



SECRETARIA GENERALIS  
SYNODI

## GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD

### **Study Groups for questions raised in the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to be explored in collaboration with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia**

#### Work outline

1. In accordance with the task that had been entrusted to it, the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2023) addressed questions that had emerged from the People of God during the consultation and listening phase of the Synod 2021-2024. The aim of the First Session was to continue focusing on steps that “the Spirit invites us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church”<sup>1</sup>. The outcomes of the First Session’s work are collected in the *Synthesis Report* (SR), grouping them around twenty nuclei. Each chapter of the SR is dedicated to one of these nuclei, highlighting the areas of convergence, issues still to be addressed, and proposals.

2. The fruits of the First Session include the emergence of various relevant issues concerning the life and mission of the Church in a synodal perspective, regarding which the Assembly consistently reached a consensus that was almost always above 90%. These are matters that “require to be dealt with at the level of the whole Church and in collaboration with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia”<sup>2</sup> with appropriate timeframes. In addition, they maintain a twofold connection with the 2021-2024 Synod process. On the one hand, they have an impact on the shape and style of a synodal Church; on the other hand, their in-depth study will need to be carried out in an authentically synodal manner, involving experts from all continents, enhancing inter-dicasterial collaboration and thus constituting a hands-on workshop of synodality. It is not only the topics that are important, but *how* the reflection is carried out, listening together to the voice of the Holy Spirit. For it is He who is the true master of harmony and communion, who disrupts our predictions and expectations to create something new; it is He who guides us in the mission and knows what is needed in every age and at every moment.

3. In the Letter sent to the Secretary General of the Synod on 22 February 2024, the Holy Father gathered these issues into ten points, indicating them as questions that, “by their nature, must be addressed with in-depth study” by specially constituted Study Groups. We reproduce these points below:

1. Some aspects of the relationship between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church. (SR 6)
2. Listening to the Cry of the Poor (SR 4 and 16)
3. The mission in the digital environment. (SR 17)

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<sup>1</sup> GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD, *For a Synodal Church. Communion, participation, mission. Preparatory Document* (2021), n. 2.

<sup>2</sup> SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF THE SYNOD, *October 2024*, 11 December 2023.

4. The revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a missionary synodal perspective. (SR 11)
5. Some theological and canonical matters regarding specific ministerial forms. (SR 8 and 9)
6. The revision, in a synodal missionary perspective, of the documents touching on the relationship between Bishops, consecrated life, and ecclesial associations. (SR 10)
7. Some aspects of the person and ministry of the Bishop (criteria for selecting candidates to Episcopacy, judicial function of the Bishops, nature and course of *ad limina Apostolorum* visits) from a missionary synodal perspective. (SR 12 and 13)
8. The role of Papal Representatives in a missionary synodal perspective. (SR 13)
9. Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues. (SR 15)
10. The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices. (SR 7)

The Holy Father also entrusted the General Secretariat of the Synod with the task of “preparing the outline of the work specifying the mandate of the Groups”. In fulfilment of this mandate, the General Secretariat presents below an outline for each of these issues that briefly states the specific scope of the topics to be studied and the subjects whose involvement is to be prioritized.

4. Excluded from this list established by the Holy Father are those subjects appearing in the SR that will be entrusted to the discernment of the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2024). According to the *Towards October 2024* Document issued by the General Secretariat of the Synod on 11 December 2023, this will focus on “*How to be a synodal Church on mission*” in order to identify “concrete forms of the missionary commitment to which we are called, in the dynamism between unity and diversity proper to a synodal Church”. The theme of participation will thus be addressed, enhancing “the originality of every baptised person and every Church in the unique mission of proclaiming the Risen Lord and his Gospel to the world today” in relation to the exercise of authority as an expression of communion at the service of mission. In particular, this specific dynamic of the synodal Church in its concrete canonical configurations and in its practical implementation will be deepened in its theological meaning on three levels: that of each local Church, that of the groupings of Churches (national, regional, continental), and that of the whole Church in the relationship between the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, episcopal collegiality and synodality.

