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ORIGINAL TEXT: ITALIAN

The Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

1. Who participates in the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?

Up to now, the regulations in force referred to the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, which in defining who the members are refers to can. 346 of the CIC.

Can. 346 - § 1. A synod of bishops assembled in an ordinary general session consists of members of whom the greater part are bishops elected for each session by the conferences of bishops according to the method determined by the special law of the synod; others are designated by virtue of the same law; others are appointed directly by the Roman Pontiff; to these are added some members of clerical religious institutes elected according to the norm of the same special law.

This resulted in the following composition:

- the President (the Holy Father) who appointed:
 - the delegated President(s)
 - the General Relator
 - the Special Secretary(ies)

For the Oriental Catholic Churches sui iuris

- the Patriarchs, the Major Archbishops, the Metropolitans of the Metropolitan Churches *sui iuris* of the Oriental Catholic Churches or, in case of impediment, the Bishop, possibly competent in the matter to be dealt with, designated by the Patriarch, the Major Archbishop, the Metropolitan of the Metropolitan Church *sui iuris*, with the consent of the Synod of Bishops or the Council of Hierarchs of the Church over which they preside;
- Bishops **elected*** by the Synod of Bishops and the Councils of Hierarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches;

For Episcopal Conferences

- Bishops **elected*** by the Episcopal Conferences;

To these were added

- the members of the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod;
- those Heads of the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia invested with the *munus episcopale* (i.e. [arch]bishops), indicated by the Roman Pontiff;
- ten clerics belonging to Institutes of Consecrated Life, elected by their respective organisations representing the Superiors General;
- other persons appointed by the Roman Pontiff, including some clerics who are not bishops.

2. What are the changes in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops?

The current norms for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly continue to be based on the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* with some modifications and new features to the composition of the Assembly and the kinds of participants. These modifications which are warranted within the context of the synodal process will not, however, change the episcopal nature of the Assembly.

1st modification

Even (arch)dioceses that are not part of an Episcopal Conference may elect a bishop;

2nd Modification

The ten clerics belonging to Institutes of Consecrated Life, elected by the respective organisations representing the Superiors General, are no longer present. They have been replaced by five women religious and five men religious belonging to Institutes of Consecrated Life, elected by the respective organisations representing the Superiors General. As members they have the right to vote.

3rd Modification

There are no longer auditors. Instead an additional 70 non-bishop members have been added who represent various groupings of the faithful of the People of God (priests, consecrated women, deacons, lay faithful) and who come from the local Churches. They will be chosen by the Pope from among a list of 140 people selected (and *not elected*) by the five International Reunions of Bishops' Conferences (CELAM, CCEE, SECAM, FABC, FCBCO), the Assembly of Patriarchs of Eastern Catholic Churches and, jointly, by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Canada (20 for each of these ecclesial realities). The territorial distribution adopted for the celebration of the Continental Synodal Assemblies of the Continental Stage was followed. It is requested that 50% of them be women and that the presence of young people also be emphasised. In selecting them, account is taken not only of their general culture and prudence, but also of their knowledge, both theoretical and practical, as well as their participation in various capacities in the synod process. As members, they have the right to vote.

Furthermore, in addition to the 70 non-bishop members mentioned above, it is worth mentioning that it will also be possible to have non-bishop members among the pontifically appointed members.

4th Modification

The representatives of the Dicasteries that will participate are those indicated by the Holy Father.

3. How does the election of members take place?

- The elected Members of the Ordinary General Assembly (referred to above as elected*), as well as their substitutes, are elected in plenary session and by secret ballot by the respective Synods of Bishops, Councils of Hierarchs of the Oriental Catholic Churches and Episcopal Conferences.
- These elections are carried out according to the norms of the C.I.C., Canon 119, 1°, and of the C.C.E.O., Canon 956, § 1. If more than one Member is to be elected, one ballot shall be held for each election.
- The five women religious and five men religious belonging to Institutes of Consecrated Life are elected by the respective organisations representing the Superiors General (for the women's branch: the UISG) and the Superiors General (for the men's branch: the USG).
- The 70 non-bishop members are identified by the International Meetings of Bishops' Conferences and the Assembly of Patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches, but not elected.

4. How is the number of Members to be elected determined?

The number of Members to be elected is determined as follows

- one representative (and one substitute) are elected for each Synod of Bishops or Council of Hierarchs of the Oriental Catholic Churches having between 26 and 50 members; two representatives (and one substitute) are elected if it has more than 50 members.
- one representative (and one substitute) are elected for each Bishops' Conference which has no more than 25 members; two representatives (and one substitute) are elected if its membership falls between 26 to 50 members; three representatives (and two substitutes) are elected if its membership falls between 51 to 100 members; four representatives (and two substitutes) are elected if its membership falls between 101 to 200 members; five representatives (and three substitutes) are elected by conferences with over 200 members.

