficult to achieve (Australia, 76; New Zealand, 44). We also need to provide formation to respond to Pope Francis's call to missionary discipleship.

113. It is unclear whether "formation" meant the same thing across the documents. Formation in a general sense involves shaping the way that people respond to the

world around them. At times the word "formation" refers to training (PNG/SI, 5.1) and at other times, to personal faith development (Australia, 77). While the desire was expressed that Catholic Social Teaching be the basis for formation across the Church (Australia, 65), formation is possible and perhaps also desirable in other areas and works best when addressing an identified need in the light of Scripture and Church teaching.

114. As our Church becomes more synodal, ongoing formation is needed for all (New Zealand, 100). A synodal Church will need participants formed in listening and dialogue (Australia, 62). Furthermore, leadership in the Church will require a different mode of formation, so that there is "servant leadership at all levels" (PNG/SI, 5.1).

Tensions and Differences

115. As indicated earlier, the Oceania region includes both developed and developing countries, and so there are different pastoral issues to be addressed as a matter of urgent advocacy.

116. A "tension" is an area of differing views that need further discernment or attention. The sections above have already identified some tensions. These are:

a) Different attitudes toward those with diverse experiences of sexuality and gender in the region.
b) The roles of women in the Church.
c) Some voices in the responses call for change in Church teaching, according to a "dying and rising" cycle (New Zealand, 52-56). Others asserted the need to retain teaching and provide formation in unchanging Church teaching of the present (ECC, 18).

117. In some areas of the region, the wounds of sexual abuse within the Church are not as much to the fore: "The scandal of sexual abuse by the clergy and abuse of minors … is a growing issue of concern. Although there are a few abuses, the scandals do not greatly affect the faith of the people yet" (PNG/SI, 3.1). In other areas, the scandal is clear and public. The ongoing wound for the whole Church, not only those of the victims and survivors of abuse but also their families and parish communities and other clergy, needs attention directed toward ongoing healing.

118. There is a tension in understanding the issue of inculturation, where a local Church adopts local customs and cultural expressions. Some regard the traditions of the universal Church as a kind of imposition on local culture, and even a form of colonialism. Others consider God present in every culture so that every culture already expresses Christian truths. Another view is that Christians cannot adopt and adapt some pre-Christian cultural practices. For instance, when a priest takes on the symbolism of the chief of a village, the priest becomes a symbol of power rather than

of service (Pacific).

119. Questions about Church teaching, or the application of Church teaching, were raised by many participants. While there was a desire to remain faithful to Church teaching, there was also a desire to embrace the paschal cycle of "dying and rising" (New Zealand, 51).

120. Some participants said that while the Church might appear to be dying "we are meant to die and rise. This is the cycle of the life of Christ in us. Some things are brought to death so that other things may rise. We need to let go and go with the dying and rising. This is what this moment is asking of us" (New Zealand, 52). For others, the Church was seen as "an unchanging rock in a sea of social change" and the "re- statement of its teaching and further catechesis" is the "necessary response to this change" (New Zealand, 55).

121. Meanwhile, the Eastern Catholic Churches suggest that "our position on Catholic teachings is not to be compromised by potential external forces that require a change in the Church for their agenda rather than accepting the truth, love and beauty that the Church offers to all people" (ECC, 18).

Gaps and Omissions in the DCS

122. In the lived experience in Oceania, the following areas were identified as gaps, or matters inadequately dealt with, in the DCS:

a) The ecological crisis including the threat of rising seas and environmental and marine degradation in Oceania, also being experienced in other parts of the world, should be amplified in the Instrumentum Laboris. This includes loss of cultural identity, psychological stress and for some a sense of hopelessness.
b) Religious life, including the contribution of religious men and women and the exemplar of relevant spiritualities, good governance and shared leadership in many of the religious institutes warrants further reflection.
c) Greater acknowledgement of the vocation of marriage and the role of families in faith formation would be valuable (Australia, 26).
d) In the DCS, the absence of lay men from sacramental programs and decision-making is not explored adequately.
e) The ongoing effects of the sexual abuse crisis have not received adequate attention in the DCS. During the life of the synodal journey launched by Pope Francis in April 2021, there have been further damaging revelations of mishandling of sexual abuse cases within the Church. This needs to be acknowledged, alongside a reflection on whether existing Church structures impede or enable adequate safeguarding, good governance and fair redress. For some parts of Oceania and more broadly, this would also include a positive recognition of the efforts in local churches to improve professional standards

and safeguarding.

f) Beginning- and end-of-life issues such as abortion and euthanasia need greater attention than given to them in the DCS.

g) Growing restrictions on religious liberty is a concern that has not been adequately addressed in the DCS.

VOICES NOT HEARD OR UNDER-REPRESENTED IN THE OCEANIA CONSULTATION

123. Many voices could not be heard directly for reasons such as remoteness and lack of access to information and communications technology, or due to disabilities or language differences. Accordingly, "advocacy" was implied throughout the five responses — advocacy for diverse groups of people in the Church or wider society which could not be directly part of a synodal listening, dialogue, discernment and decision-making process. For example: "The plight of the poor and the marginalised people, disabled, elderly, street children, orphans, criminals, prostitutes, widows, divorcees, victims of abuses, victims of sorcery-related violence and refugees is a great concern for the Church" (PNG/SI, 2.4).

124. The decrease in the number of young people in the Church was lamented in the documents. Their voices have not been sufficiently heard in the synodal process.

125. Another problematic issue that was raised was the issue of inaccessibility for many countries in Oceania. This is related, first of all, to the geographical isolation of many ecclesial communities, either due to mountainous terrain, the distance between islands or the lack of roads. Also, many areas lack the technological infrastructure that would facilitate access to the internet and online communication. All these factors impeded responses from people in these regions.

126. For a variety of reasons, CEPAC was unable to submit a synthesis document.

127. Other voices that were identified as missing or inadequately represented from all countries in the region were: the voice of West Papuans; the adequate representation of migrants; the voice of those affected by "neo-colonialism" (the workers of the multinational extractive companies), the voice of those still affected by "the old colonialism" and the Church's role in colonialism; lay men; members of other Christian churches; religious movements; and victims of domestic violence and human trafficking, slavery, exploitation and other abuses.

128. It was also noted that the voices of bishops in some parts of the region were missing, not only for hearing their perspectives on the style of synodal leadership but also about isolation and other challenges that they experience in their pastoral ministry.

Priorities and Calls to Action

129. Many themes, issues and insights emerged as the fruits of the discernment process in Oceania, and the 11 key themes outlined in the earlier sections of this document. These are the priorities that emerged from the five syntheses which the People of God in Oceania consider appropriate for consideration at the First Session of the Synod Assembly in October 2023. In doing so, we have concentrated on those matters which are more properly considered by the Universal Church (such as Church teaching) and left other matters for consideration at the level of continental, episcopal conference or local Church. Other important topics such as the relevance of the tent metaphor, the centrality of baptism as our identity and forming the baptised to understand their call to mission may be helpful in the writing of the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

MISSION

130. Mission was identified as a key priority in each of the responses, with a strong sense that the mission which Christ entrusted to the Church is truly linked to the inclusion of all the baptised. Below are the issues for the Synod Assembly to consider:

a) Ways of more effectively engaging the whole People of God in their baptismal invitation to participate in God's mission (Pacific).
b) Making a transition from a "maintenance" to a "mission-focused" Church (Australia, 69).
c) Inviting and encouraging all Catholics "to accept their baptismal call to evangelise and proclaim God's love in unity with others" (Australia, 69).
d) In the absence of priests, validating and strengthening lay pastoral ministry in prisons and hospitals to ensure that people receive the healing ministry of Jesus (New Zealand, 116).
e) Recognising the Eastern Catholic Churches in Oceania as "Sui iuris [self-governing] Churches who through their rich spiritual tradition can contribute to the mission of the Church" (ECC, 19).

ECOLOGICAL CRISES

131. As a sea of big and small islands, Oceania is uniquely impacted by the devastating consequences of the ecological crisis – from rising sea levels threatening the very existence of island communities to catastrophic cyclones, floods, fires and droughts and the resultant loss of human life and biodiversity. While acknowledging that the DCS made reference to the climate emergency, **the Synod Assembly should consider this as an urgent existential global issue**:

a) Stand in solidarity with those communities severely impacted by the ecological crisis, noting the differential impact on the poor and vulnerable.
b) Promote *Laudato Si'*s integral ecology as critical to our care for the earth and for the oceans and urge local churches and ministries to implement action plans.
c) Consider the ecological crisis **as a mission field in which the whole Church,**

globally and locally, should be engaged in the "urgent struggle to preserve our planet and its life, and to provide economic justice for its people" (New Zealand, 114).