A process of consultation with the local Churches around the world has already been launched on these issues, on whose contributions the drafting of the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Second Session will be based. The document *Towards October 2024* details the steps and timing of this important work. It is not possible to draw a clear line of demarcation between the subjects covered by the work of the Second Session and those included in the above list in paragraph n. 3; there are many points of contact, interconnections and overlaps. The subdivision responds above all to criteria of operational practicality. It will therefore be essential that the work along the various axes proceeds in a coordinated manner and in an attitude of listening to the results being achieved in the various areas.

5. For this reason, and because of the twofold connection of the topics listed in paragraph n. 3 to the Synod 2021-2024 process, the General Secretariat of the Synod is entrusted with the task of coordinating and animating their in-depth study, overseeing in particular the synodal quality of the method of work, as well as the timing and manner of composition of the Groups. In carrying out this task, it will be assisted by the International Theological Commission, the Pontifical Biblical Commission, and by a Canon Law Commission established at the service of the Synod in agreement with the Dicastery for Legislative Texts, as already established at the Audience of 18 December 2023.

The Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, convened on individual topics within their specific competencies, will participate in the coordination of the work or offer their collaboration, thus giving specific implementation to Article 33 of the *Apostolic Constitution “Praedicate Evangelium” on the Roman Curia and its service to the Church and the World*.

6. The Study Groups that will be set up to handle the various themes will take care to involve Bishops and Experts from the different parts of the world, identified on the basis of their expertise and taking care to respect the variety of geographical origins, disciplinary areas, gender and ecclesial condition necessary to favour an authentically synodal approach. They will collect and develop the already existing contributions on the themes assigned to them; the insights they will provide should be informed not only by study and research, but also by consideration of the fruits of active listening in a variety of pastoral situations and by the considerations of the local Churches.

Those responsible for the coordination of each Study Group will define more precisely the participants, the methodology, and the timetable of the work in a way that is suitable for the subjects or the matter to be dealt with, making sure that authentically synodal methods are adopted. Each Group will initially need to design a work plan at the beginning and submit a brief report with an outline of the topic by 5 September 2024, so that it can be presented to the Second Session of the Synodal Assembly, following the instructions that the General Secretariat of the Synod will provide. The Groups should finish their work, if possible, by the end of June 2025.

7. In addition, and at the service of the synodal process in a broader sense, the General Secretariat of the Synod will activate a “permanent Forum” to deepen the theological, juridical, pastoral, spiritual and communicative aspects of the Church’s synodality. This “permanent forum” will also respond to the request formulated by the SR “to promote, in an appropriate forum, the theological work of deepening the terminological and conceptual understanding of the notion and practice of synodality” (SR 1p). In its own work, the “permanent Forum” will also be attentive to “clarifying the relationship between synodality and communion, and between synodality and collegiality” (SR 1j); to bringing out the many expressions of synodal life in cultural contexts where people are accustomed to walking together as a community (SR 11); to studying the “contribution that the experience of the Eastern Catholic Churches can offer to the understanding and practice of synodality” (SR 6d; cf. also 1k); to deepening the different conceptions and practices of synodality in the various ecclesial traditions of East and West, in a spirit of an exchange of gifts” (SR 7g). During the Second Session of the Synodal Assembly, a report will be given on the progress of the work of this “Forum”.

## **1. Some aspects of relations between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church**

The Synod Assembly highlighted the need for greater mutual understanding and dialogue between members of the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church. In a context of increasing migration, which has seen the development of Eastern Christian communities in the diaspora, communities of Eastern and Latin traditions coexist in most parts of the world today. In this regard, the SR stresses that “For various reasons, the establishment of Oriental hierarchies in the countries of immigration is not sufficient to solve the problem, but it is necessary that the local Churches of the Latin rite, in the name of synodality, help the Oriental faithful who have emigrated to preserve their identity and cultivate their specific heritage, without undergoing processes of assimilation” (SR 6c).

