



## Press Conference for the Presentation of the Continental Phase of the Synodal Process 2021-2023



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#### Intervention by Father Giacomo Costa, SJ

1. In the wake of the Diocesan Phase, the Continental Phase we continue the consultation of the People of God for Synod 2021-2023. **The main objective remains listening**, guided by the fundamental question that inspired the first year of this journey. The question is: “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). This question helps us to focus on a very important point: the Synod is not an opportunity to address all the problems of the Church in a generic way, but rather places them in a specific perspective, that of seeking the way to walk forward together in order to proclaim the Gospel. It is therefore always a question of “**listening in order to walk together.**”

Walking together in this upcoming Continental Phase means making an effort **to respect and value the originality of each local Church**, without imposing the same approach on everyone, as well as **seeking relationships, perspectives, and paths** that can be shared between neighbouring Churches across a vast territory.

The Diocesan Phase has built a web of relationships between individuals and groups down to the parish level, both within and outside the Christian community. The Continental Phase aims to broaden this dynamic, investing in relations between neighbouring Churches and Bishops’ Conferences, within what we have referred to as “Continents,” even if this should not be understood in a strictly geographical sense.

An internal task force of the General Secretariat closely accompanies each continent, not in order to impose an identical model for all of them, which is not the aim, but rather ensuring that each continent finds an approach that is adapted to its circumstances in order to create an opportunity for exchange, comparison, and contrast.

2. The great novelty of the Synod 2021-2023 is, therefore, that the consultation is also carried out through **a dialogue between the universal Church and the local Churches**. Indeed, this is precisely the specificity of the Continental Phase. The Synod is not a process of gradual abstraction that gradually becomes detached from reality, but **a circular process of dialogue. We want a back-and-forth circularity between those who are invited to listen and those who are listened to**, obviously within the realm of possibility, with a great willingness on the part of the General Secretariat to learn from what is received, and even to review the way things work. But in concrete terms, how will this dialogue occur during the Continental Phase?

- a. The starting point is the contributions that the General Secretariat of the Synod has received from the Diocesan Phase.
- b. We are currently in the process of drafting a text that is the fruit of listening to all these voices: the Document for the Continental Phase (DCP). This is a delicate task: it must not only reflect all the voices that we have heard, but also **choose (or rather discern) the key points** that emerge from the consultations in relation to the fundamental question of the Synod. I will speak about this DCP in greater detail in a moment.

- c. Once drafted and approved, **this DCP will be sent back to all dioceses and episcopal conferences**. This is not about repeating what was done during the Diocesan Phase. The Bishops' Conferences have shared their experiences; they are now called to see, via the DCP, how their experience compares and contrasts with that of other particular Churches in the world, in a process which culminates in the Continental Gatherings.
- d. There is a precise aim for this process: to recognise within the DCP **the intuitions** that need to be highlighted from their continental perspective and the questions that need to be addressed. But above all, the most ambitious and therefore the most difficult objective is to identify priorities.
- e. We hope that the Continental Gatherings will also have a dialogical structure. They will include a phase in Ecclesial Assembly, with a rich representation of all the components of the people of God. Then there will be a phase in Episcopal Assembly. In a perspective of "circularity" and dialogue, **we hope that after the Continental Gathering, the bishops will find ways to "return" the text to the whole People of God before sending it to the General Secretariat**, so that it can be corroborated by as broad and conscious an ecclesial consensus as possible.
- f. From the syntheses produced at continental level, the *Instrumentum laboris* will then be drawn up which, in practice, will outline the agenda of the Synodal Assembly of October 2023.

3. In the light of the dynamics we have just outlined, it is clear **that the DCP is a key instrument for dialogue**, between the local Churches amongst themselves as well with the universal Church. **The text is and must remain a tool**: what really counts is that relationships are established, dialogue is engaged, and priorities are identified.

What's more: the process of drafting the DCP is not a pure synthesis or distillation of the material received, since even a machine produce a generic list of the most recurrent terms. Rather, the drafting of the DCP is **a journey of listening to the Holy Spirit and discerning together**: it will take place in an atmosphere of prayer, listening to the Word of God, celebrating with one another, and sharing moments of silence.

The work of drafting the DCP is entrusted to a group composed of the General Secretary (Card. Grech), the Under-Secretaries, and some officials of the General Secretariat of the Synod, as well as the members of the Coordination Committee, in addition to 25 other persons, **chosen in such a way as to ensure a certain variety in terms of geographical origin, ecclesial role** (diocesan priests, religious men and women, laity), and **gender**. These 25 'experts' were not chosen to inject their ideas into the DCP, but to be the instrument through which the voice of the People of God from all parts of the world can be heard. This is a role of service.

In particular, the documents received from across the world have been divided and allocated in such a way that each one will be read several times by different people and therefore from different perspectives. Each person will draw up a summary sheet for each document read and an analysis or summary sheet, highlighting what seems particularly significant. **What is important is not only what comes up most frequently**. It may also be something that may only appear in one contribution, but which sheds new light on things, makes them clearer or even opening up a promising way forward.

**Starting September 21, 2022, the whole group will meet for two weeks of working together**, which will consist of three stages:

- a. First, we will compare the results of the different readings in order to obtain an overview, or rather to bring out more and more clearly the deepest cores and the most significant elements,

according to the criteria that I have just outlined. On this basis, a first draft of the DCP will be drawn up.

- b. The second stage is the writing stage: everyone will be asked to provide parts of the text relating to the different core nuclei identified. In order to give homogeneity to the text, the final drafting will be entrusted to two editors (one woman and one man, both lay people) and will be done simultaneously in two languages (Italian and English). This is the first time this has happened, but proceeding in this way guarantees a progressive refinement of the text beyond the idiosyncratic expressions of a single culture.
- c. The final stage is verification and approval, through a personal and collective rereading of the text aloud, in which those ultimately responsible for the text will participate, namely the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat, as well as some members of the four Commissions constituted in the General Secretariat to serve the synodal journey (who will participate remotely).

We will do our best to have the DCP ready by the end of October, at least in the main languages. We are aware that this process has its limits, the foremost among which is *time*. But it is also **an innovative – and even pioneering – process: it is a consultation in dialogue**, which has never happened before. The text of the DCP, once produced, will again be entrusted to the reflection and prayer of all the People of God and to their sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*). This reassures us. We are doing our utmost to try and walk together.