CHURCH TEACHING

132. Questions about Church teaching, or the application of Church teaching, were raised in the Oceania responses. There are differences in the region about whether change is needed in Church teaching in some areas, and about whether Church teaching can change or develop. These issues listed below need to be addressed for the sake of our unity in diversity.

a) Those aspects of Church teaching which are perceived as "exclusionary or hurtful" or understood to "cause people to walk away from the Church or deter them from returning" (New Zealand, 117). These include teaching on sexuality, diverse sexual relationships, contraception, the situation of the divorced and remarried, intercommunion with other Christian denominations whose Baptism we recognise, priestly celibacy and the restriction of ordination to men.
b) Improved communication of Magisterial teaching, in accessible language and modes for the People of God.
c) Liturgical reforms to implement the teachings of Vatican II on inculturation and reflect contemporary theology, such as "a better translation of the Missal, inclusive language, lay people giving homilies, flexibility in different contexts ... Overall, it was agreed that liturgy should always allow for active participation and be inclusive and open to all" (Australia, 68).
d) Liturgical norms which enable and facilitate local cultural approaches to worship (Pacific).

BECOMING MORE SYNODAL

133. The majority of respondents valued the experience of synodality and expressed a desire for the Church to become more synodal. This was seen as a priority in each of the responses. The Synod Assembly should consider ways of embedding synodality in the life and teaching of the Church:

a) Using discernment processes in Church decision-making, which requires that "those in leadership positions listen to the Holy Spirit and try to seek the will of God in affairs of the Church" (Pacific).
b) "Developing further resources for discernment and synodality in the ordinary life of the Church" (New Zealand, 113).
c) Shifting attitudes and practices within the Church to be more communal (Pacific).
d) Transforming the culture of Church leadership to emphasise "the importance of accountability, transparency and openness at all levels of the Church, for parishes, dioceses and Church agencies and for the bishops themselves" (Australia, 61).
e) Embedding "synodality as the 'way of being Church' at every level" (New Zealand, 113) by identifying "those bodies in the Church at all levels which are synodal by nature" (New Zealand, 113), and "establishing forums at all

levels of the Church" where they are lacking (Australia, 61) in order to promote "subsidiarity within the Church" (Australia, 61).

AUTHORITY AND DECISION-MAKING

134. Discernment in Oceania revealed a common view that a synodal Church needs a cultural and structural change in Church leadership, including shared governance and decision-making, involving both laity and clergy, to reduce the possibility of a culture of clericalism and enable the laity in the contribution of their gifts.

The Synod Assembly should consider:

a) Ways of embedding a culture of servant leadership for those in leadership positions – clerical, religious and lay people.

b) Changes to current governance structures to enable shared governance and decision-making, involving both laity and clergy.

c) Those areas of canon law which do not enable lay women and men to participate in appropriate forms of decision-making, while not derogating from episcopal authority.

d) Removing provisions that restrict certain diocesan and tribunal roles to clerics to allow qualified lay people to take up these roles (New Zealand, 116).

e) How initiatives to improve transparency and accountability in the Vatican might be modelled in the local churches.

f) Investigating "pathways for people from diverse backgrounds to be trained in governance roles, such as pastoral councils or other areas of governance" (Australia, 67).

YOUNG PEOPLE

135. The discernment across Oceania revealed a common concern regarding the disconnection and absence of many young people in the life of the Church and a keenness that the Assembly give them priority:

a) Listening and "investigating how the faith needs of young people could be met and how youth could be better formed and provided with platforms that allowed them to utilise their skills and passions" (Australia, 76), including documents in a language they can understand (New Zealand, 47).

b) Accompanying young people in discerning the gifts and talents "that they can offer for the growth of the Church" (Pacific).

c) An increased focus on "a union of family, parish and school to work together" to enrich the Catholicity within Catholic schools (ECC, 20).

d) More pastoral activities and faith formation programs that cater to young men's and boys' unique perspectives (PNG/SI, 5.6).

WOMEN

136. The role and place of women in the Church was a uniform concern in Oceania. The Synod Assembly should consider the experience of women in the Church:

a) Hearing directly from women on all matters under consideration during the Synod Assemblies.

b) Ensuring the spirit of synodality continues to cause the Church to listen to

those women who do not feel sufficiently recognised in the Church (Pacific).

c) Change the perception of women in the Church as being homogenous in their views, the way cultural influences impact them at a local level or their way of life (New Zealand, 118).

d) Full and just participation of women in Church governance, decision-making, mission and ministry (Australia, 60; New Zealand, 118).

e) A just remuneration for lay women working in the Church and "religious women, especially in the pastoral field" (PNG/SI, 2.6).

f) A greater involvement of women in the formation of seminarians and priests (New Zealand, 118).

FORMATION

137. In the five responses from the region, formation was seen to be essential. As this was seen as a priority, the Synod Assembly should consider:

a) Creating a formation framework for all the baptised to help them participate in a synodal Church and be courageous missionary disciples.

b) Ensuring that formation identifies needs within the light of Scripture and Church teaching, includes Catholic Social Teaching, and addresses the reality of people's lives.

c) Prioritising formation resources for ecological conversion and specific resources for the formation of young people in the faith.

d) Ensuring that there is an adequate emphasis on formation for catechists and other lay leaders.

Conclusion

138. The experience of synodality became for many people a new experience of Church. During the process people recognised the presence of the Holy Spirit in listening to one another, in the joy and freedom they experienced and in the common ground they found. Those who reflected upon the DCS found the emergence of clear themes across the world amazing – evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church. "The experience with the DCS has given many people a global perspective of the Church which they did not have before, which has induced a sense of wonder at the diversity and breadth of the Church to which we belong" (New Zealand, 13).

139. As the *Instrumentum Laboris* is prepared for the Synod Assembly, we note that the many people who have taken part have already been changed by this process. An outpouring of people's hearts has taken place which has created new bonds and strengthened people's understanding of their shared identity as members of Christ's Church. Many lay people now have a deeper knowledge of their Baptism and what it means, and a strong desire to act upon that new knowledge.

140. People are awaiting with interest the next stage of the global process. There is great hope that the First Synod Assembly in October 2023 will be aligned with the

synodal process, Christ-centred and Spirit-led, focused on God's call to us at this point in the Church's history. To be truly synodal the lay and religious participants need to reflect the diversity of the People of God.

141. There have always been "experts" and "auditors" at Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops in the past. We invite the Synod Secretariat to discern carefully how those people are chosen for this Assembly and recommend a transparent process be adopted. The "experts" should have expertise in areas such as pastoral care, missionary work and synodality, alongside theology, ecclesiology and canon law. "Auditors" should include people such as migrants, the poor, priests and religious who work among the marginalised, and survivors of abuse. Whether the traditional roles of "experts" and "auditors" are retained, or a modified structure is adopted, women, lay men, young people and indigenous people should participate with the bishops in the Assembly, and some of these should be from Oceania.

142. The title of the Working Document for the Continental Stage is *Enlarge the Space of Your Tent*. The People of God need the Assembly to heed this call as we continue the synodal journey.

Pastoral Reflection by the Bishops of Oceania Gathered at the FCBCO Assembly, on the Oceania Response to the DCS

143. As we considered this Oceania document, we had a sense of a very real confidence in the presence of Christ in the Church, and that He is moving the Church forward. The document captures the hopes and concerns of our people, and this might give the impression that the Church is in disarray. However, it is precisely in places and times of pain and suffering that Christ reveals himself. This confidence and faith in His presence can guide us in our response. We seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we continue our synodal journey.

144. We trust the process and the people we appointed, who have collated well the responses of the People of God to the questions posed in the Document for the Continental Stage of the Synod. We believe that this document is a fair representation of the reality of the People of God who participated in this synodal process. However, we acknowledge that this document is not a census of all Catholics in Oceania but an expression of the views of those people who responded to the invitation to discern on the DCS. Acknowledging the limited participation due to time pressures, we hope for broader participation as the synodal process unfolds.

145. We noticed in the people's responses a desire for practical applications of synodality in the present moment. However, we also realise that while we are a synodal Church, giving practical expression to synodality will take time. It will be a long journey, both in Oceania and in the Universal Church. This document is not a catechetical or magisterial document. It is more like a postcard at this point in our journey, showing where we are now.

146. We do not want to build a different Church, but rather to renew and revitalise the Church which we love. This renewal and revitalisation will begin with personal conversion, and it will also find communal and structural expression. A renewed and synodal Church seeks not to leave anyone behind. In such a Church we will walk together, loving one another.

147. Reflecting on the responses of the people, we were pleased to see they appreciate that their Baptism is foundational and that it receives great attention in this document. However, we noticed that Eucharist is less prominent.

