



# STUDY GROUPS

on relevant questions from the *Synthesis' Report* of the First Session of the XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

**FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH:  
COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION**

## **STUDY GROUP N. 2 TO HEAR THE CRY OF THE POOR AND THE EARTH**



**FINAL REPORT**

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## PREAMBLE

0. Jesus taught that both personal (internal, communal) devotional and social (external) works of mercy are essential to living our faith in charity: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself* (cf. *Mt* 22,36-40; *Mk* 12:28-31). According to St. Augustine, “You choose love of neighbour; it won’t be genuine unless God is also loved. You choose love of God; it won’t be genuine unless your neighbour is also tacitly included”.<sup>1</sup> This two-fold love finds both expression and nourishment in listening to the cry of the poor and the earth.

1. In the title *Listening to the Cry of the Poor and the Earth*, the word “listening” actually stands for a whole over-arching, faith-based process with several elements:

- “Listening” requires “hearing” and goes further.
- The word “cry” stands for every sort of suffering.
- “Who are the poor?” sounds very much like the scribe asking Jesus, “Who is my neighbour?” Jesus’s parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10,25-37) gives a dynamic answer: the neighbour is the one in need, and responding makes one a neighbour in the image of Christ. Since the beginnings of the Church until today, there have been countless examples of hearing the cry of the poor.<sup>2</sup>
- Recently the Church’s teaching – especially *Laudato si’* and *Laudate Deum* – have encouraged hearing the cry of the earth, too, and many initiatives have been taken at the local level throughout the world.<sup>3</sup> Care for God’s earth reflects our responsibility towards our fellow human beings with whom we share it. In this sense, our listening to the cry of the poor must also be a listening to the cry of the earth and *vice versa*.<sup>4</sup>

So, our question becomes, “How can the Church *better* hear the two interconnected cries?”

2. Listening is not a single act. Rather, the over-arching process of listening involves these elements:

- encounter, hearing, seeing, sharing, appreciating [nos. 3-4, *below*]
- grasping the problem and tackling it [nos. 5-6]
- reflecting, evaluating, advocacy and communication [no. 7]
- spiritual support [no. 8]

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<sup>1</sup> AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 90A (Dolbeau 11), no. 13.

<sup>2</sup> LEO XIV, *Dilexi te*, 4 October 2025, chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the *Laudato Si’ Action Platform* encourages individuals, families, groups, organizations and institutions to work towards integral ecology, providing assistance, advocacy, webinars and networking. <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/>

<sup>4</sup> “A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (FRANCIS, *Laudato Si’* [LS], 24 May 2015, no. 49; cf. no. 139; ID., *Evangelii gaudium* [EG], 24 November 2013, no. 198).

The first three are intrinsically interrelated and can happen in sequence. The fourth imbues the others and applies throughout.

3. Many people in the Church are already doing good Christian listening to the poor and to the earth. There are many parish-level groupings or organizations – St Vincent de Paul, Catholic Women’s League, *les Mamans Catholiques*, Knights of Columbus, Order of Malta, Sodalties, all sorts of BECs, SCC’s, ecclesial communities and movements. They listen to and accompany people in situations of suffering, exclusion, poverty of every kind. Let us begin with getting to know and acknowledging the many good efforts already going on in the parish, diocese or country,<sup>5</sup> and then encourage new and more effective ones.

4. *Who are the poor? Where is the earth that cries?* The cries of the poor and of the earth are so many and varied; at a general level (like the news), it is easy to feel overwhelmed. Listening can really happen only in reality, at the concrete level, close to the ground. In each real situation, the neediest groups, the most pressing problems, need to emerge, thanks to the inclusive process underway.

Since the list of cries is infinite and varies from place to place and time to time, this Study Group struggled to include listings of all priority categories. Cross-cutting themes, such as the participation and leadership of women, youth, Indigenous peoples, etc. are necessary in all our listening - but unique and specific avenues of response must be discovered in each time and place. Study Group 2 did not want to continually list voices that must be heard in every section of our document - much less omit any group or give the impression ahead of time that a certain cry is more important than the others. One cannot say ahead of time that a certain cry is more important than the others; priorities must be discovered through listening in each time and place.

Hearing the cry of the poor and of the earth is following Christ, for “when you did it to one of the least of these, you did it for me” (*Mt 25,40*). Moreover, the cries are for every Christian, including those who feel poor, or whom others see as poor. They too are called to ask, “How can I better hear the cry of the poor/the earth?”

Listening can begin like a kind of curiosity or open-mindedness, but it needs to mature into authentic, mutual relationships of trust, friendship and action, between those “crying” and those “hearing”. Everyone involved both evangelizes and is evangelized, sometimes explicitly, oftentimes without words. Christ listens to each and every one.

