



**SECRETARIA GENERALIS
SYNODI**

Prot. N. 220236

A MESSAGE

for the 19th SECAM PLENARY ASSEMBLY in Accra, Ghana

25 July-1 August 2022

THEME: Ownership of SECAM: Security and Migration in Africa and the Islands

On this auspicious occasion of the 19th SECAM Plenary Assembly, I send you cordial and fraternal greetings from the Secretariat for the Synod. As you are aware, the Universal Church is on a journey of synodality. As the Pope reminded the People of God, in his homily at the inaugural Mass, the synodal process calls every Church, people and nation “to become experts in the art of encounter,” “to listen with the heart” to Jesus, to one another and to the Holy Spirit; and, finally, to enter into “a process of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment, that unfolds in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God.” It bears reminding ourselves that the objective of the synod is “to provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term” (*Vademecum*, 1.3).

This General Assembly is a graced occasion for you as leaders of the church in Africa to encounter and listen to one another and to discern the path that the Spirit of the Risen Christ is calling you to take. The themes that you have chosen are pertinent, urgent and consequential. You will no doubt have much to say about the ownership of SECAM, which, according to the post-synodal exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* “is the institution of the organic pastoral solidarity of the Church hierarchy in Africa” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 16, 1995).

During this assembly you also plan to study, discuss and address the twin issues of “Security and Migration in Africa and the Islands.” The gravity of these issues and many conflicts assailing the continent is obvious. The fact that you moved the venue of this General Assembly from Burkina Faso to Ghana is an example of the violence and instability confronting many African countries. Across the continent of Africa and the Islands, growing insecurity poses a constant threat to lives, properties and livelihoods. This is particularly worrisome when the perpetrators and instigators of such insecurity and violence adhere to the

bogus claim that they do so “in the name of God” or are compelled by their religious beliefs. The sobering words of Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI during the opening of the Second African Synod in 2009 captured this reality of insecurity anchored in religious fundamentalism: "They are doing so in the name of God, but with a logic that is opposed to divine logic: teaching and working not with love and respect for freedom, but with intolerance and violence."

While the primary responsibility for addressing this evil lies with political and civil authorities, the church in Africa bears a preponderant responsibility to work tirelessly for reconciliation, justice and peace, as the Second African Synod declared.

When there is a fire in the house, the inhabitants cannot sleep in peace. With such an alarming situation of insecurity, it is hardly surprising that many people are obliged to flee and to seek safety and security elsewhere. The phenomenon of migration from the continent of Africa is disturbing, especially when it concerns young Africans. Daily we hear news and reports of young Africans attempting to cross the Sahara, the Mediterranean and all manner of borders and barriers in search of greener pastures, security and safety. The actual death toll of migrants will perhaps never be known. Their pain, suffering and death are lamentable and call us to action as the disciples of the Risen Christ. Thankfully, you will occupy yourselves with and focus your deliberations on these evils of our times.

Why do you care about security and migration? Why should any member of the church care about them? The answer lies in one word – **communion**. Our faith tells us that we form one body: we are the body of Christ and if one part of this body hurts or is in pain, we are all affected (1 Corinthians 12:26). As an African proverb goes, if one finger touches oil, it soils the others. Our faith forbids us to ignore the suffering and pain of our fellow sisters and brothers. In solidarity, compassion and mercy, we make their pain our pain, their suffering our suffering and their agony our agony. True communion calls us not only to announce the Gospel in words, but to experience it as a lived reality of solidarity with one another, especially the most vulnerable, marginalized and excluded in our midst.

Communion leads us to **mission**. The suffering, pain and hurt that we see in these phenomena of insecurity and migration do not leave us indifferent. They summon us to act as people of faith; they call us to fulfil the mandate and the mission of Matthew 25: “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, that you do unto me.” It is also a call to assume and fulfil the mission of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), to descend from our pedestal of indifference and to bathe the wounds of our sisters and brothers who are blighted by insecurity, violence, displacement, forced migration, poverty and intolerance. Our communion, therefore, gives us a strong impetus to mission.

Together, communion and mission imply that we are in this together – whether we are dealing with ownership of SECAM, security or migration, nobody is exempt: all are called to full **participation** in discerning the problems, in listening to one another and in discerning what the Holy Spirit is saying to the People of God, the Body of Christ, in Africa and beyond.

As you can appreciate, the themes of **communion, participation** and **mission** are at the centre of the ongoing Synod on Synodality. Even as you address these topical and consequential issues, synodality offers you an effective means, a solid method, a shared orientation and a common path. You do not take this path alone; you are journeying, walking and working together.

To return to the point that I began with, drawing on the insight of Pope Francis, a time such as this General Assembly is a time for encountering one another, for listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit, and for discerning the will of God for the church. Your General Assembly is a moment of synodality. The theme of this Assembly may seem remotely or hardly connected to the experience of synodality, but all of us are called to become architects and artisans of synodality in whatever context we find ourselves. As SECAM, in the context of your deliberations on ownership, security and migration, the Spirit of the Risen Christ does not abandon you; you are not bereft of the special grace of God to live this moment as an intense and renewing experience of synodality.

In saying this, I wish to draw your attention to the fact that Africa possesses a special gift for the church, especially during this journey of synodality. The rich traditions and life-affirming cultures of Africa are a fertile soil for incarnating the meaning of synodality. Africa is a synodal continent; it shows in the various practices of encounter listening and discernment, such as Palaver, Baraza and Indaba. Synodality in Africa is underpinned by the cardinal principle of Ubuntu which prioritizes the humanity, dignity and mutuality of every human being created in the image and likeness of God. As you enter into this General Assembly, I encourage not to hide the gifts and contribution of Africa for the edification of a truly synodal church. Let your gathering be a moment of true encounter, deep listening and authentic spiritual discernment.

The synodal journey is now advancing towards the second phase: the continental synodal assemblies – there will be seven in all. The aim of this stage is to offer the opportunity to the people of God in every continent to make “a spiritual reading” of the synthesis of the results of the consultation – or better still of the discernment – that was done throughout the whole Catholic Church and to make a further ecclesial discernment of the same **Document for the Continental Stage** using the tools which are specifically yours – such as your human and spiritual experiences, the hermeneutics and exegesis developed in your ecclesial communities, your religious traditions, your rich culture, your liturgy and rites etc. In this way all the Churches in the different continents are being offered the opportunity to share their spiritual richness with the whole Church! The conclusions of each continental synodal assembly, will be collected in a document which will then be sent to our Secretariat; subsequently, we will compile the document for the general assembly of the Synod of bishops that is scheduled for October 2023.

In order to assist and accompany the Church in every continent in the preparations and organization of this continental synodal assembly, at our Secretariat we set up a task force. Mr. Mauricio López Oropeza who is participating in your assembly in his capacity as Director

of Pastoral Action of the Latin American Episcopal Council - CELAM, is by my delegation as General Secretary of the Synod, the coordinator of the task force which is leading the continental phase of the Synod. I asked Mauricio to present to you all that corresponds to the continental phase of the Synod so that the Church in your continent could continue to offer its unique contribution in this synodal process.

Dear brothers and sisters, may you have a good journey together during this General Assembly! May you be pilgrims in love with the Gospel, rooted in the rich and life-giving traditions and cultures of Africa, and open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit. As you deliberate on the ownership of SECAM, security and migration in Africa and the Islands, may you not miss out on the grace-filled opportunities born of encounter, listening and discernment. May the Lord meet you with love, mercy and joy.

Vatican, 21st July 2022

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mario Card. Grech". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'M' and 'G'.

Mario Card. GRECH

General Secretary