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Continental Stage comes to an end

The consultation also ends but not the dialogue with the People of God

On Friday, 31 March 2023, the Continental Stage, that is, the second stage of the synodal process, officially ended and with it the time of broad-based consultation of the People of God. The inclusion of a time to listen, dialogue and discern among the Churches of the same geographical area after the Local Stage (diocesan and national) represented a new feature that was introduced by this synodal process.

This new stage was not confined to the mere celebration of seven continental assemblies, but was a real process of listening and discernment on a continental level. The question that formed the basis for these assemblies was the same and unique question of the synodal process as a whole, namely: How is our 'walking together' which enables the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accord with the mission entrusted to her, being achieved today at the different levels (from local to universal)? (PD No. 2).

Following the principle of subsidiarity, the organisation of this part of the process and the respective continental synodal assemblies were entrusted to local Organising Committees (or Task Forces) that were mostly part of the International Reunions of Bishops' Conferences or the Eastern Catholic Churches. However, a special Task Force of the General Secretariat of the Synod accompanied their work. The heads of the General Secretariat of the Synod and the General Rapporteur of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops ensured the presence of at least one of them in each continental assembly as a testimony of the closeness and desire of the Holy See to listen to the particular Churches.

The seven assemblies that, from the beginning of February to the end of March, have marked this time of the synod's journey, were all ecclesial assemblies, that is, representative of the People of God (bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, laity). Their aim was to respond to the three questions contained in the DCS (no. 106) published on 27 October ([for more details](#)). Participants in these assemblies sought first to identify the 'resonances' aroused by reading the DCS and second, to indicate tensions and priorities. It was comforting to note how the participants in the continental assemblies recognized themselves in the paths identified in the DCS, notwithstanding that each one came from their own ecclesial and cultural perspectives which were sometimes profoundly different. The fruit of their discussions is contained in the **Final Document** that each Assembly produced and that will serve as a contribution to the work of the first session of the Synod of Bishops (4-29 October 2023).

These documents were the fruit of an authentically synodal journey, respectful of the process so far, reflecting the voice of the People of God on each Continent. These seven continental documents will form the basis of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the working document for the first session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. It is now up to the Preparatory Commission, set up by the General Secretariat of the Synod, ([read more](#)), to organise the working group called to produce it.

All assemblies have been a graced time for the Church. In addition to emphasising the great desire for renewal by walking together in unity with Christ, the continental process revealed deep joy and the love of so many faithful for their Church, the People of God, despite its shortcomings and weaknesses as well as the importance of listening as a tool and permanent dynamic of ecclesial life. These assemblies also

confirmed the decision to opt for the method of “spiritual conversation” to foster true listening and community discernment in order to reach ecclesial consensus.

The General Secretariat of the Synod expresses its heartfelt gratitude to all those who have engaged in this process with great seriousness and enthusiasm. The Continental Stage led to a greater awareness of the importance of walking together in the Church as a communion of communities, strengthening the dialogue between Particular Churches and the Universal Church.

The conclusion of the consultation does not mean the end of the synodal process within the People of God; nor does it mean the interruption of the dialogue between the Universal Church and the Particular Church. Rather, it means leaving the local communities with the challenge of putting those "synodal reforms" into practice in the daily routine of their ecclesial action, in the knowledge that much of what has been discussed and identified so far at the local level does not require the discernment of the universal Church nor the intervention of the Magisterium of Peter.

The Final Documents published so far are available [here](#).