148. For Catholics, the Eucharist is central. Through Baptism, we gain entry to the Eucharistic community gathered at the Table of the Lord. With Christ, we as a people are invited to die to self and rise again with Christ as we participate in his sacrificial self-emptying and self-giving. The Lord Jesus gives us Himself as food for the journey until we share in the banquet of heaven. He gives us priests, whom He calls to have a shepherd's heart to care for their people, proclaim the Word of God, celebrate Eucharist with and for them, and so nourish the Church as she strives to fulfil her mission for the life of the world. Similarly, the Sacrament of Penance reunites the sinner with the Eucharistic community.

149. Not every bishop found every part of the document wholly convincing or complete, and some had doubts and concerns about where this might be leading us. Jesus appeared to the disciples with their pain, shame, loss and shattered hopes. In the same way, we bishops feel doubts, anxieties and fears about certain parts of this document. We also feel joy and hope. The crucified and risen Christ showed his wounds to his disciples and despite their shame, doubts, and fears, they were filled with joy and hope. His words were "peace be with you". He invites us bishops to trust in his mercy and proclaim the truth with love, as Jesus did.

150. In the face of our doubts and fears, Jesus sends us to a broken world. We receive the griefs and anguish, the joys and hopes of the people of Oceania expressed in this document. With trust in the Holy Spirit, we will continue to journey together, people and pastors, as the pilgrim People of God. Jesus Christ is walking with us in our synodal journey, offering us His peace and urging us to have courage.

151. Our sharing of the Gospel in Oceania takes place in quite varied contexts. This document is an example of the voices of the peoples of our nations revealing the contexts of our mission. The document has a lively sense of mission, which is at the heart of the laity being Church in the world.

152. We have a desire and responsibility to listen to and accompany our young people and assist them to draw on the life-giving Gospel in responding to the challenges they face in their search for meaning, hope and healthy relationships. We are conscious that reaching out to our young people in more courageous, creative and engaging ways is an essential aspect of mission for our Church in the context of

our world today.

153. We are also committed to our shared responsibility expressed in this document to better care for and advocate for our common home. In our region, the ecological crisis is an existential threat to many people and communities. It is experienced in sea level rises, the acidification of the oceans, droughts, flooding rains, and more frequent extreme weather events. The destruction of some island nations becomes increasingly likely as the melting of the Antarctic ice cap on our southern periphery continues with global warming. Ecological conversion is an urgent mission priority.

154. Formation for all members of the Church, including the bishops, will be essential to support our journey of becoming a more synodal Church.

155. Having reflected on this document together at our Assembly, we feel peace and joy. We also feel called to be prophetic. The apostles were accepted by Jesus even though they had let him down. He offered them peace. We are called to be ready to sacrifice ourselves in the process of being prophetic. We need to model ourselves on the love we proclaim. We are sent forth just as Jesus sent forth the apostles.

On Synodality

After the explanation of the three key words of the synodal process – communion, participation, mission – the people in the village shouted confidently and loudly, "We are synodality! We are synodality!" Why? "We are doing it ever since we became Catholics." (Balimo Village, Papua New Guinea, became a parish 27 years ago and people are NO READ, NO WRITE)

When the explanation went on to emphasise the idea of "WALKING TOGETHER", they said, "Every day we ONLY WALK and all the time we walk in numbers because it is strange walking ALONE and CAR ride not possible for we don't have road!"

If synodality expressed the Church-people's ordinary way of living and working, then I must say, people in Balimo are right in one sense in their simplicity as Church and in their display of faith practice.

Bishop Joseph Durero

"One means loneliness, closure, a claim to self-sufficiency, two means relationship. The Church is synodal, it is communion, mutual help, a common path. This is the aim of the current Synod, which will have its first assembly moment next October."

(Pope Francis)

DOCUMENT OF THE DIGITAL SYNOD FOR THE CONTINENTAL STAGE

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DIGITAL SYNOD

INTRODUCTION

"Enlarge the space of your tent, spread out your awnings without fear, drive in your stakes and lengthen your cords, for you shall spread out to the right hand and the left; your descendants shall inherit nations and populate deserted cities."

(Is.54, 2-3)

a) Remembering

Origin: The synodal process convoked by the Pope to discern the theme "*Towards a Synodal Church*" has also challenged the digital world, and thus the initiative "*The Church Listens To You*" was born, under the slogans of Francis: "*Church which goes forth*", "reaching the existential peripheries" and "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security," taking the Synod to the digital spaces and culture, on mission, so that no one is excluded. The General Secretariat welcomed the initiative. From that moment, in the different Dioceses of the world, the first stage of the Synod was being worked on, and the digital missionaries/evangelizers and their communities were going through the first steps of this initiative.

Dimension: It was a seminal and incipient proposal and, at the same time, sufficient because opening this door allowed us to see that this "digital place"i exists, that it must be explored and accompanied. The mission in digital environments has been born, from the very beginning of this new culture, naturally and spontaneously, from the missionary ardor of *evangelizers-influencers*, children of their time, who, finding new environments of evangelization, with courage and creativity, have put their charisms to bring Jesus to these new horizons and to find Him there too.

Specificity: The originality of the proposal to hold the Synod in "digital environments" did not lie in the use of the instruments, but in the appreciation of the digital space as "*locus*", inhabited by people naturally and properly, looking at their reality from their own culture. They do not always participate in the institutional life of the Church in person.

Outreach: Having gone out to the existential peripheries in digital spaces, we have met people in search and others who are wounded. In the digital world, there are paths open to *pastoral care for missionaries*, which wants to go to everyone and reach everyone. This reality subsists in the People of God, even before the institutional forms, and is verified in the vocation and urgency to reach the last ones, those who are seeking, those in need of God's tenderness.

End of the first stage: The Church accompanies humanity (GS1) to serve the men and women, discovers the wounded on the side of the road, to show them and offer them Jesus, the Merciful face of the Father. During the first stage of the Synod, this community of *digital evangelizers* and their communities experienced themselves as the Church that goes out, the Church that listens, and the Samaritan Church.

b)The Word inspires us

The Working Document of the Synod takes the image of the tent with which chapter 54 of the Book of Isaiah begins. It brings us a promise of God that becomes a vocation for his people and his Church: "*Enlarge the space of your tent*" (Is 54:2). The exile helped Israel to live faith in the open. There he knew how to be alone with God and to love him wholeheartedly. There they lived the experience of the Exodus, a God who burned without being consumed. There he lived faith without fear. A small flame that was extinguished at the slightest wind. A big fire, the more wind, the more it was lit. The incomprehensible became reality through faith in a God who fulfills his promises.

Today the promise still stands and was verified, once again, in the second stage of the Synod. The distant, the indifferent, those who never heard the Announcement, those who think differently, those who have learned to live without faith in a serene a-religiosity... There are many wandering in an exile that has no geographical borders. In exile, home is far away, it is blurred, forgotten, and even unknown. On the way back, it must be rediscovered.

Who will be able to discover this renewed Church? The seekers, the pioneers, the wayfarers, those who do not stay still? They will be able to discover this Church that does not stand still, that is on the move, that resembles a field hospital, a *Samaritan Church* amid humanity. Many of these seekers, some time ago, went out into the digital world. Today, with the whole Church, they are walking the synodal path.

This experience is for them a vital and powerful tool that has allowed them to listen to the cries of pain and loneliness of those who inhabit the "digital continent". They are *missionaries/ evangelizers* who, in this second stage of the Synod, were able to *discern* the needs behind these cries. They are like "pioneers" of a Church in *perennial reform* , signs of a Church that is on the way to listen . The digital space brings us closer to those who think differently, to those who are different… They enter our house simultaneously, permanently inviting us to hospitality and *discernment*. The digital space contributes significantly to communion and transcends "frontiers".

The Synod, conceived as the return from exile, refers to a double dimension of synodality: walking together as the People of the Baptized and accompanying all humanity, of which the Church is the servant, towards the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Following Pope Francis we can affirm "*I have a dogmatic certainty: God is in the life of every person*". Therefore, a synodal Church is not only a Church that knows how to welcome but also a Church that goes out to encounter and is open to *universal fraternity*. The People of God that does not close in on themselves, but, based on the criteria of inculturation and interculturality, dialogues with the interlocutors of a pluralistic world. In the wordsc of the Pope, it is about "*a Church connected with the lowly, with the small, with the problems of the people, with those marginalized by the culture of waste*".

c) From listening to discernment

The *discernment* process of Phase II was carried out with the Influencers/digital missionaries who participated in the first synodal stage (listening), which had an experimental character, reaching a total of 250 from different cultures, countries, and languages. It is noteworthy that the experience has been repeated, reaching 30% of the participants who are non-believers or are distant from the Church. Currently, more than 850 influencers/missionaries/digital evangelizers have joined the project. This original group was divided into 12 communities. These, in turn, were divided internally into small discernment communities of approximately 12 people with an sponsor who met synchronously and asynchronously, in person and online.