5. Regarding the next steps, there’s less to say because, in each case, the dynamic or process depends so much on what cries are being heard.

Sometimes those who are crushed need immediate help: charity, humanitarian assistance, relief work.<sup>6</sup>

Other times, from the cries being listened-to, an issue to work on, a problem to be solved, a challenge to be taken up, needs to be identified. This requires more listening, reading, thinking, consulting, discussing, leading to planning and deciding and doing and finally evaluating. The

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<sup>5</sup> What is said about parishes applies, more or less, to Catholic schools, universities, clinics, etc.

<sup>6</sup> LEO XIV, *Dilexi te*, “Almsgiving today”, nos. 115-121.

social teaching of the Church, the social sciences and other sources, the help of experts, shed light on the cries in order to grasp what the problem really is and what might be some effective options.

When people are suffering from environmental degradation, in their cry, the earth is quite vocally crying out, and responses are needed. But to hear more complex cries of the earth requires the help of natural or environmental sciences and, often, cooperation with experts or groups active in the field. Reality is often more complex than we think and should not be overly simplified. For example, desertification is produced by industrial processes often without sufficient governmental policies, and results in forced displacement which becomes “a cry of the earth”. Addressing issues of this scale requires much dialogue and well-coordinated efforts.

As people strive to better understand such complex realities, however, they can start to act together with the means and the knowledge they already have, in constant dialogue to attain a better understanding of the issue, leading to better responses.

St John Paul II called the poor to become protagonists of ecclesial and social transformation, getting beyond paternalism, and Pope Leo XIV spells this out in *Dilexi te*, “The Poor as Subjects” (nos. 99-102). For example, the popular movements, appreciated as a “torrent of moral energy that springs from including the excluded in the building of a common destiny,” testify that justice arises from the participation of the excluded. Christians characterize the poor, not just in terms of what they lack, but as “bearers of hope” and “builders of a common destiny.”<sup>7</sup> The poor need to participate in an active and leading way in Christian responses to their own cries and those of the earth.

6. At the parish, diocesan and Conference levels, the listening and responding can easily contribute to the dialogue of action with peoples of other confessions and other religions. It is very important that the Bishop be kept informed and occasionally invited to take part. Moreover, both the parish priest and the Bishop can encourage new opportunities to listen, to accompany, to serve; conversely, where it is difficult to begin or to continue listening, the Bishop and pastors need to encourage the listening to take place and to support the new ministries which flow from hearing the cry of the poor and the earth.

Non-Catholic initiatives can also be discovered, which parish-members can get involved in and bring the fruits back to the parish and the diocese. The Bishops of Quebec make a strong call for Church leadership to be open to such wider collaboration without judging their catholicity as a starting point.

7. The many good initiatives underway are left incomplete, however, without reflection, evaluation and communication. Such reflection, in fact, is a form of recognition and gratitude, and it is important to give thanks to God for the listening and all that follows.

- To reflect is to draw out the fruit of the experience personally, communally, spiritually, socially, etc.
- Evaluation is needed to improve the listening, to deepen the understanding of what works (or doesn't) and why, and to correct mistakes that keep happening. When people's voices are

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<sup>7</sup> FRANCIS, *Address to the Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements*, 28 October 2014; Cf. LEO XIV, *Dilexi te*, nos. 80-81; ID., *Address to World Meeting of Popular Movements*, 23 October 2025.

not being heard, advocacy is needed to help give voice to those involved and speaking up about the problem.

- Communication shares the initiatives taken, the good practices developed, within the local Church where they take place and with the rest of the Church and the wider world. Fellow-parishioners need to know, and then other parishes and the diocesan leadership, and the wider public. The communication of good practices attracts new participants and new support. It needs to take place in both traditional and digital forms.

8. There are many scriptural, classical, and contemporary forms of prayer, liturgy, and spirituality available to nourish Christian listening to the cry of the poor and the earth. These resources need to be shared widely, and new ones are very welcome. They can help each follower of Jesus Christ to listen, to pray, to respond. For example, there is the new Mass for the Care of Creation, among the other Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions relevant to various cries of the poor.<sup>8</sup>

Professionals in ministry (not just in social ministries, but also in pastoral situations, Catholic education, Catholic healthcare, etc.) are also invited to reflect on their own faith as they help the Church to listen to the two-fold cry.

9. Besides parishes and other groupings of the faithful, the Church also has more professional ways of listening to the cry and responding, at the diocesan, conference and international levels. They are carried out, not by parishioners (individual Christians) but by trained people earning their living. Caritas is the best-known name, and there are hundreds of others, many of them initiated and sponsored by religious congregations of priests, sisters and brothers.