In the wake of what was proposed by the SR (cf. SR 6j), a Study Group made up of Oriental and Latin theologians and canonists, coordinated by the General Secretariat of the Synod and the Dicastery for the Oriental Churches, is to be set up to formulate indications after the necessary in-depth study:

- relative to participation in Episcopal Conferences of Bishops of Eastern Catholic Churches outside their canonical territory (cf. SR 19l);
- relative to guidelines for pastoral action of Latin dioceses in whose territory Oriental presbyters and faithful live (cf. SR 6c), in order to help them “preserve their identity and cultivate their specific heritage” (SR 6c) and with the aim of “finding ways to make visible and experienceable an effective unity in diversity” (SR 6f).

This Group could also examine the dossiers concerning the request to “establish a Council of Patriarchs and Major Archbishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches to the Holy Father” (SR 6h), and the adequate representation of members of the Eastern Catholic Churches in the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, “to enrich the entire Church with the contribution of their perspective, to favour the solution of the problems detected and to participate in dialogue at the different levels” (SR 6k).

## 2. Listening to the Cry of the Poor

Chapter 16 of the SR expresses the awareness that “Listening is the term that best expresses the most intense experience that has characterized the first two years of the synodal journey and also the work of the Assembly” (SR 16a), and affirms that “A synodal Church cannot renounce being a Church that listens, and this commitment must be translated into concrete actions” (SR 16n).

Listening allows the Christian community to “assume the attitude of Jesus towards the people he met” (SR 16d). “Along the synodal process, the Church has met many people and groups who ask to be listened to and accompanied” (SR 16e). Each person has his or her own story; what unites them all is the experience of being victims of forms of marginalization, exclusion, abuse or oppression, in many different situations and even in the Christian community. For these people, being listened to is an experience of affirmation and recognition of their own dignity that is deeply transformative (cf. SR 4a and 16b). For the Church, listening to them allows the Church “to understand their point of view and to concretely place herself at their side” (SR 16i). Furthermore, “Standing by the side of the poor means also joining with them in our commitment to the care of our common home: the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are the same cry” (SR 4e).

Precisely because of the theological value of listening, “it is the Church that listens” (SR 16d). Concretely, this happens thanks to the action of those who, often within projects, organizations or institutions, try to accompany people in situations of poverty. Fundamental is the task of promoting awareness that listening and accompaniment are an ecclesial action and not a task relegated to only a few instead of embraced by all (cf. SR 16n).

A Study Group is established to investigate how to strengthen the Church’s capacity to listen to the different forms of poverty and marginalization at different levels and, above all, at the local level. The Study Group will address questions such as:

- What means does the Church already have at her disposal to reach out to those who ask to be listened to? What new ones would be useful to introduce?
- How can we reinforce the link between the Christian community that listens and those who work concretely in the service of charity, justice and integral development, in order to avoid abdication of responsibilities and illegitimate delegation? Could it be useful to think about instituting a ministry of listening and accompaniment (cf. SR 16p)?
- How can we better network initiatives of welcome, human promotion and charity? How can we better combine listening and services of charity with protecting the “rights of the poor and excluded, and [...] the public denunciation of injustices” (SR 4f)?
- How can theological research listen to what the poor have to teach us since “through their sufferings they have a direct knowledge of the suffering Christ (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 198)” (SR 4h)?
- How can the Church respond to the formational and spiritual needs of those who are directly involved in the service of charity, the promotion of justice and integral human development? How can we develop a spirituality that sustains them?

The Study Group will be coordinated by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development together with the General Secretariat of the Synod; the Dicastery for the Service of Charity will also participate along with individuals, projects, organizations and networks concerned with the various areas of poverty.

### 3. The mission in the digital environment

Chapter 17 of the SR constitutes the horizon within which to grasp the importance for the Church of carrying out the mission of proclaiming the Gospel also in the digital environment, which involves every aspect of human life and must therefore be recognised as a culture and not only as an area of activity. However, the Church is struggling to recognise action in the digital environment as a crucial dimension of its witness in contemporary culture (cf. SR 17b).