In this second stage, the General Secretariat of the Synod also proposed sending delegates to the Continental Synodal Assemblies. It was possible to reach the Assemblies of Africa, Asia, Europe, and America. Fourteen digital missionaries/evangelizers participated and presented the Project "The Church listens to you"; and the evangelizers/missionaries themselves carried out the process of spiritual conversation.

It ended with a *Digital Assembly*. Here the animators of each community shared what they had worked on through the method of "spiritual conversation", following the same methodology of the continental meetings.

Discernment, which is an openness to the Voice of God and to the reciprocal listening of those who share the synodal journey, is a gift of the Spirit and a dynamism of seeking the presence of the Lord, which, in the synodal journey, as a sincere and docile community process, allows us to recognize God's plan and thus discover options and priorities. In the communities gathered *in the digital space*, as in the in person communities, communion, a place of discernment, develops.

In the second phase of the Synod, we moved from the first listening to the sharing of lines and horizons, that is to say, to a listening-discerning listening. The *digital space* extends far and wide over an incomprehensible distance and, paradoxically, this space provokes encounters and returns. With God's help, in the communities

that inhabit digital environments, we observe that closeness is facilitated, in order to overcome distances, making *community discernment* possible.

In this digital process, as it happened in the Continental Assemblies, it became clear that there is no topic that cannot be talked about, that cannot be discussed. Therefore, this Synod, a work of the Spirit, gives the Church the opportunity to recognize itself in digital environments and to think about a possible *digital pastoral care, in the* organic framework of other pastoral ministries. Thus, by walking together, it will be possible to ensure an ecclesial way of bringing the Message of Jesus to all the peripheries.

d) The fundamental question

At the end of this introduction, we asked ourselves: *"How does this journey together enable the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to it; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take to grow as a synodal Church"* (DP 2. 26) (DEC 2. 105).

e) The structure of the Document

The structure of the document is presented in a qualitative and quantitative analysis, with an introduction and a conclusion plus an annex with tables of significant figures.

In the body of the document, the contributions of discernment to each theme of the DEC are presented.

A special section is dedicated to the contribution of the distanced and non-believers who participated in this phase.

1. A choice for young people, people with disabilities, and the defense of life

Intuitions - new or enlightening experiences - positive aspects:

Leadership in mission: Young people are digital leaders, driving evangelistic projects for the common good, generating valuable content, and promoting missionary initiatives.

Distances shrink: In the digital world, believers and non-believers, faithful and

NOTE:
In this document, we have standardized three expressions: *influencer, digital missionary, and digital evangelizer*, as well as the terms *digital continent, digital culture, digital space, and digital place*. They have been used in an equivalent manner and without preference of one over the other. Our intention here, and in general in the digital synodal process, is not to establish definitions, but to be able to carry out the synodal process in contemporary culture, which has a strong and important representation of the digital. As the terms cited have different interpretations in different contexts, we have used them all without any preference.
In the synthesis, we use "missionary" and "evangelizer" referring to the digital space as a place of evangelization. The concept of "*influencer*" was used by the Pope at the closing of World Youth Day in Panama (26/1/19). There he referred to "*Mary as God's influencer*". On the same occasion, he also mentioned Don Bosco as an "influencer of the young". Blessed Carlo Acutis, who stood out for his evangelizing service in the digital space is a close example of a "*Catholic influencer*".

priests, young and old come closer together, favoring greater listening and sharing of experiences.

Sensitivity to the defense of life: The voice of young people in the digital world is particularly strong in promoting the dignity of the human person from conception to the end of life.

Voice of the disadvantaged: The digital environment allows people, especially those with disabilities, to speak about their lives and inspire others with their testimony of overcoming them.

Tensions or divergences - issues and questions - negative aspects:

Prejudice towards digital mission: Young people sometimes do not feel listened to and perceive their digital mission as superficial or irrelevant to evangelization, many feel alone, without support or community to back them up in their mission.

Face-to-face and Digital: Young people and people with disabilities feel that they can contribute their talents more freely in digital structures than in face-to-face structures.

Understandable language: The language used in the digital world connects more easily with the reality of young people, while they perceive the language used in parishes and homilies as more distant.

Accessibility: **It is** not only a matter of offering spaces adapted to people with disabilities, but also of promoting the participation of all in the mission of the Church. Digital tools can make sure that no one feels excluded.

The announcement in postmodernity: Faced with the change of era, it is necessary to take into consideration the sensitivity of young people who, as children of their time, relate to a liquid society, characterized by a growing fragmentation, erosion of the bonds of permanence, individualism, and relativism, and the instrumentalization and manipulation of some people for the benefit of others.

Priorities - recurring themes - calls to action

Pastoral accompaniment: In order to provide adequate accompaniment to support them, it is important to reflect on issues such as the defense of life, inclusion, suffering, and social inequality.

Ongoing formation: Faced with the challenges that the digital culture presents to digital missionaries to enter into dialogue with diverse realities, the aforementioned topics are articulated in ongoing formation.

Listening and dialogue: The digital world offers a privileged space for listening to the cries of God's people. Therefore, it is necessary to create permanent spaces

where welcoming listening and sincere dialogue favor a pastoral conversion that responds to the most pressing needs of our time.

Synodal participation: The young people ask to continue participating and contributing to the synodal processes, in order to illuminate with their contributions the new challenges that today's culture presents to the evangelization of the new generations.

2. Listening to those who feel abandoned and excluded

Intuitions - new or enlightening experiences - positive aspects:

Valuing diversity and ecumenical dialogue: The importance of valuing and welcoming diversity in the communities and working for the inclusion of people, regardless of their sexual orientation or other aspects, is emphasized. Interreligious and ecumenical dialogue is emphasized as a valuable work that promotes synergy with separated brothers and sisters and other religions in the search for peace, the common good, social promotion, and care for life.

Reaching out to the peripheries: The reflection underlined the position of the digital evangelizer in the face of the issue of diversity and exclusion, especially in the situation of peripheries in which the abandoned and excluded find themselves. The Church constantly encourages processes to embrace new peripheries and work for the dignity of the person in all its dimensions.

The charism of the digital missionary: Its positive role in times of change and uncertainty is emphasized. The Church, called to differentiate itself by its hopeful charism, acts in the world illuminated by the Holy Spirit from its vocation of openness, and fraternal accompaniment in the diverse, creative, and changing digital culture.

Tensions or divergences - issues and questions - negative aspects

Inclusion and openness: Although the Church seeks to be close to the marginalized, this does not always happen in practice. Church efforts to help the poor and marginalized often fall short of inclusion by bridging the "digital divide". It is common to see exclusionary groups and digital communities can be centers where only certain people are accepted.

Discrimination: It has been observed that digital culture can also be exclusionary and discriminatory, with digital creators using their power to overshadow and marginalize different opinions. The Church is not exempt from people labeling others and encouraging discrimination. Those who feel excluded do not just want to be tolerated but incorporated into the life of the Church.

Incorporate the peripheries: The Church needs to open up to excluded groups, listen and create spaces conducive to inclusion. Diversity is not always included in digital evangelization. The Church is questioned, how can it talk about community life while segregating those who think differently? Sometimes it talks about young

people, but it does not talk to young people.

Priorities - recurring themes - calls to action

Culture of encounter: The importance of welcoming people who feel abandoned and excluded is pointed out. It is necessary to establish a specific pastoral care for the digital world and to accompany the evangelizing agents and the people of God with ongoing formation about these topics. Disseminate the actions carried out by the Church to promote the culture of encounter. On the other hand, we also perceive the need for a pastoral vision dedicated to the theme of corporeality and sexuality.

Participation and accompaniment: It is suggested to promote digital spaces for participation and accompaniment, and to make visible experiences of solidarity and welcome, especially for people who are unable to do so in person. It is advocated to teach inclusion through testimony and to seek ways of welcoming all people with greater openness.

Equality and equity: To recover the simplicity and humanity of Jesus in treating others. To favor spaces for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and joint actions that seek the common good. It is necessary to understand the diverse experiences that exist in society and in the Church itself to demonstrate the commitment to equality and equity.

3. The mission of the Church in today's world

Intuitions - new or enlightening experiences - positive aspects

Church going forth: The mission of the Church in digital environments has an evangelizing potential for missionary disciples on the move. It can reach people there in the reality where they are, however, there is still much to be done.

Called to build bridges: The digital realm is a place of mission that offers opportunities to build bridges between different Christian perspectives and communities. Moved by the love for Jesus, we are encouraged to work together on common concerns such as human dignity, justice, and environmental responsibility.