How can more professional responses build upon and strengthen parish-level efforts? How can the professionals support and strengthen the parishes and other Christian groupings to better listen, respond and communicate?

From now on, by sharing the listening they conduct, they can help Church members and leadership to hear the cry of the poor and the earth more deeply, and to appreciate how in our name the responses are carried out. Once their own spiritual needs become evident, they deserve support in their ministry on behalf of the Church.<sup>9</sup> For example, the chaplaincy ministries once promoted amongst trade unions and other social movements could be renewed.

10. In conclusion, to ask about listening *to the cry of the poor and the earth*, is to ask, in each situation, “What does the love of God with all my heart and the love of my neighbours as myself entail?” The Church on each continent has its distinctive history, style and approach, so the question needs to be asked in appropriate and specific ways. The response includes all the elements in the above paragraphs nos. 3-9.

Accordingly, the question about hearing the cry of the poor and of the earth becomes: grateful for the many responses down through the centuries and around the world, how can the Church more

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<sup>8</sup> 6. For the Sanctification of Human Labour; 7. At Seed-time; 8. After the Harvest; 9. For the Progress of Peoples; 10. For the Preservation of Peace and Justice; 11. In Time of War or Civil Disturbance; 12. For Refugees and Exiles; 13. For Migrants (in the Italian Missal); 14. In Time of Famine or for Those Suffering from Hunger; 15. In Time of, Earthquake; 16. For Rain; 17. For Fine Weather; 18. For an End to Storms.

<sup>9</sup> We might propose renewing the chaplaincy ministries formerly promoted amongst trade unions and other social movements - parish ministry is not the only avenue.

evangelically and more effectively accompany God's people in facing the most damaging, most intractable, most pressing obstacles to their "full and abundant life" (cf. *Jn* 10,10) in our common home now and in our heavenly one forever?

Cardinal Michael Czerny SJ

*Prefect*

Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

October 2025

# INTRODUCTION

Study Group 2 was entrusted with five broad and important questions. We offer the fruit of our efforts in the time available to us and with the resources at our disposal. We hope that our report is of assistance to the Churches in deepening their ongoing efforts to listen to the cry of people and communities made poor and of the earth.

The five questions given to Study Group 2 were:

1. What means does the Church already have at her disposal to reach out to those, including the earth, asking to be listened to? What new ones would be useful to introduce?
2. How can we reinforce the link between the Christian community that listens and those who work concretely in the service of charity, justice, integral development, and integral ecology 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. *Synthesis Report* [SR], no. 16p)?
3. How can we better network initiatives of welcome, care for creation, 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, no. 4f)?
4. How can theological research listen to what the poor and the earth have to teach us since “through their sufferings they have a direct knowledge of the suffering Christ (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 198)” (SR, no. 4h)?
5. How can the Church respond to the formational and spiritual needs of those who are directly involved in the service of charity, care for creation, the promotion of justice and integral human development? How can we develop a spirituality that sustains them?

**Part One: Methodology** describes our methodology and offers some methodological learnings from our work.

**Part Two: Executive Summary** provides a summary highlighting our recommendations and pointing to further detail in the relevant appendices.

**Appendices A to F** identify elements of good practice which may inspire action and offer reflection that may assist in the discernment of action in diverse contexts, as well as presenting concrete and practical recommendations.

Dr Sandie Cornish  
Coordinator Study Group 2  
October 2025

# **PART ONE**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **What We Did**

#### **Forming and Meeting**

The Members of Study Group 2 were: Dr Sandie Cornish (Coordinator), Professor Agnes Brazal, Professor Sr. Maria Cimperman RSCJ, Cardinal Michael Czerny SJ, Mr Joseph Gunn, Mr. Mauricio Lopez Oropeza (June 2024 - February 2025), Dr Leocadie Lushombo, Fr Francesco Mazzitelli (Dicastery for the Service of Charity, until August 2024), Mr Humberto Ortiz Roca (from February 2025). We were a group of women and men, including religious, laity and clergy who lived and worked in six continents. Our diversity was a deliberate strategy that enabled Study Group 2 to reach into many networks and gather insights from lived experience and engagement in a variety of local Churches.

Between July 2024 and October 2025 Study Group 2 met via Zoom 23 times with the support of staff of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

#### **Document Analysis**

The work of Study Group 2 began with analysis of a sample of the documents generated by the Synod process. It emerged that these documents raised the five questions entrusted to us rather than providing answers to them.

#### **Mailed Surveys**

In July 2024 four short, mailed surveys were sent electronically in English, French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. Each survey included a subset of the five questions entrusted to Study Group 2 and was directed to people and organisations with direct experience related to the specific questions put to them. These were not large or scientific samples but rather a quick exercise in taking the pulse of a variety of people and organisations with direct experience.