Although it concerns everyone, action in the digital world is marked by a special attention to the world of youth: many young people “have abandoned the physical spaces of the Church to which we try to invite them in favour of online spaces” (SR 17k); at the same time, “young people, and among them seminarians, young priests and young consecrated men and women, who often have direct experience of it, are the best suited to help the Church carry out its mission in the digital environment” (SR 17d).

In addition to encouraging the local Churches to pay more attention to the digital environment (cf. *Towards October 2024*, n. 2), it is appropriate to set up a Study Group to investigate the implications at the theological, spiritual and canonical level and identify the requirements at the structural, organisational and institutional level to fulfil the digital mission. “Renewed attention is needed to the question of the languages we use to speak to people’s minds and hearts in a wide diversity of contexts in a way that is both beautiful and accessible” (SR 5l). The Group will work by addressing questions such as:

- What can a missionary synodal Church learn from greater immersion in the digital environment? With what criteria can we evaluate the many experiences that have taken place during the pandemic, so as to identify what can be “the lasting benefits for the mission of the Church in the digital environment” (SR 17j)?
- How can digital mission be integrated more routinely into the life of the Church and into Church structures, deepening the implications of the new digital missionary frontier for the renewal of existing parish and diocesan structures (cf. SR 17j)?
- What adaptations to the digital environment does the notion of jurisdiction require? Indeed, “online apostolic initiatives have a scope and reach that extend beyond the traditionally understood territorial boundaries. This raises important questions about how they can be regulated and which ecclesiastical authority is responsible for supervision” (SR 17h).

The Study Group will be coordinated by the Dicastery for Communications and the General Secretariat of the Synod; the Dicastery for Culture and Education and the Dicastery for Evangelization will also be involved. Those involved in the initiative “The Church listens to you” are available to offer their contribution.

#### 4. The revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a missionary synodal perspective

The SR points out the need to pay special attention to the formation of deacons and priests and explicitly formulates the request “that seminaries or other courses of formation for candidates for the ministry be linked to the daily life of the communities” (SR 11e). It also asks that “candidates for ministry, before embarking on specific paths, should have matured a real, albeit initial, experience of Christian community” and that the formation path should not create “an artificial environment, separate from the common life of the faithful” (SR 14n). Finally, it emphasises the importance that “the experience of encounter, of sharing life and of service to the poor and the marginalised should become an integral part of all formation paths [...] especially for candidates to the ordained ministry and consecrated life” (SR 4o)

Formation *for* ordained ministry and *in* ordained ministry (i.e. ongoing formation) must be embedded in the web of relationships that make up the Church and make it a “sign and instrument” of the union of God with humanity and of human persons with each other.

The Eastern Catholic Churches must prepare their own norms on this matter, starting from their liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary heritage.

Currently for the Latin Church, the profile of formation for ordained ministry is indicated by the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis. The gift of vocation*, published in 2016 by the then Congregation for the Clergy. This applies to countries under the jurisdiction of the Dicastery for the Clergy, and partially for the territories under the jurisdiction of the Dicastery for Evangelisation (Section for First Evangelisation and the New Particular Churches), for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life for Clerical Associations that can incardinate clerics, for Military Ordinariates and Personal Ordinariates, as well as for houses of formation for movements and new ecclesial communities. Episcopal Conferences have the task of drafting their own *Ratio Nationalis* (cf. *Optatam totius* 1; CIC can. 242, § 1).

It now seems appropriate to form a Study Group to carry out a review of formation to the ordained ministry and a revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis* in the perspective of a synodal missionary Church (cf. SR 11j), at the service of the Episcopal Conferences, addressing at least these questions:

- Which aspects, criteria, provisions of the current *Ratio Fundamentalis* correspond to a missionary synodal Church, and which are most in need of being rethought?
- What choices should be made to better connect the training programs for ordained ministry with those proposed for other ministerial figures (both instituted and ‘de facto’ ministries)?
- What changes could be envisaged in order to adequately recognise the competences of the Episcopal Conferences in the different contexts?

The task of verification and revision will be coordinated by the Dicastery for the Clergy with the General Secretariat of the Synod, but also requires the participation of at least the Dicasteries for Evangelisation; for the Eastern Churches; for the Laity, Family and Life; for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; for Culture and Education. Considering the importance of the topic, an inter-dicasterial evaluation and deeper exploration of the theme is required.