Called to Be Samaritans: The question "Who is your neighbor?" resonates in our history and in the digital context, therefore, the call to be Samaritansvi , to comfort and lift up the wounded of the world, and not to be indifferent to social reality, must be part of the witness of faith that we are called to offer.

Tensions or divergences - issues and questions - negative aspects

The challenge of polarization: The digital age offers the possibility of being more connected and available to welcome others, but it is not always harnessed for the encounter. Added to this is the action of internet algorithms, which promote polarization by rewarding controversy and conflict.

Unity in diversity: There is difficulty in dialogue in digital environments in the face

of the diversity of cultures and thoughts, fostering divisions, tensions, and criticisms. There is a lack of unity and confrontations that obscure the Message itself.

Priorities - recurring themes - calls to action

Pastoral Care: Faced with the challenges digital evangelizers encounter, the creation of a pastoral care is proposed. Through a permanent structure, recognized by the Bishops, it should promote spaces for listening, dialogue, and collaboration among digital missionaries and encourage the exchange of missionary initiatives. It should also have professional resources, in synergy with other institutions.

Formation for the mission on digital media: The issues of the digital cultural context require a greater understanding and consequently an adequate formation to face the new forms of digital evangelization, and how to react to aggression and hatred on the networks.

Accompaniment: To be a Church that accompanies the journey of the People of God present in digital spaces so that they can live in a prophetic and missionary way. It should encourage and promote the various gifts and charisms that the Holy Spirit raises to meet the challenges of today. An accompaniment that helps to grow and develop positively and that is also capable of helping in need, weakness, and error.

Collaborative networking: It is important to break out of pre-established forms and create collaborative networks with people who influence digital realities. Those who belong to other religions or who do not profess faith, but who collaborate in common causes in favor of the dignity of the human person, should be included in the process.

4. We walk together

New or enlightening intuitions-experiences-positive aspects:

Accompanying digital missionaries: As a result of the synodal process, a sense of relief has been generated since many of the digital missionaries are beginning to feel accompanied and listened to. It is essential that the Church pay attention to the digital world and continue to create spaces for digital evangelizers to meet and think about new ways of being Church in this area.

Bridging distances: The digital realm offers spaces for dialogue that enable collaboration between Christians, believers of other religions, and non-believers in support of common values that allow us to walk together, e.g., in caring for creation and promoting peace. Dialogue does not imply uniformity, but the ability to walk together while respecting differences.

Sense of belonging: In an individualistic and discriminatory society, with so much bullying, digital spaces offer opportunities for community and belonging that can alleviate situations of pain and loneliness.

Tensions or divergences-issues and questions-negative aspects:

Difficulties along the way: The Church faces a series of challenges that make it difficult to walk together in the digital world. Among them are the issues that cause noise in this area: the problem of abuse, internal division, attacks in the digital world, conflicts in social networks, lack of commitment to the neighbor, and relativism in the digital culture.

Pluricultural arena: Need to find meeting points that can foster dialogue taking into account the different areas of relationship with the world, with other religions, among Christians, and in our Catholic faith to walk together in this dramatic situation of the world.

Priorities - recurring themes - calls to action:

Culture of charityy: It is important to find a common ground where everyone is listened to, respecting differences, and avoiding common tensions in the networks. Taking the Gospel as a starting point, focusing on the service of charity that generates commitment and actions towards those who suffer and need.

The way of beauty: It is necessary to take advantage of the riches and gifts that digital evangelizers possess so that, through the way of beauty, with art, music, poetry, painting, video, etc., they can effectively present the value of peace, hope, and life.

Deepening of the Magisterium: There is a great need for knowledge and systematic and applied formation on the recent Pontifical Magisterium, which opens us to the perspective of the Spirit on the world and contemporary culture, for this it is important to take advantage of the forces and dynamics of digital spaces for a formative offer.

5. Cultural contexts, cultures, religions, and dialogue

New or enlightening intuitions-experiences-positive aspects:

Embracing diversity: The digital space is a place where diverse cultures and religions are reflected. Because of its particular dynamics, it allows both the maintenance of these riches and the dialogue between them, promoting a relationship of collaboration in charity.

Generational transmission: The Church, bearer of the Gospel, is challenged by the new generations to proclaim it also in the digital culture. For this reason, it is necessary to have deep dialogues with people to understand their sadness and concerns, their dreams and hopes.

Tensions or divergences-issues and questions-negative aspects:

Dialogue without transmitting: **It is** not just a matter of communicating, but of doing so credibly and understandably, with the witness and language that is proper to them. In the digital world, the Church can play an important role in dialogue,

overcoming negative prejudices to listen to today's culture. It is essential to have an open attitude towards every culture and religion, and to understand the "universal" meaning of the Church, breaking down walls and building bridges.

A Church "a la carte": There is a cultural risk of designing a personalized Church in some groups that do not know the essentials of the faith due to the large amount of false information in the digital world. This can lead to adopting an "accommodated" religious form where the Church loses strength in the proclamation and only accepts what suits personal tastes.

Priorities - recurring themes - calls to action:

External dialogue: It is important to work for unity in the dialogue between believers and non-believers. The Church in the digital environment should seek communion as a sign of credibility and establish open communication and dialogue with other cultures and religions.

Internal dialogue: Keeping a close relationship with the Bishops for an apostolic mission. The work in ecclesial communion with the hierarchy and with all the institutions and charisms in the Church makes evangelization true and fruitful, for this, it is necessary to increase the accompaniment and pastoral orientation of the digital missionaries.

Pastoral structures: To strengthen evangelization in the diverse realities of the world, evangelizers need specialized and continuous training and accompaniment. For this reason, structures that form and accompany these missions are also needed in digital evangelization. Pastors must also be trained in evangelization in digital environments.

6. Beyond clericalism

Intuitions - new or enlightening experiences - positive aspects:

All missionaries: In digital environments, the mission is carried out by the baptized. It is perceived that followers do not only seek or follow evangelizers for their roles or ecclesiastical titles but rather for other values such as the ability to communicate the Message, the ability to meet the needs, personal testimony, coherence in the discourse and to respond with closeness. For this reason, clericalism does not impact so much on digital environments.

Repairing credibility: The Church's action concerning all kinds of abuse is marking an important step in the process of purification so that the growth of credibility is possible, recognizing the dignity and importance of all. The repair of trust is a pressing need, and there is still a long way to go in this regard.

Healing presence: The richness of ministries in the Church, also in the networks, is the natural way to overcome any clericalist attitude and is the evangelical way of distributing gifts and talents. Consecrated life and the variety of lay charisms present

a more servant and less clerical Church.

Hierarchy and co-responsibility: The co-responsible mission in the networks, which gives participation and voice to men and women, lay and consecrated, young and not young, does not lose the referentiality to the pastors that are valued when there is priestly and paternal dedication.

Tensions or divergences - issues and questions - negative aspects

Instrumentality of the spaces: There is no shortage of priests who take advantage of the potential of digital spaces to accentuate clericalism.

Personalism and co-responsibility: In digital environments, there is a tension similar to the face-to-face one, where sometimes the priestly figure is overemphasized and does not contribute to shared responsibility.

Personalism and self-referentiality: In some cases, there is no service to the Word but to one's thoughts and visions.

Identity of the People of God: It is important to avoid the clericalization of the laity and the laicization of the clergy. Sometimes lay digital evangelizers find it difficult to act in the face-to-face world due to clericalism. There is a need to reflect on how to train priests and bishops to understand the new culture in the digital environment.

Priorities - recurring themes - calls to action

Formation: Among the actions considered necessary to overcome clericalism is the revision of the formation of seminarians and clergy favoring a formation that stimulates teamwork, co- responsibility, and the vision of priestly ministry as service and not as power. The exchange that takes place in digital spaces favors this equity.

Digital pastoral care in communion and participation: In order to collaborate in overcoming clericalism, the implementation of a living digital pastoral care should be favored, working in communion with bishops, priests, religious men and women, and lay men and women.

7. Rethinking women's participation

Intuitions - new or illuminating experiences - positive aspects

Active participation: In the digital spaces there is a strong evangelizing witness on the part of young women, single women, mothers, wives, and religious and consecrated women who reflect the feminine face of the Church through the dedication of their lives. The living out of their vocation brings the richness of their thinking, vision, and spirituality.

The Mother Church: The Church going forth, called to go to the geographical and existential peripheries to bend down like the Good Samaritan in the face of the many sufferings, contributes to covering their wounds with tenderness and care. It

reflects the maternal face through the contribution of women, wherein the digital environment they go out to meet people who feel distant, providing the service of listening, welcoming, and offering their strength.

Shared protagonism: In digital spaces, all voices have the same value and reflect the testimony of the interaction between men and women, who work as a team for the Gospel. Numerous collaborative initiatives led by women in the field of mission can be seen in the digital sphere.