It is also required that

- In the election of the Bishops, account be taken not only of their general culture and prudence, but also of their knowledge, both theoretical and practical, of the subject matter to be dealt with in the Assembly.
- The Heads of the Oriental Catholic Churches and the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences shall communicate the names of those elected to the Secretary General of the General Secretariat of the Synod, through the Pontifical Representative of the respective Nation, at least five months before the opening of the Assembly.
- For both the female and male congregations, the President of the respective body representing the Superiors General shall directly communicate the names of those elected to the Secretary General of the General Secretariat of the Synod at least five months before the opening of the Assembly.

5. If one is elected, is one automatically a member of the Assembly?

If one is elected by the competent ecclesial bodies for each 'type' (bishops or non-bishops) of members of the Assembly, one is not automatically a member of the Assembly. All elections must, in fact, be ratified by the Roman Pontiff. The names of those elected are not made known to the public until their election has been confirmed by the Roman Pontiff.

6. Are there other participants?

Others who are not members of the assembly will also participate in the assembly. Because they are not properly members, they do not have the right to vote. These are **experts** (people who are competent in various capacities on the subject under discussion) who will be joined, for the first time, by a number of **facilitators**, i.e. experts whose task it will be to facilitate the work at the various moments of the Assembly.

Fraternal delegates, members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities will also participate.

7. So what is the significance of the inclusion of non-bishops among the members of the Synodal Assembly? Does it therefore change the episcopal nature of the Assembly?

On 17 April 2023, the Holy Father approved the extension of participation in the Synodal Assembly to "non-bishops" (priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, lay men and women). This choice is in continuity with the progressive appropriation of the constitutive synodal dimension of the Church and the consequent understanding of the institutions through which it is exercised.

The Synod of Bishops was instituted by Paul VI with the *motu proprio Apostolica sollicitudo* (15 September 1965) as "a permanent Council of bishops for the universal Church, to be directly and immediately subject to Our power", with the task of advising the Successor of Peter, thus participating in

the solicitude for the whole Church. However, from the outset Paul VI made it clear that "This Synod ... like every human institution, can be further perfected with the passage of time". The need for this refinement has emerged with the progressive reception of the Second Vatican Council, in particular from the relations between the People of God, the College of Bishops and the Bishop of Rome.

The apostolic constitution *Episcopalis communio* (15 September 2018), which transforms the Synod of Bishops from an event into a process, articulated in three successive phases (preparatory, celebratory, implementative), is part of this framework. The Assembly that we are preparing to celebrate in Rome in October belongs to the celebratory phase, in continuity with the first phase, which took place with the consultation of the People of God in the particular Churches and the subsequent stages of ecclesial discernment in the Bishops' Conferences and Continental Assemblies. The *Instrumentum Laboris* that will form the basis of the work for the October Assembly is the fruit of this process of listening at all levels of the life of the Church.

This synodal process, initiated by the Holy Father, the "visible principle and foundation of unity" of the whole Church (cf. LG 23), was possible because each Bishop opened, accompanied and concluded the phase of consultation of the People of God. In this way the synodal process was at the same time an act of the entire People of God and of its Pastors, as "the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, fashioned after the model of the universal Church, in and from which churches comes into being the one and only Catholic Church" (LG 23).

It is in this perspective that one must understand the Holy Father's decision to maintain the specifically episcopal nature of the Assembly convened in Rome, while at the same time not limiting its composition to bishops alone by admitting a certain number of non-bishops as full Members.

This decision reinforces the solidity of the process as a whole, by incorporating into the Assembly the living memory of the preparatory phase, through the presence of some of those who were its protagonists, thus restoring the image of a Church-People of God, founded on the constitutive relationship between common priesthood and ministerial priesthood, and giving visibility to the circular relationship between the prophetic function of the People of God and the discernment function of the Pastors. Thanks to a better integration with the preparatory phase, the Assembly makes concrete the hope that it may "an expression of episcopal collegiality within an entirely synodal Church" (Francis, Address on the 50th anniversary of the Synod).

It is therefore in the role/function of memory that the presence of non-bishops is included, and not in that of representation. In this way, the specifically episcopal nature of the Synodal Assembly is not affected, but rather is confirmed. This is shown first of all by the numerical ratio between bishops and non-bishops, the latter being less than 25% of the total number of Assembly members. But above all this is shown by the way in which the non-bishops are appointed: in fact, they are not elected by some *demos* or *coetus*, whose representation they would take on, but are appointed by the Holy Father on the proposal of the bodies through which episcopal collegiality is realised at the level of continental areas, rooting their presence in the exercise of pastoral discernment.

The Assembly will have the opportunity to reflect on its own concrete experience with a view to formulating proposals on how to proceed in the future.