All Bishops with designated responsibility for justice, ecology and peace within their Bishops' Conference were asked in relation to the local Churches in their territory:

1. What are the most significant obstacles to the Church hearing the cries of the poor and the earth?
2. Can you give examples of some effective ways in which the Church listens to the poor and the earth?
3. Is there anything else you would like to share about listening to the poor and the earth?

A variety of Church ministries and organisations were asked:

1. In your experience, what are the most effective means that the Church currently has for listening to the poor and the earth?

2. What new means would you suggest?
3. How can we most effectively link listening, service, and advocacy?
4. How can we reinforce the link between the Christian community that listens and those who work concretely in the service of charity, justice, integral human development, and integral ecology?

Theologians and formators were asked:

1. How can theological research listen to what the poor and the earth can teach the Church?
2. How can the Church respond to the formational and spiritual needs of those who are directly involved in the service of charity, justice, integral human development, and integral ecology?
3. How can we develop a spirituality that sustains those who are directly involved in the service of charity, justice, integral human development, and integral ecology?

Staff of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development were invited to respond to any of the following questions, connected with their own unit or role:

1. In the local Churches that you have contact with, what means does the Church use to reach out to those who ask to be listened to, including the earth?
2. What new means to reach out to those who ask to be listened to, including the earth, would be useful to introduce?
3. In what ways do the local Churches you are in contact with reinforce the link between the Christian community that listens and those who work concretely in the service of charity, justice, integral human development, or integral ecology?
4. From your experience, could it be helpful to think about instituting a ministry of listening and accompaniment (cf. SR, no. 16p)? Do you have a specific proposal?
5. How can we better network initiatives of welcome, care for creation, human promotion, and charity? Do you have examples of good practice or specific proposals?
6. 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, no. 4f)? Do you have examples or suggestions?
7. How can theological research listen to what the poor and the earth have to teach us since through their sufferings they have direct knowledge of the suffering Christ (cf. EG, no. 198)?
8. How can the Church respond to the formation and spiritual needs of those who are directly involved in the service of charity, care for creation, the promotion of justice and integral human development?
9. How can we develop a spirituality that sustains those who are directly involved in the service of charity, care for creation, the promotion of justice and integral human development?

The data was collected and analysed between July and August 2024 with the assistance of Fr Sylvester Berinyuy, Associate Professor Emmanuel Guzman and Dr Sr Ann-Maree O’Beirne. The survey data provided stimulus for ongoing dialogue with Bishops, ministries and organisations, theologians and formators between November 2024 and March 2025.

### **Session at the Second Assembly of the Synod**

A session on the work of Study Group 2 was held at the Second Assembly of the Synod on Synodality, attracting approximately sixty people. Seventeen submissions were received in response to Cardinal Grech’s invitation to all interested people to send contributions to the Study Groups.

### **Disability and Theology Subgroups**

Two subgroups were formed in November 2024 to assist the work of Study Group 2.

The *Disability Subgroup*, chaired by Mr Enrique Alarcón García, brought together people who had participated in the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life’s Advisory Board and Council for the preparation of inputs to the Synod by persons with disability. Its members were Mrs Carmo Diniz, Rev Dr Justin Glyn SJ, Deacon Peter Hepp and Dr Vittorio Selzo. The majority of them brought lived experience as people with disabilities while others are allies working for the inclusion of people with disability.

The *Theology Subgroup*, chaired by Professor Agnes Brazal, brought together theologians who are actively engaged in doing theology with those made poor, marginalised, or excluded. Its members were Professor Olga Consuelo Velez Caro, Dr Sandie Cornish, Associate Professor Leo Guardado, Dr Leocadie Lushombo, Rev Dr Francois Odinet, and Professor Anna Rowlands with Dr Vittorio Selzo representing the Disability Subgroup.

Each subgroup met via Zoom and contributed insights and recommendations to this report. We thank the Disability Subgroup for drafting [Appendix B](#) and the Theology Subgroup for drafting [Appendix E](#).

### **Reaching Out on Formation**

Professor Maria Cimperman worked with the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) to conduct a survey of women’s religious institutes exploring two questions:

1. Are encounters with people who are poor (economically and/or on the margins) and the experience of listening to them, part of your formation program? Explain.
2. What practical suggestions would you offer for how formation programs could better include listening to the poor and the earth?

More than 200 responses were received.

She also reached out to theologates and formation programs for clergy and laity across continents for responses to these questions. Analysis of this data contributed to insights and recommendations in relation to question 5 reported in [Appendix F](#).

## **Feedback Loop**

In August 2025 draft recommendations in relation to each of Study Group 2's five questions were provided to a variety of people and organisations across all continents for feedback. They were asked:

- Which, if any, of these recommendations is relevant in your context?
- Are there any important gaps?