Ecclesial renewal: The awareness of a single baptism incorporates us into Christ and the ecclesial mission of evangelization. The participation of women in different areas reflects the beginning of a process of renewal within the ecclesial structures, contributing what is proper to them.

Tensions or divergences - issues and questions - negative aspects

Complementarity and diversity: Learning to walk together without diluting the richness of differences, convinced that self-sufficiency impoverishes the Church and that a joint vision can be an adequate response to face the challenges that today's fragmented society presents.

Non-Inclusion: Women continue to be on the margins of discernment and decision-making processes. However, due to the characteristics of the digital sphere, non-inclusion is not reflected as much.

Variety of vocations: In the various discernment teams the topic of "female priesthood" has not been relevant. The need for a renewed understanding of the dignity of the baptismal priesthood is emphasized, avoiding the clericalization of the laity in general and of women in particular.

Priorities - recurring themes - calls to action

Strengthen identity: Take advantage of the digital spaces where women unfold their being, occupying their own place and enriching the community.

Fraternity: We need the contribution of both male and female perspectives that allow us to see reality from a broader and more complete perspective, being a reflection of a Church where we can see a new way of being together.

Participation: The space achieved by women in the digital environment promotes their place, their role in the Church, their thinking, and theological discernment around their identity.

Walking together: The synodal process presents an opportunity for an authentic exchange where dialogue, between male and female, contributes to ecclesial renewal.

8. Charisms, vocations, and ministries

Intuitions - new or illuminating experiences - positive aspects

A plurality of charisms: In the digital environment, the plurality of charisms, vocations, and ministries is observed. When these charisms are valued, respected, and promoted, they complement each other, seeking unity in diversity.

Church "all ministerial": In the digital world, encounters between evangelizers of different vocations are favored, all the more necessary in their diversity and complementarity when the diversity and greatness of the digital world they are going to serve is great. The synergy between ordained and lay ministry is also necessary.

Invitation to discernment: The edifying testimony of the different vocations present in the digital world awakens the thirst to search for the meaning of life, and to discover one's personal vocation by initiating a process of discernment.

Tensions or divergences - issues and questions - negative aspects

Unity in diversity: The Church present in the digital world also encounters tensions caused by the polarization that prevents listening and dialogue. Synodality has encouraged us to recognize in the other a companion on the way. Learning to walk together is a call and a task.

Overcoming individualism: One of the obstacles in digital evangelization can be the tendency to individualism or self-centeredness, which dissociates people from belonging to a single body. Therefore, it is necessary to promote networks that generate communities, where they feel supported and part of a whole.

Distrust towards the digital: There is a certain lack of knowledge and resistance to the digital media to value the mission that is carried out in these environments because the digital world is considered *an instrument to be used and not a place to evangelize*. Tensions are generated with the new generations even in vocational environments due to the exclusion of those who dedicate themselves to the digital media.

Priorities - recurring themes - calls to action

Facing abuses: The variety of vocations and ministries allows those who reject the figure of the priest due to abuses, to find in the Church, through the digital lay evangelizers, the service of listening, creating bridges, and enlightening answers. Also, the sexual and power abuses within the Church have fueled hate speech in the digital environment and challenges us to regain credibility.

Ecclesial synergy: In order to give impetus to the "all ministerial" Church, we seek to promote the vocation of the digital evangelizer. The Church needs to "widen the tent" to welcome these new charisms and vocations.

Accompanying discernment: For discernment in digital media, it is necessary to

develop the listening and accompaniment of those who seek to find their vocation.

Beauty in diversity: To take advantage of the multimedia richness and potential of the networks to reflect the universal charism of the Church. To make known the beauty of the diversity of charisms, ministries, and vocations existing in the Church through digital media.

9. Structures and institutions

New or enlightening intuitions-experiences-positive aspects:

New structural channels: Digital platforms allow people of different nationalities to connect and experience the Church in an innovative way, exposing the realities of local churches, which is considered a gift.

Digital perception of the Church: The presence of the Church in the digital environment allows us to grow in transparency and confrontation, promoting a close and open attitude to questioning, listening, and dialogue.

Tensions or divergences-issues and questions-negative aspects:

Institution in the digital world: In the media, when talking about the Church, it is often associated with the problems of protocols to prevent sexual abuse, power, and mismanagement of economic resources.

Institutional communication: There is a tension between the value of the content and the formulation of the discourse, which is often coated with institutional character, making it perceived as "boring" and challenging us to adapt the form of the advertisement to a world in constant change.

Need for communication: Communication, both internal and external, will always be a challenge, but its effectiveness can be very powerful in the evangelization process. Through a proper communication strategy, it is possible to convey the message effectively and achieve a greater reach and impact in the community.

Priorities - recurring themes - calls to action:

Digital communication: The positive image of the Synod in digital natives is recognized as impactful. An important form of credibility is to communicate with transparency.

Proximity in the process: A collaborative environment between communities is seen in some cases. The missionaries are called to evangelize and also to listen closely to their pastors. There is a need for pastors to accompany and form the new missionaries of the digital spaces.

A Maternal leadership: The Church in the digital world has the responsibility to be loving, truthful, and merciful as a Mother and teacher. To achieve this, it is important to maintain an active digital ministry. It is also recommended to establish

guidelines and policies for the presence of the Church online. This is an opportunity to strengthen the figure of a Mother Church that is close to us, that serves and welcomes all those who are on the periphery.

10. Formation and spirituality

Intuitions - new or enlightening experiences - positive aspects:

Meeting environment: Social networks generate a meeting environment in which a very distant reality can become accessible, visible, and fraternal, allowing to open horizons since it presents approaches which were not foreseen. It impacts relationships with people who are distanced from the Church.

Continuous and synodal training: The rapid evolution of the digital environment has fostered a mentality of continuous training, which is necessary to keep up to date. Moreover, this environment offers unimaginable dimensions that enable interaction, collaboration, dialogue, and the exchange of diverse experiences.

Opportunities to participate: Digital environments present multiple opportunities to engage in discussions and be heard, including paying attention to the perspectives of local churches and the Universal Church. They facilitate synchronous and asynchronous modes.

Anonymity and openness: Digital environments offer the possibility of asking questions about sensitive topics without the fear of being judged or receiving negative reactions, thanks to the anonymity that can be maintained.

Tensions or divergences - issues and questions - negative aspects

Marginalization and arbitrariness: In digital environments, the message conveyed depends to a large extent on the approach of the sender. Generally, greater weight is given to information presented by those with greater influence, rather than objective truth. This can lead to the marginalization of groups whose perspectives are not accepted.

Need for formation: Many evangelizers began to create content intuitively, but there is a great need for theological formation according to the magisterium of the Church and in relation to digital communication. Also, the need for further training on issues related to the social doctrine of the Church is mentioned.

Priorities - recurring themes - calls to action

Accessible initiatives: Encouragement of formation that fosters a close relationship with God, that is attentive to the reality of people, that encourages the living of faith, stimulates participation in the sacraments and that is effectively disseminated.

Walking together: As a Church in digital environments we are called to generate synergies between formation and spirituality through prayer and formation meetings.

11. Synodal life and liturgy

New or enlightening intuitions-experiences-positive aspects:

Liturgical diversity: Digital environments draw attention to the beauty and diversity of the Church in the liturgy. The journey together is enriched by the diverse culture of each place in its liturgical experience, with the ability to maintain unity without uniformity in the different rites.

Inculturation: The importance of inculturation of the liturgy in the great cultures to reach the faithful, manifesting the universality of the Church, and avoiding ideologies.

Digital participation: The pandemic highlighted the capacity of the digital environment in the liturgical field. This experience is valued for other cases of need. For this, a normative and a catechesis that accompanies it to an adequate and complete experience is required.

Digital media as an instrument: Digital media do not replace face-to-face, especially in the sacraments and in the life of the ecclesial community, but it is an instrument that favors rapprochement, a sense of belonging, communion and accompaniment in cases of need, and in some cases a first step towards face-to-face participation.

Tensions or divergences-issues and questions-negative aspects:

In person/virtual: To the question about the absence of in person participation, the recurrent answers were: boring and long homilies, schedules not adequate for today's life, dark and sad Churches, scarce sound, and absence of beauty.

Liturgical abuses: The liturgy could be used as an ideological issue that fosters division. On the other hand, it installs a climate of distrust, also due to excesses. Celebrations in the digital media should have a regulation that safeguards them.

Distractions: The lack of formation and specific catechesis to participate in the liturgy in the digital, can lead to a praxis of doing several things simultaneously, not dedicating the exclusive and necessary time that the liturgy requires.