## 5. Some theological and canonical questions about specific ministerial forms

The *Synthesis Report* highlighted the need to “continue to deepen the theological understanding of the relationship between charisms and ministries in a missionary perspective” (SR 8i). The charismatic and ministerial dimensions of the Church are not opposed to each other, nor do they overlap. In different ways and with different levels of awareness and visibility, both are part of the life of each member of the People of God and of every ecclesial reality.

The Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will address the question “*How* can we be a synodal Church in mission?”. The Assembly will be asked to propose practical ways, from a theological and canonical point of view, to promote and support the participation of all the baptized in the mission of the Church in different contexts. On the one hand, it is necessary to avoid limiting the participation of the lay faithful to “intra-ecclesial tasks without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society” (*Evangelii gaudium*, n. 102). On the other hand, it is necessary to continue the research on the relationships between the different forms of ecclesial ministry.

Also in view of this commitment, it seems important to delve into some theological and canonical questions related to these matters now, including: the specificity of the sacramental *munus* (capacity); the relationship between the sacramental *munus* (capacity) (especially that deriving from the capacity to administer the Eucharist) and the ecclesial services necessary for the care and growth of God’s Holy People in view of mission; the origin of ministries; the charismatic dimension of the Church’s life; ecclesial roles and services that do not require the sacrament of Holy Orders; Holy Orders as a service and the problems arising from an erroneous conception of ecclesial authority; the role of women in the Church and their participation in decision-making/taking processes and community leadership.

- It is in this context that the question of women’s possible access to the diaconate can be properly posed: to this Group is entrusted the task to continue “Theological and pastoral research on the access of women to the diaconate [...], benefiting from consideration of the results of the commissions specially established by the Holy Father” (SR 9n).
- This Group will also aim to respond to the Synodal Assembly’s desire for “a greater recognition and appreciation of the contribution of women and a growth in the pastoral responsibilities entrusted to them in all areas of the life and mission of the Church” (SR 9i).

In coordination with the General Secretariat of the Synod, the study of these themes is entrusted to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, in dialogue with the various relevant Dicasteries.



## **6. The revision, in a synodal missionary perspective, of the documents on the relations between Bishops, Consecrated life, Ecclesial aggregations**

Synodality goes hand in hand with the recognition and enhancement of the charisms of all members of the People of God. The Assembly highlighted the importance of the articulation of hierarchical and charismatic gifts in the life and mission of the Church. The Magisterium of the Church has developed a broad teaching on this subject; during the First Session it clearly emerged the need to question the ecclesiological meaning and the canonical and pastoral implications of these acquisitions (cf. RdS 10e).

Within this perspective, the RdS recognizes the reality and the contribution of consecrated life, and of the different forms of ecclesial aggregations to the development of the synodal life of the Church and asks 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. RdS 10f).

A Study Group is to be established for the purpose of exploring themes such as:

- The revision of the “guiding criteria on the relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church proposed in the 1978 document *Mutuae relations*” (SR 10g).
- The identification, beginning with the study of already existing best practices, of places and means 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).
- The identification, on the basis of the study of already existing best practices, of places and means to promote organic relations between Lay Associations, Ecclesial Movements and new Communities and the life of the local Churches, starting from the configuration of the Councils and Councils in which the representatives of the Ecclesial Aggregations converge (cf. SR 10i)

The Study Group will be coordinated by the General Secretariat of the Synod, in collaboration with the Dicasteries for Bishops, for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, for Evangelization (Section for the First Evangelization and the New Particular Churches), and for the Laity, Family and Life; it should also involve and include the international bodies of representation of consecrated life (UISG and USG) and the different ecclesial aggregations.

