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1st General Congregation
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**PRESENTATION OF THE REPORTS OF THE 10 WORKING GROUPS
ESTABLISHED BY POPE FRANCIS**

Group 6

**The revision, in a synodal missionary perspective, of the documents
touching on the relationship between Bishops,
consecrated life, and ecclesial associations (SR 10)**

1. Outline/Revision of the Topic

The *Synthesis Report* asked for a more profound exploration of the way the relationships between pastors, consecrated men and women, members of ecclesial movements and new communities can better explain themselves and stand together at the service of communion and mission (cf. SR 10f).

Consecrated life is a gift, a sign of God in the different areas of life, leaven for the growth of a more just and fraternal society, prophecy of sharing with the least and the poor, an example of synodal style. It takes place within the local Church and can be present in a significant way in the universal communion of the different local Churches. Similarly, the different Ecclesial Associations – Lay Associations, Ecclesial Movements and new Communities (AEMNCs) – are privileged places of maturity and exercise of shared ecclesial responsibility in relational and professional life, in the service of charity and human promotion, cultural commitment and models of synodal communion and participation in view of the mission.

The vocations to the lay life, to the ordained ministry and to the consecrated life are at the service of one another, for the growth of the People of God in history and for its mission in the world; the Bishop is at the service of communion and his task can be understood in the interplay of relationships with the portion of the People of God entrusted to him. Hierarchical communion and synodality are the two keys to interpret ecclesial relationships: they apply as trust and fraternity (MR 9) starting from the common condition of being baptized in the differentiation of roles (principles of equality and functional diversity). The variety of charismatic forms and expressions of consecrated life and the AEMNCs is a call to recognize the fertility of collaboration in the mission.

There are differences and nuances in the way of living the relationship between Bishops and consecrated life in different regions and continents. In Latin America, collaboration between the Conferences of Bishops and of Religious is effective and regular; in Africa, it is more difficult to integrate them at the local, regional, and continental level. In Asia, the relationship is more

challenging: there is no synodal approach and consecrated life is not recognized as a gift; rather, it is mainly seen in a functional way, with a risk of abusive dynamics.

With the task of providing elements to review the “guiding criteria on the relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church” proposed in the 1978 document *Mutuae Relationes*, the following will be taken into account: the scriptural contexts that enlighten the relationships between Bishops and consecrated people; the ecclesiological contexts where such relationships are mostly found and therefore the fundamental principles of ecclesial communion, synodality, and mission that lead them; the practical application and the implications of charismatic and hierarchical gifts and their coessentiality.

Starting from the biblical foundation, efforts will be made to use a narrative style, referring to or briefly recalling the necessary ecclesiological principles, and avoiding repeating the doctrinal study already conducted in MR; with the commitment to avoid the “verticalization” of relationships (e.g.: Institutes of Consecrated Life → Bishop; AEMNC → Bishop) and emphasize the communion relationship among everybody, with the Bishop as a principle of unity of the whole portion of the People of God entrusted to him. Special attention will be given to the phase of discernment of the new Institutes, new forms of Consecrated Life and lay associations, with regard to the criteria for the recognition of the ecclesial nature of the charisms and the principles for discerning them (cf. IE 18).

To provide an overview of the situation of the AEMNCs, it is essential to consider the variety of their ecclesial contexts. A brief introduction to the diverse associative world will be made to define its scope (e.g. no clerical associations), clarifying whether it refers to the relationships with all AEMNCs (of diocesan right, of national right, of pontifical right), providing the necessary distinctions concerning the areas of relation with the Bishop, deepening his specific responsibilities regarding the legal conditions of AEMNCs sodality members, and the *ius moderandi* within local Churches and in relation to the ecclesial associations.

Places and means will be identified to promote “meetings and forms of collaboration in a synodal spirit between Episcopal Conferences and the Conferences of Superiors and Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life” (SR 10h), as well as organic relations between AEMNCs and the life of the local Churches, starting with the configuration of the Consultation Bodies and Councils in which the representatives of the ecclesial associations converge (cf. SR 10i).

2. **Methodology**

- Work divided in three subgroups based on thematic paths, in synodal style:
 - I. *Relations between Bishops and Consecrated Men and Women;*
 - II. *Collaboration between Conferences of Bishops and Conferences of Superiors and Major Superiors;*
 - III. *Relations between Ecclesial Associations and Local Churches.*
- Interaction between subgroups, in synodal style.
- Synodal method used in the First Assembly in October 2023 adapted to this group’s work.
- Research of existing good practices, places, and means to promote relationships in synodal style.

- Listening to Bishops and representatives of Consecrated Life, in its different forms (Unions of Major Superiors and Superiors General, Secular Institutes, *Ordo virginum*, Monastic Life), and AEMNC delegates.
- Enhancement of contributions emerging from the experience of the competent Dicasteries, Bishops, representatives of Consecrated Life in its different forms and AEMNC delegates.

3. **Work plan**

The documents of the Church will be further explored to carry out a joint reflection on the identification of core theological and ecclesiological principles related to the relationship between Bishops and consecrated people, and Ecclesial Associations.

Current experiences will be shared in order to identify practical and concrete ways to apply such principles. Communication style will be refined to make it understandable, accurate, and inspiring, as an expression of communion, synodality, and mission.

Through meetings and online exchanges, the group aims to provide its contribution by June 2025.