Isolation: If not used carefully, the digital medium can lead to a non-communal faith experience, where people end up "satisfied" with the online material and do not seek the sacraments in their community. The virtual does not trump the face-to-face, but it can elicit it.

Priorities - recurring themes - calls to action:

Formation: The potential of the digital mission presents itself as a good possibility for liturgical formation leading to a rediscovery of its value in the life of the Church. Digital creativity can foster ways to awaken the interest and love of the People of God, especially the younger ones, to fall in love with the liturgy and actively participate in it.

Belonging: The Church, called from the digital medium, in distant and difficult situations, finds a spiritual and celebratory opportunity where the Spirit manifests itself by stimulating the sense of belonging.

Theology and catechesis: Incorporate the liturgy and the kerygma into theology and catechesis, promote reflection and online participation, to provide a foundation for the Church's thinking and the transmission of the faith.

Eucharist: The mission of digital evangelizers is a great opportunity to catechize on the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the Church. Promote music, chant, and liturgical signs in liturgical celebrations.

12. Contribution of the distant

a) VISION:

Listening to the distant

The Digital Synod sought to listen to those who feel alienated and unrepresented within the Church. Among them, there are different groups. We had the opportunity to carry out "discerning listening" to those who feel marginalized, on the peripheries of the Church.

Those who believe without belonging

They do not consider themselves part of the ecclesial institution, they live an individualistic faith and only approach it in the face of vital situations or the face of predominantly social celebrations. Some affirm: "I believe in God, but not in the Church." At some point in their lives, they met a digital evangelizer and, little by little, began to follow him. These evangelizers of the digital world, like true shepherds of a flock, have been forging true communities in which fraternity and communion are growing. The lack of structures and hierarchies in the digital space makes these distant ones think and feel that they still do not belong to the Church. They do not always manage to make the step from digital to face-to-face. In any case, as the digital drives and motivates the face- to-face and as the Spirit of God is present in digital environments, these believers can come closer to Eucharistic communion.

Those who left because of anger or pain

For some reason, they made a true and genuine renunciation of the Christian faith. Catholicism and its values are no longer part of their cultural universe or their choices. They have a "dormant" faith. Although they still believe that God exists, they chose to leave the Church because of anger towards a member of the Church, because of the anti-witness of its members, or because of very great suffering that led them to distance themselves from God. With the proximity of a digital evangelizer, they meet again with the God whom they never denied completely. Thus, these distant ones begin to discover, little by little, another Church in which they do not feel like strangers. Once again, with God's grace, they begin to weave their way back to the ecclesial institution and to be present.

Those who were rejected and discriminated against

They are those who say they want to belong but are often not taken into account by the ecclesial institution because they are divorced in a second union, because of their sexual orientation, because of their position on the value of human life..., in short, because they "feel they do not fit" in an institution that asks them for a way of life to which they are not willing. So a double movement is provoked: they exclude themselves and are excluded. Many of them have been able to be received in communities that populate the digital space. Some have no faith and others live a faith "à la carte." One thing is very certain: they are not indifferent and explicitly or implicitly manifest the need to be received and accepted. They challenge the digital evangelizer to a permanent teaching of the truth with charity, like Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Jn 4:5-28).

A-religiosity, atheists and agnostics, and those who never received the Announcement

They are perhaps the most distant among the distant. The former live peacefully in religious indifference. Perhaps they never received the Announcement. Atheists and agnostics have a more reflective position. They move between indifference and criticism of the Church. The digital ecclesial sphere sometimes receives their criticism and indifference as well as the other ecclesial spheres. At other times, through the action of the Lord Jesus and the service of digital missionaries, they discover there a way of First Announcement that awakens their faith.

b) SYNTHESIS:

The digital synod was aimed at listening in a "discerning" way. It has also reached out to the distant and those who do not feel represented in the Church and was very well received. Participation took place in various forms, digital and face-to-face, synchronous and asynchronous. Members of other Christian denominations participated, as well as members of the LGBTIQ+ community, the feminist movement, non-believers, art and culture, citizen movements, digital communicators, and people with disabilities. Achieving among themselves active listening from respect for differences, being a reflection and example of the joint construction of the synodal path. As a result of the conversations held, the following aspects stand out:

Respectful dialogue: The digital synod promoted dialogue, listening, and respect, generating safe spaces to share diverse opinions. The participants valued it as a path of personal and community growth, in which they felt they were protagonists of the synodal process, and challenged to be agents of change.

Going forth to encounter: Church members who encourage open dialogue in the digital environment are valued. However, the lack of understanding and listening on the part of some evangelizers is pointed out, which is an obstacle to their approach to the Church due to the tendency to judge those who do not share the same faith and thinking. The need to be received and accepted was expressed because they feel marginalized.

Listen to all: The young people who are distanced from the Church feel in common that the Church does not pay enough attention and does not listen sufficiently to certain groups. They consider that it is not yet a welcoming space for those who come from different paths. They see listening as a mere "Christian practice", but it does not correspond to reality and it is pointed out that often the Church pretends to evangelize without dialogue and there is no horizontal communication.

Real welcome: There is a divergence in the perception of the attitude of the Church: in social networks, it seems welcoming, but in person, it is not perceived in the same way. It is observed that there is a lack of training for the accompaniment of those who suffer discrimination. The testimony of a young man with same-sex attraction illustrates this problem: "The church officially tells me that I am welcome only if... Is this a real welcome?".

Renewed language: The language used by the Church is considered institutional and unidirectional, which makes it difficult to understand for those who are not familiar with ecclesial terms. It is suggested to adapt the language to make it more human, respectful, and inclusive of daily reality. It is proposed to update and professionalize the digital formats. The testimony of a young person mentions: "If the Church is like a father... Young people prefer to talk to friends".

Digital conflicts: The relationship between believers in social networks is seen as conflictive by those who do not practice religion. They consider that faith is often used for personal purposes reflecting fanaticism or resentment. Groups take advantage of the difference to dismiss other beliefs and attack others. This attitude does not contribute to building bridges of dialogue.

Women's participation: Some note a significant presence of Christian women in digital, while others express the need for real change for greater inclusion of women in leadership positions. Restriction of women's freedom has been noted in some congregations.

Social action: In a context of great dynamism, the Church remains stagnant and too far removed from the life and needs of society today. The lack of coherence between the Church's words and actions is questioned by some who wish to see what is preached put into practice. They invite the Church to promote initiatives in favor of the poorest and neediest, encouraging volunteering and activities with young people in the digital environment.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

A complementary qualitative/quantitative approach was used during the discernment. The quantitative dimension synthesizes many words and complements the qualitative expressions, referring to complex realities. This analysis helped us to understand the participants' perception of what has already been achieved digitally with regard to the themes of the Synod. Given that the numerical ratings remained at

4 or above 4/8, we conclude that, in general terms, the participants perceive that, in the digital environment, the Church is basically performing well on the issues raised by the Synod. The ordering of the issues from the lowest to the highest degree of achievement leads us to discover nuances that complement the reflection made by the participants and is synthesized in the body of this paper. For the tables see *Appendix* (pg. 22).

Celebration and spirituality in the digital environment.

It was noted the need to study and deepen the issues related to digital Liturgical Celebrations. Eucharistic sensitivity is present and visible in digital environments. It can be observed that various initiatives are promoted around the Eucharistic adoration, both face-to-face and digital, to reach those who cannot attend.

Listening to the abandoned and excluded. Christian unity:

This listening obtained a low score. However, in the qualitative responses many missionaries pointed out that, precisely, the networks are spaces where the excluded - at least for reasons of sexual orientation, differences with the Church, or couple status - feel more welcomed. Possibly this low quantitative response points more to the exclusion of poverty and the digital divide, in which undoubtedly much remains to be done.

As for Christian unity, this evaluation depends on the countries where the missionaries are located; the more interconfessional the society is, especially if recently created Churches coexist, the more this theme emerges as a priority. In societies that are mostly Catholic and secularized, this aspect does not stand out for its perceived importance.

The option for young people, people with disabilities, and the defense of life:

It was the most criticized theme of the questionnaire because it included three very different aspects in a single item, which may reduce the validity of the average. Young people are the majority audience in social networks, and it is precisely there that they are found and can be heard. The same happens with people with certain types of disabilities (motor and mental, perhaps not visual): in the networks, they find a more friendly space for socialization and dialogue than in the face-to-face environment. On the other hand, the defense of life is a theme in itself that cannot be evaluated based on the numerical responses added to the other two themes. Some missionaries are very sensitive to this theme and many others barely touch it.