All bishops who are the designated contact for their Bishops' Conference for the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development were invited to provide comments and suggestions. Care was taken to include among those asked to provide feedback grassroots organisations and people with lived experience of the issues covered. Responses were received from every continent including from 21 Bishops Conferences and 15 individuals and organisations.

In early October 2025 all feedback was considered by Study Group 2 at two meetings and via email exchange before the finalisation of this report. The Disability Subgroup was provided with all feedback relating to disability and they held a meeting to consider adjustments to recommendations.

## **Writing the Report**

Members of Study Group 2 worked collaboratively to draft this report. Different members lead parts of the drafting with the support of subsets of the membership and in some cases co-opted advisors. Study Group 2 Coordinator Dr Sandie Cornish coordinated the drafting and undertook final editing.

## **Limitations**

Study Group 2 members lived and worked in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, North America and Oceania. We were conscious of not having a member from the Middle East and ensured that input and feedback were received from this continent. Nonetheless a Middle Eastern sensibility may be missing from this report.

The working language of Study Group 2 was English. Some members of the Study Group were able to work in Italian, Spanish or French, and staff of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development provided support in translating materials. The Disability Subgroup, through the efforts of its members, met effectively in English and Spanish. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that insights expressed in other languages may not have been adequately grasped and integrated.

Protocols of consultation within Indigenous communities before representatives can speak on behalf of the community are often extensive and may require long and open time frames.

Furthermore, acknowledging Church entanglement in the process of colonisation, consultation with Indigenous bodies requires interlocutors with established and ongoing relationships of trust. While Study Group 2 was able to gather some input from Indigenous Catholic organisations, we did not have sufficient time or resources to consult in a truly adequate way with Indigenous communities on ways of improving the Church's listening to them.

A practical decision was made not to address matters that are more central to the tasks of other Study Groups. For example, although the digital environment has the potential to provide new spaces for listening to marginalised groups and for their agency as missionary disciples, this topic is left to Study Group 3. Study Group 2 did not specifically reach out to the LGBTIQ+ community to address their marginalisation. We anticipate that Study Group 9 on theological criteria and synodal methodologies for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues (SR, no. 15) will respond to this significant issue.

Had time allowed, an even more ‘circular’ process with more extensive opportunities for input and feedback from people and communities with lived experience of poverty and marginalisation would have been undertaken for the development of recommendations and their network validation. It was originally intended to engage the assistance of local interlocutors with existing relationships of trust with these people and communities for this purpose. Limits of time and resources did not allow for this.

## **Reflection on Learnings from our Methodology**

The Study Groups were asked to do their work in a synodal manner – to be workshops of synodality. Hence care was taken to include members from different continents and states of life, and to have a gender balance. The Study Group was initially made up of equal numbers of women and men and was coordinated by a lay woman. When Fr Mazzitelli withdrew from the Study Group on completion of his term at the Dicastery for the Service of Charity and was not replaced, women outnumbered men four to three. Given that women are the majority of those made poor, and of active members of the Church, this seemed appropriate.

Forming the Study Group and achieving a shared understanding of its task took some time, leaving approximately eighteen months in which to conduct the work – a modest timeframe for a complex, intercultural and multidimensional task. Synodality requires patience and the building of relationships especially in diverse groups.

All members of the Study Group, including those currently in academic positions, brought practical experience of pastoral engagement with people and communities made poor, marginalised or vulnerable to this task. Reflecting on our own experience of work for justice, ecology, and peace in different continents, we affirmed that listening to those made poor, pushed to the margins, or excluded, requires authentic ongoing relationships of trust and mutuality. It cannot be achieved top-down by an international study group and can only proceed at the speed of trust.

We were conscious that we were largely speaking about such listening rather than demonstrating it comprehensively and consistently in our own methodology. Demonstrating in a small way a “nothing about us without us” approach, we were able to establish two subgroups consisting of people with lived experience. Their authorship of [Appendices B](#) and [E](#) is explicitly acknowledged to make visible the fact that they are speaking for themselves. In gathering information via surveys, we sought the views of those who were directly engaged through their regular commitments in addressing the questions entrusted to us. We wanted to tap into their lived experience and critical reflection.

We noticed that the importance of listening to the cry of the earth is now generally accepted but we received little material describing how such listening might take place. It seems that Church groups are struggling to acquire differently attuned ears. The cry of the earth is not separate from the cry of the poor, but nor are they the same - just as the experiences of poor, marginalised or vulnerable women and girls are not separate from or the same as those of men and boys. Interconnection and intersectionality must be addressed in concrete and specific contexts. In fact, the feedback that we received on our draft recommendations confirmed that they did indeed stimulate identification of local initiatives, priorities and possibilities.