## **7. Some aspects of the person and ministry of the Bishop (criteria for selecting candidates for episcopacy, judicial function of the Bishops, nature and course of *ad limina Apostolorum* visits) from a missionary synodal perspective**

The figure and role of the Bishop was one of the central themes of the work of the First Session of the Synodal Assembly, given the abundance of references found in the *Instrumentum laboris*. This centrality also emerges in the SR, in chapters 12 and 13 explicitly dedicated to the episcopate, and in other chapters the subject matter of which involves the role of the Bishop, such as chapters 8, 10, 11, 18, 19, 20. The deepening and examination of many aspects of episcopal ministry will be the subject of the work of the Second Session.

This work will certainly benefit from an effort of preparation. More than likely, it will not be possible for the Assembly to exhaust all aspects of the figure and ministry of the Bishop. This is why it is appropriate to entrust their in-depth study to specific Study Groups.

A first Group, coordinated by the Dicastery of Bishops and the General Secretariat of the Synod, with the involvement of the Dicastery for Evangelisation and the Dicastery for the Oriental Churches, will address topics such as:

- In a synodal Church, what are the criteria for the selection of Bishops (cf. SR 12l)? How can or should the local Church enter the selection process: the People of God in all its components? the presbyterate? participatory bodies and the Episcopal Conferences?
- In this activity of selecting that involves different institutional subjects, the Nuncio plays a delicate role, representing in the local church the closeness of universal care: how can his service grow in the involvement of all the members of the People of God of the dioceses concerned, in an authentically synodal perspective and taking care to avoid inappropriate pressures? (cf. SR 12l).
- How can *ad limina* visits become an opportunity and instrument for exercising collegiality and synodality, in the logic of exchanging gifts in the service of communion? (cf. SR 13g)

A second Study Group, coordinated by the Dicastery for Legislative Texts and the General Secretariat of the Synod, with the participation of the Dicasteries for Bishops and for Evangelisation, will delve into the topic of the Bishop's judicial function, already raised by *Motu proprio Vos estis lux mundi* (25 March 2023):

- How to promote its exercise within a synodal rationale (cf. SR 12c), also in order to meet the difficulty, manifested during the First Session, of reconciling in some cases the role of father and that of judge (cf. SR 12i)?

## 8. The role of Papal Representatives in a missionary synodal perspective

Within the framework of the proposed culture of transparency and accountability as “an integral part of a synodal Church that promotes co-responsibility, as well as a possible safeguard against abuses” (SR 12j; cf. also 12i and 11k), the Assembly considers “it opportune to envisage forms of evaluation of the work of the Pontifical Representatives by the local Churches of the countries where they carry out their mission, in order to facilitate and perfect their service” (SR 13i).

Nuncios play a fundamental role in the process of choosing Bishops (cf. Sheet 08 *above*), but even more so they represent a fundamental link of the interplay between the local and universal levels of the Church’s life. Their ministry and the way it is carried out must therefore be attuned to the attention to the local Churches typical of a synodal Church (cf. SR 13c). This thrust highlights “the decisive role of the Episcopal Conferences” (SR 19d), whose prerogatives and competences need to be rethought in a synodal key. It also brings out “the need for an instance of synodality and collegiality at a continental level” (*ibid.*) and motivates the proposal to “strengthen the ecclesiastical province or *metropolia*, as a place of communion of the local Churches of a territory” (SR 19i). Following the path of a growing abundance of intermediate bodies, the changing synodal environment with which the Apostolic Nuncios interface requires that we reconsider how their ministry today can help to consolidate the bonds of communion between the local Churches and the Successor of Peter, enabling him to know, with more certainty, their needs and aspirations.

A Study Group will be dedicated to this task, with coordination by the Secretariat of State and the General Secretariat of the Synod, and with the involvement of the Dicasteries for Bishops and for Evangelisation. The involvement of some representatives of the local Churches and their episcopates, for example by enhancing the groupings of Churches on a continental level, also seems useful.