Intercultural respect and dialogue between Catholic communities:

From the quantitative dimension, these arguments are perceived as relatively high in the digital environment. We must understand this in the light of the qualitative responses: the missionaries express the importance attributed to the care of not hurting sensitivities in the different types of positionings and communities within the Church. It is, therefore, an achievement that is still in process. On the other hand, in the digital environment - as a somewhat "prophetic" place - a reduction of clericalism,

a greater co-responsibility among the faithful whatever their role and a much more visible and quality female presence are perceived. Many comments, in addition to the numerical assessment, were along these lines. The digital environment is perceived as an *area of mission*, with greater freedom and flexibility to deploy the action of the Church, without the labels associated with the various ministries.

CONCLUSIONS

Propose and project

After the listening/seeing/contemplating of the first phase of the Synod, *the digital evangelizers* addressed in this second phase the themes, which are synthetically developed in the body of this work. In this conclusion, we offer the following proposals. For this purpose, we use three globalizing lines that articulate the "main ideas" of the discernment carried out.

Making the distance close

The ecclesiology of Francis and, therefore, his pastoral proposal invites us to move from a self-referential, sedentary, and static pastoral to an open, itinerant, and ecstatic one, thus concretizing that permanent missionary process that wants to go towards everyone and reach the last ones, the forgotten ones that God does not forget. In the language of Francis: it is a matter of reaching out to the geographical and existential peripheries."T*he Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.*".

In the second phase of the Synod, we heard a cry: we must *bring the distant closer*. The digital environment made it possible to overcome the distances of different geographies and schedules to carry out community discernment and broaden the horizons of the Synod.

Digitality makes it possible to reduce the distances between believers and non-believers, and between priests and faithful... It makes possible relationships of greater equality and also helps to shorten generational distances. The missionary capacity that can be found in the networks helps to reach where usually it has not been possible, thus favoring the closeness of the Church with the people and with the new realities that are being lived.

It is a closeness that receives, includes, and embraces many who suffer and are far away. Today, when one of the greatest crises of the Church is the absence of missionaries who share a close Jesus, many digital missionaries/evangelizers are creatively engaged in bringing Jesus to the peripheries who, often unknowingly, hunger and thirst for Him and His Message. This closeness is an expression of the culture of encounter to which Francis invites us.

Thinking about "digital pastoral care

In the evangelizing mission of the Church, the different pastoral ministries (educational, catechetical, family, urban...) have been configured. Today we note the existence of digital spaces as "*locus*", going beyond the mere conception of "instrumentality". Thus, this "locus" is spontaneously inhabited by believers and non-believers and by evangelizers/digital *missionaries* who carry out their mission in these spaces. The universality of the Church is also reflected in social networks and other digital spaces. This "digital pastoral care" is all the more necessary because the reality of mission/evangelization in the networks is often carried out without proper accompaniment, formation, and guidance, leaving it open to the risk of errors and distortions.

The discernment of the second phase of the Synod invites us, therefore, to *think about a digital pastoral care*. This implies discovering and recognizing that this, in fact, exists and acts. The Spirit is blowing strongly also in the networks and digital spaces. Like a renewed Pentecost, to *think of digital pastoral care* is to experience a Church that widens its tent and, therefore, stops speaking in a monocultural language for a dialogical listening to the multiple intercultural expression of diversity. Thinking about digital pastoral care is the fruit of discernment.

The Church is called to a *pastoral conversion* to lead to a new expression in the digital pastoral and to contribute to a greater organicity and evangelizing fruitfulness in a new cultural reality. Thus, in communion and participation, co-responsibility between the hierarchical Church and the digital evangelizers would be favored, who would perceive themselves as part of a whole, and closer to Bishops, priests, and other pastoral agents of the Church.

Thinking about digital pastoral care also calls us to accompany and form the missionaries/evangelizers who carry out their mission in digital environments. They and their communities ask for this accompaniment and formation, especially the younger ones, who seek to live their friendship with Jesus, in a sincere conversion of heart. A formation that is deep and attractive in faith and at the same time, that takes into account that, for young people, beautyix is a value. "*The various forms of beauty that are valued in different cultural settings, and even those unconventional forms of beauty, which may be of little significance to evangelizers, but which have become particularly attractive to others*" (EG 167).

Building networks.

On many occasions, digital evangelizers are alone with their community. Not only because of the lack of relationships with other pastoral ministries but also because of the lack of links with other communities in the digital space. Especially young people value social networks as a meeting space. They want to feel part of it, they express the need for a response, to know that what they say is listened to. It is necessary to help them to make the ecclesial experience of communication and communion. Transcend their small community to meet other communities living in the same space.

Digital environments, which bring the distant closer, have all the potential to facilitate encounters. By weaving networks, communities that are accompanied by digital evangelizers can more clearly manifest their condition as an ecclesial community. There is also the Church that evangelizes and makes possible the flow of the Life of Grace in abundance in these spaces.

Path to communion, participation, and mission

Pastoral conversion: With the digital missionaries we affirm that we have tried to realize the experience of a synodal Church on the road to conversion. With them, we also recognize that there is still a long road to travel. The Spirit of God urges us and assists us in personal and community conversion in order to continue on a path of *communion, participation, and mission*.

Existential peripheries: The Digital Synod reached out to the young and the distant. Precisely, it is young people who can greatly help the Church to discover the potential of the digital space as an evangelizing environment, especially through networking. For this reason, it is necessary to have a more active presence of the Church in the digital space, accompanying digital evangelizers more closely. This is a great appeal to the Church, especially to the Pastors.

Synodal culture: On the path of conversion, which we continue to follow, the Church has the opportunity to continue to grow in synodality. *The ecclesial communities that inhabit the digital space are also called to build a synodal culture in their own spheres*. It is a single Church that, with different pastoral approaches and diverse languages, wants to reach out to all, with the Grace of God, freely manifested in Jesus Christ.

Divine presence: The digital environment is a space where the Spirit can also manifest itself. It is an environment that can touch lives and, as all that is human, welcomes the divine, also in the digital space, women and men of today can meet God and feel invited to set out on the path towards Eucharistic communion. The digital pushes and accompanies us towards the face-to-face.

New Pentecost: Mary and the Apostles gathered in the cenacle, at the arrival of the Spirit, opened the doors to announce the kerygma, and were understood by all in their own languages. Digital missionaries must, with the power of the Spirit, penetrate the cultures in their languages to announce the kerygma.

"... let us not forget that walking together and recognising ourselves in communion with one another in the Holy Spirit entails a change, a growth that can only take place, as Benedict XVI wrote, 'starting from the intimate encounter with God ..."

(Pope Francis)

XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS

FOR THE FIRST SESSION

(OCTOBER 2023)

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)
DP	GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD, *For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission. Preparatory Document* (2021)
DTC	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)

"The path to Christian unity and the path of synodal conversion of the Church are linked..."

(Pope Francis)

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"... the current Synod is - and must be - a journey according to the Spirit: not a parliament to claim rights and needs according to the world's agenda, not an opportunity to go where the wind takes us, but an opportunity to be docile to the breath of the Spirit."

(Pope Francis)

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 sessions[1] (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

[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.

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).

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 **cquestions 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

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

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 reference[3], 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.

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.

[3] The expression "local Church" here indicates what the Code of canon law calls the "particular Church".

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 Spiri**"[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.

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

A1. 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 **ua 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 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.

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

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 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, **ua 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. 18).

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 conversationin the Spirit

A dynamic of discernment in the synodal Church

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.

Silence, prayer and listening to the Word of God

«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 & 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 in my chest?"

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?"

Fynal 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 Y*oung 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.

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.

B1. 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,**

[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".

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.

B2. 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 gifts[8]. 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]to 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

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

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.

B3. 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 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?**

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

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

"Remember this, call everyone: the righteous, sinners, the healthy, the sick, everyone, everyone."

(Pope Francis)

"We must "pray" deeds and put prayer "to work". In this way we will be in tune with the mission of the entire Church. This is also the essence of synodality, what makes us feel protagonists and co-responsible for the wellbeing of the Church, to know how to integrate differences and work in ecclesial harmony."

(Pope Francis)

XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

WORKSHEETS FOR THE SYNODAL ASSEMBLY

(FIRST SESSION – OCTOBER 2023)

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. 30), 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.

Co-responsibility
in mission
A communion
that radiates
For a synodal
church
Participation,
governance and authority

A Communion that radiates ..... B 1

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.

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

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?

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?

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

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?

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

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?

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

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

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

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.

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.

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

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?

Co-responsibility in Mission ..... B 2

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

B 2.1 Come camminare insieme verso una consapevolezza condivisa del significato e del contenuto della missione?

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 account[15];

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,

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

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.

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?

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

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?

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

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?

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

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?

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

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?

Participation, governance and authority ..... B 3

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.

e) the Continental Assemblies also point to experiences in which power and decision-making processes have been appropriated by some in positions of authority

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

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?

What processes, structures and institutions are needed 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?

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].

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

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

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?

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?

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

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