We struggled with the desire to provide concrete examples while wishing to avoid the impression of endorsing only or especially those initiatives mentioned. We were conscious of not being able to provide examples of good practice from all contexts. We hope that our descriptions of general characteristics of good practices will bring to mind concrete examples in specific contexts.

Truly synodal processes are not quick and neatly planned. Encounter and listening are slow work that unfolds in an open-ended way through feedback loops with next steps discerned in the light of what is heard. This report communicates what we have been able to learn in the time available and points towards further needs and possible mechanisms for ongoing listening and sharing of good practice.

## PART TWO

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Part Two we provide an overview of our recommendations. Further details are provided in the appendices named under each heading.

#### 1. Means of Reaching Out to Listen

Question 1 asks “What means does the Church already have at her disposal to reach out to those, including the earth, asking to be listened to? What new ones would be useful to introduce?” [Appendix A](#) describes the spaces, times, and processes of listening that already exist. It reflects on what hinders listening and on how we may become a listening Church. It makes eleven recommendations.

##### Recommendations

- 1.1. That the establishment of online platforms for sharing examples of good practice from around the world, be encouraged to assist the further development of a culture of encounter, ecological culture, dialogue, and deeper listening, by promoting and better utilising the material and personnel resources available within the Church. The new website of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development’s *Laudato Si’ Action Platform* is an example of how existing good practices can be shared and promoted.
- 1.2. That Bishops Conferences encourage use of the Mass for the Care of Creation recently added to the Roman Missal, especially during the ecumenical Season of Creation.
- 1.3. That leaders in parishes and dioceses be encouraged to expand the inclusiveness of the participatory bodies of the Church named at n 103 of the *Final Document* of the Synod on Synodality (hereafter, the “*Final Document*” [FD]) by ensuring the appointment of more people who are poor or from marginalized groups, including from the very local parish level, and those who speak on behalf of the territories most affected by the climate crisis, depopulation, and wars. Pastoral and parish councils should formalize this inclusive vision in their handbooks, ensuring that council members are representative of the entire parish or diocese, especially the vulnerable.
- 1.4. That regional working groups or an international working group on listening and responding to Indigenous Peoples’ concerns be established with terms of reference developed in dialogue with existing national or continental bodies of Indigenous Catholics.
- 1.5. That the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences study the possibility of establishing a safeguarding body where Dalit Catholics can safely raise their concerns, and which would monitor casteism issues within the Church in Asia and the diaspora.
- 1.6. That the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors be renamed to better communicate that its mandate includes safeguarding vulnerable adults as part of its scope, that victims of caste discrimination be included in its definition of vulnerable adults, and that it

consider the establishment of a dedicated staff position or pilot program on safeguarding mechanisms for these people at different levels in the Church.

- 1.7. That an Ecclesial Observatory on Disability be established pursuant to no. 63 of the *Final Document*, in accordance with the proposal at [Appendix B](#) which was prepared by the Disability Subgroup of Study Group 2, the majority of whose members are persons with disability.
- 1.8. That Bishops and groupings of Bishops be invited to adapt the proposal for an international Ecclesial Observatory on Disability to establish similar bodies at the diocesan, national and regional levels, and to use this model to create structures and processes for listening to other marginalised groups. Equal representation of women and men in the membership of such bodies, especially in leadership roles, is highly desirable.
- 1.9. That dioceses and Bishops Conferences consider forming groups, where they do not already exist, for single parents, widows, and widowers for support and empowerment and as a means of listening to their experiences and needs.
- 1.10. That further study on effective ways of listening to those affected by war, conflicts and violence be undertaken.
- 1.11. That dioceses, Bishops Conferences, and other groupings of Bishops develop plans to make resources available to facilitate the implementation of those recommendations in this report of greatest priority in their own context.

## **2. The Christian Community and Service of Charity, Justice, Integral Development, and Integral Ecology**

Question 2 asks “How can we reinforce the link between the Christian community that listens and those who work concretely in the service of charity, justice, integral development, and integral ecology 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, no. 16p)?” Thus [Appendix C](#) asks who are the poor and what is the earth that cries? It considers the proposal of a specific ministry of listening and accompaniment. It makes three recommendations.

### **Recommendations**

- 2.1. That pastors, bishops, ministries, and agencies of the Church stay constantly in touch with one another and ensure thorough two-way communication and collaboration between the Christian community and those who work concretely in the service of charity, justice, integral development, and integral ecology.
- 2.2. That parishes, dioceses and other Church entities invite all pastoral personnel, whether they are paid employees or volunteers, to participate in an ongoing social justice or ecological justice training or formation experience as part of their orientation to pastoral positions. Such experiences should involve spending time with the people and training for deep listening.
- 2.3. That dioceses offer spiritual and pastoral support to people and organisations working concretely in the service of charity, justice, integral development, and integral ecology by

providing lay, religious, or ordained chaplains, pastoral workers, or theologians to accompany them.