## 9. Theological criteria and synodal methodologies as a basis for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues

On the basis of the Assembly debate, the SR affirms that “Among the questions on which it is important to continue reflection, there is that of the relationship between love and truth and the repercussions that it has on many controversial issues” (SR 15d), recognising that “Sometimes the anthropological categories that we have elaborated are not sufficient to grasp the complexity of the elements that emerge from experience or from the knowledge of the sciences and require refinement and further study” (SR 15g). Therefore “We recognise the need to continue ecclesial reflection on the original interweaving of love and truth witnessed to by Jesus, with a view to an ecclesial praxis that honours his inspiration” (SR 15h), investing “the necessary time [and...] the best energies, without giving in to simplistic judgements that injure individuals and the Body of the Church” (SR 15g).

In this perspective, the Assembly formulated the proposal “to promote initiatives that allow for a shared discernment on doctrinal, ethical and pastoral issues that are controversial, in the light of the Word of God, the Church’s teaching, theological reflection and valuing synodal experience” (SR 15k). It also indicated a possible method: “This can be done through in-depth discussions between experts of different skills and backgrounds in an institutional context that protects the confidentiality of the debate and promotes frankness of confrontation, giving space, when appropriate, also to the voices of the people directly affected by the controversies mentioned” (*ibid.*) and explicitly requests that this path be “initiated in view of the next Synodal Session” (*ibid.*).

This request could be followed up by forming a study group which, on the basis of a shared overall approach, would reinterpret the traditional categories of anthropology, soteriology and theological ethics with a view to better clarifying the relationship between charity and truth in fidelity to Jesus’s life and teaching, and consequently also between pastoral care and (moral) doctrine. In this work it will be appropriate to better articulate the circular relationship between doctrine and pastoral care: the former is usually associated with truth and the latter with mercy, as if practices that seem pastorally sensible had no repercussions on doctrinal systematisation. Moreover, in the various discernments one must ask oneself how we can pay “greater attention to the diversity of situations and a more attentive listening to the voice of the local Churches” (SR 13h).

Bearing in mind the authority required to tackle this task, the direction of this Group is entrusted to the Prefect of the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith and the Secretary of the International Theological Commission, with the support of the General Secretariat of the Synod. The Pontifical Academy for Life is invited to make its contribution.

In this sphere, perhaps even more than in others, there is an urgent need to move towards greater collaboration between those entities that, albeit in different capacities, speak on behalf of the Holy See with a view to greater harmony in their positions. Dissonances, and even more so oppositions, risk fostering division and disorientation rather than confrontation and reflection. A synodal approach aims not at homogeneity, but at harmony.

## 10. The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices

The observation that “the path of synodality, which the Catholic Church is on, is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical path is synodal”<sup>3</sup> is not just a wish: the Catholic Church’s synodal process is of great ecumenical significance, and several Churches and Ecclesial Communities have expressed sincere appreciation for what has taken place. The First Session was marked by two important novelties: it was introduced, and not merely in an ornamental manner, by the ecumenical prayer vigil “Together”, attended by heads and leaders of the different Churches, and Fraternal Delegates actively participated, with speaking rights, in the dialogue and discernment conducted in the small groups and in the plenary.

We must seize the opportunities that open up from the richness of the convergences reached, in the timeliness of the issues to be addressed indicated in Chapter 7 of the SR, and in the concreteness of the proposals put forward there. To this end, it is appropriate that a Study Group be set up to address the following issues:

- In light of theological dialogues and paying attention to the concrete ecclesial repercussions deepening the mutual interdependence between synodality and primacy at different ecclesial levels, with particular reference to “the way of understanding the Petrine ministry at the service of unity” (SR 7h);
- In-depth study from a theological, canonical and pastoral point of view of the issue of Eucharistic hospitality (*communicatio in sacris*), in light of the connection between sacramental and ecclesial communion, with particular reference to the experience and ecumenical significance of interchurch couples and families (cf. SR 7i);
- An in-depth and open reflection “on the phenomenon of ‘non-denominational’ communities and ‘revival’ movements of Christian [charismatic/Pentecostal] inspiration” (SR 7j).

The Study Group will be coordinated by the General Secretary of the Synod and the Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

*Vatican, 14 March 2024*

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<sup>3</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address to His Holiness Mar Awa III Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East*, 19 November 2022, cited in XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNODOX OF BISHOPS, *Instrumentum laboris for the First Session (October 2023)*, B 1.4.