



Original text: English

1st General Congregation
October 2, 2024

**PRESENTATION OF THE REPORTS OF THE 10 WORKING GROUPS
ESTABLISHED BY POPE FRANCIS**

Group 3

The Mission in the Digital Environment (SR 17)

Introduction

How is the synodal Church on mission called to be in the world today? The [*Synthesis Report of the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*](#) recognizes that the synodal Church is on mission in a digital culture:

Digital culture represents a fundamental change in the way we conceive of reality and consequently relate to ourselves, one another, our surroundings, and even to God. (...) Digital culture, then, is not so much a distinct area of mission as a crucial dimension of the Church's witness in contemporary culture. This is why it holds special significance in a synodal Church.¹

Today our family of faith is called to go forth within this digital culture, the interconnected, dynamic, global context created by digital technologies where engagement, communication, and activities occur through electronic means rather than in physical spaces. This environment is now “indistinguishable from the sphere of everyday life.”² It is a new missionary page in the life of the Church, allowing us to reach out to the peripheries, to those who are far away, to those who are searching and who have fallen by the wayside.

Those gathered at the First Session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023 saw that being present in the digital environment makes it possible to have an impact on contemporary culture and to extend a hand to those who need it right where they are, and in many cases to be a first proclamation of the Lord in a world that does not know Him. To proclaim the Gospel effectively in our contemporary culture, we must discern the opportunities and challenges presented by this new dimension of the “place” of the Synodal church on mission, a fluid place that involves a dynamic of inculturation of the Church in the digital culture that shapes our way of life today.

¹ XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, First Session, *Synthesis Report: A Synodal Church in Mission*, 17a-b (SR)

² *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 53rd World Communications Day*, “We are members one of another (Eph 4:25). From social network communities to the human community” (24 January 2019).

In response to the [Letter of the Holy Father to Cardinal Grech](#), the General Secretariat of the Synod has constituted Study Group 3 to address this topic of “the mission in the digital environment” in light of the Synthesis Report.³ Study Group 3’s mandate is “to investigate the implications at the theological, spiritual and canonical level and identify the requirements at the structural, organizational and institutional level to fulfill the digital mission. ‘Renewed attention is needed to the question of the languages we use to speak to people’s minds and hearts in a wide diversity of contexts in a way that is both beautiful and accessible.’”⁴

Group Composition and Approach

Study Group 3 brings together expertise from various sectors of the Church and academia to address the complexities of the Church’s mission in the digital environment.

Our approach is firmly rooted in the synodal method, emphasizing listening, discernment, and adaptation, to ensure that we incorporate a wide range of perspectives, particularly those of young people, into our work. Following the structure laid out in our work plan, our efforts are organized into phases, and include a review of existing reports from prior synodal phases; a series of listening efforts; and focused working groups to explore our questions surrounding the mission in the digital environment in a comprehensive and thoughtful way.

Substantive Questions

Our work is guided by five key questions:

1. What can a missionary synodal Church learn from greater immersion in the digital environment?
2. How can digital mission be integrated more routinely into the life of the Church and into Church structures, deepening the implications of the new digital missionary frontier for the renewal of existing parish and diocesan structures (cf. SR 17j)?
3. What adaptations to the digital environment does the notion of jurisdiction mainly linked to a geographical territory require?
4. What are practical recommendations or proposals regarding the church’s mission in the digital environment?
5. Do you have any other input or good practices to share on this topic and possibly any other questions or challenges that need to be addressed in this journey of further study?

Progress Overview

We have made significant progress to date, adhering closely to the work plan’s directives as we move towards a substantive understanding of the Church’s mission in the digital environment:

- **Synthesis of Existing Reports:** We have conducted an extensive review of reports and data from previous synodal phases, including resources from national and continental stages, providing a comprehensive foundation for our ongoing analysis.
- **Listening Efforts:** We have initiated a series of listening efforts in alignment with the work plan’s emphasis on inclusive engagement, and more will follow. We have asked all the episcopal conferences’ communication offices to answer the questions above, and also engaged voices from youth networks, those involved with digital culture, those

³ See especially Chapter 17.

⁴ Id., quoting SR 51.

involved in the Church Listens to You effort, those involved with the Dicastery for Communication's pastoral reflection on engagement on social media ("Towards Full Presence"), and many others, helping ensure that our work reflects a broad spectrum of experiences and insights. We welcome submissions of answers to our questions from others as well.

- **Working Groups:** We are in the process of establishing several working groups that will focus on responding to the substantive questions in a more sustained approach, particularly as they relate to key themes such as integrating digital mission strategies into Church structures and addressing the legal and ethical challenges posed by digital jurisdiction, as outlined in the work plan.

Next Steps

As we move forward, we will continue our listening efforts, seeking to broaden our engagement by including more diverse voices, especially from underrepresented regions, and continuing to follow a synodal approach. By the end of January 2025, we plan to begin to synthesize key findings and emerging patterns, and will work to refine our conclusions. The final phase of our work will consolidate our findings into a full report, offering actionable recommendations to the Holy Father for enhancing the Church's mission in the digital environment. Our plan is to ensure that our work remains aligned with the work plan, is systematic, and is focused on delivering meaningful outcomes.

Conclusion

We are called as a family of faith to witness to Jesus Christ in every culture. Today we live in a digital culture, and so we must discern how best to reach that culture "in all spaces where people seek meaning and love,"⁵ reconnecting digital encounters with physical ones, weaving the communion that unites us, with the aim of encountering people wherever they live. We believe that "gathered together by God the Father, in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit," it will become possible "...to understand what the Lord is asking us to do and to be prepared to do it."⁶ We trust that the Holy Spirit will lead our Synodal church as we walk together on this path forward.

⁵ SR 17.

⁶ *How to be a synodal Church on Mission: Five perspectives for theological exploration in view of the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* at 4.