### **3. Networking Initiatives and Combining Charity and Protecting Rights**

Question 3 asks “How can we better network initiatives of welcome, care for creation, 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, no. 4f)?” [Appendix D](#) notes that a variety of kinds of initiatives are needed and that they are more effective when they are part of multilayered and interconnected networks of initiatives of different kinds. It makes seven recommendations.

#### **Recommendations**

- 3.1. That all Church ministries from local parishes to the international level continue to work towards better hearing both the cry of the poor and of the earth, attending to the interconnection of these cries, and involving relevant bodies to ensure that further action is taken.
- 3.2. That all social ministries promote political love as “one of the highest forms of charity” (*Fratelli tutti* [FT], n. 180) by linking charity with advocacy for justice and defence of human rights in their own responses to the cries of the poor and the earth and/or through popular participation in advocacy networks or alliances. The Church must make its voice heard and show how people experiencing poverty struggle daily to survive, accompanying them closely.
- 3.3. That social ministry initiatives engage in broad networks, including with people of other Christian traditions, other faiths, or none, and make use of the assistance of relevant experts and Christian leaders, expanding cooperation in other social areas and with other actors such as representatives of governments, non-profit organisations, social movements and other organisations working for the common good.
- 3.4. That parishes, dioceses and social ministry organisations ensure that their members who are concretely engaged in listening and responding to the cries of those made poor and of the earth have access to formation in the social teaching of the Church and social analysis, conflict resolution, and to assistance from people with relevant expertise such as lived experience, alliance building, care or advocacy.
- 3.5. That social ministry initiatives engage in regular self-critical reflection, evaluation, and reporting to ensure transparency and accountability, and to continually improve listening, deepen understanding of what works, correct any inadequacies, and inspire ever more effective action. This should include the application of gender, intergenerational, and ecological lenses as well as opportunities for input from people with lived experience, giving feedback from people, providing frameworks and other resources to enable more effective implementation on the ground.
- 3.6. That those involved in social ministry be supported to access the many scriptural, classical, and contemporary forms of prayer, spirituality, and liturgy, available to nourish listening to

the cry of those made poor and the earth, encouraging prayer moments for causes of justice, hope and resilience for those suffering in war zones.

- 3.7. That methods of communal spiritual discernment such as the spiritual conversation method be used when and where those involved in social ministry come together for evaluation, sharing, accountability and planning.

#### **4. Theological Research that Listens to the Poor and the Earth**

Question 4 asks “How can theological research listen to what the poor and the earth have to teach us since “through their sufferings they have a direct knowledge of the suffering Christ (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 198)” (SR, no. 4h)?”. [Appendix E](#) was developed by the Theology Subgroup of Study Group 2, which was made up of theologians who are or have been actively engaged in listening to the poor or marginalised. It reflects on theology for a synodal Church, the vocation of the theologian, doing theology, the need for an ecclesial and community-based theology, and on communication. It offers a six-part recommendation specifically for theologians, and a further six recommendations involving other actors.

##### **Recommendations**

- 4.1 That Church authorities appoint a significant number of theologians from communities made poor or marginalized, and/or theologians working with them in a non-instrumental way, to serve in advisory bodies at all levels of the Church from parishes to the Vatican, with active participatory roles in drafting Church statements. The appointment of women, people with disabilities, and people of colour should be a key priority.
- 4.2 That Church authorities and theological schools facilitate the access of lay people, especially women from poor or marginalized communities, to theological studies.
- 4.3 That theologians:
  - 4.3.1 become involved in ecclesial communities and movements with people in precarious situations, in order to deepen and expand ways of doing theology rooted in the suffering of the poor and the earth;
  - 4.3.2 develop their competency in intercultural approaches and dialogue;
  - 4.3.3 listen to poor and marginalised people’s own voices through their stories, music, art, and spiritual practices;
  - 4.3.4 meet face-to-face with communities pushed to the margins for mutual learning;
  - 4.3.5 engage with science, philosophy, the humanities, and the arts to think critically and analytically;
  - 4.3.6 work in a transdisciplinary way to make theological language more relevant and to thoughtfully highlight the faith expressions of people made poor.
- 4.4 That theological societies, with the support of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, collaborate to develop scalable global networks (in person and online) that connect theologians with organizations closest to the reality of the world of the poor. The lived experience and faith reflections of people/ecological communities made poor can

challenge theologians' way of doing theology. In turn, theologians can offer their expertise for: research, analysis of ecclesial cultures, engagement with canon law, biblical formation on pressing issues, the production of public theology, facilitating meetings with local ecclesiastical leaders, or pastoral accompaniment.

- 4.5 That the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, and the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue and/or their counterparts in local Churches strengthen dialogue among people made poor and vulnerable, Christians of other confessions, and neighbours of other religions in addressing theological and pastoral issues related to marginalization and the earth.
- 4.6 That Catholic media organizations and the schools or departments of theology at Catholic universities, theologates and seminaries, with the support of the Dicasteries for Communication, and Culture and Education, collaborate together with young people, to offer training on how to share ideas widely and to turn research into action that engages and helps communities.
- 4.7 That theological societies and Catholic universities organize conferences with people who are made poor and vulnerable, along with faith-based centers, GOs and NGOs working with them, and experts from other disciplines. They should discern and publish together in free easy to read formats their theological reflection on their lived experience and ensure that these are widely promoted.

## **5. Formation for Listening to the Poor and the Earth**

Question 5 asks “How can the Church respond to the formational and spiritual needs of those who are directly involved in the service of charity, care for creation, the promotion of justice and integral human development? How can we develop a spirituality that sustains them?”

[Appendix F](#) describes the listening that often accompanies formation programs, offers some insights that can be gleaned from them, and calls for deepening of listening. It notes that listening must be taught as a skill as well as a spiritual discipline, be integrated across disciplines and ministry experiences. It should be regularly evaluated and impact future ministry as well as present ministry experiences.

Twenty recommendations are addressed to those who work in the formation of lay leaders, seminarians, religious and laity in academic and pastoral programs, and those accompanying ongoing formation in parish and social ministries. They are offered under the headings of encounter, education for integration, and enlarging the space of our tent.

### **Recommendations**

#### *Encounter*

- 5.1. That formation programs prioritise direct encounters with persons who are made poor or in vulnerable situations.
- 5.2. That experiences of *listening* to persons on the peripheries include the diversity of those made poor and/or on the peripheries (e.g., listening to women, children, indigenous persons).

- 5.3. That formation programs include respectful encounters with other creatures and elements of creation in our Common Home.
- 5.4. That both before and during encounters with the people and the earth, formation programs include training in and developing competency in listening.
- 5.5. That formation programs recognise those made poor and vulnerable as agents of evangelization.
- 5.6. That formation includes opportunities for insertion in social movements and networks (e.g., indigenous communities, integral ecology, human rights, rights of women, Dalits, the LGBTQ+ community, those that link ecclesial and civil society networks) for cross-cultural learning, and to better understand the relationship between encounter, realities, and advocacy.
- 5.7. That formation programs engage with the great richness in the training provided within ecclesial networks on integral ecology, human rights, rights of women and children, the solidarity economy, migrants and other issues in partnership with civil society networks.

#### *Education for Integration*

- 5.8 That formation in the Catholic social justice tradition:
  - 5.8.1 explains how listening is integral to the development of Catholic Social Teaching, to Catholic social thought and action, and to processes of engaging experience, social analysis, theological reflection and action;
  - 5.8.2 makes explicit the spirituality embedded in it and presents listening as a spiritual experience rather than a strategy;
  - 5.8.3 includes social teaching, thought and action emerging from the peripheries, for example the statement from the Catholic Episcopal Conferences and Councils of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean on the Occasion of COP30, [\*A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home: Ecological Conversion, Transformation and Resistance to False Solutions\*](#);
  - 5.8.4 includes education for advocacy and action that respects the agency of those made poor or experiencing vulnerability.
- 5.9 That spiritual traditions, including the rich histories of religious congregations, are explored as resources for a spirituality of justice that can sustain people in ministry and also those on the peripheries.
- 5.10 That formation programs and resources make explicit the interconnection between care of those made poor and care of the earth so that listening in one area impacts all else.
- 5.11 That formation be done by lay, religious and seminarians (FD, no. 143) together as much as possible, with deliberate diversity within formation faculties (e.g. including lay, religious and clergy, different genders, cultures, and experiences of accompanying those made poor or in vulnerable situations).
- 5.12 That Programs of Priestly Formation, Religious Life Formation, and for Ecclesial Lay Leadership, include listening to the people made poor and the earth within their Goals and

Orientations. Formation programs need to include Skill-building, Competency Assessments and Growth Plans. Local Churches and Religious Institutes should make specific recommendations based on their specific contexts.

- 5.13 That as part of the evaluation process, formators seek feedback from local communities about the capacity of people in formation to be with and listen to the people.

*Enlarging the Space of Our Tent*

- 5.14 That access to formation opportunities be ensured for persons on the margins or in vulnerable situations including First Nations people, women, and people with disability.
- 5.15 That language for persons on the margins or in vulnerable situations honours the diversity of their experience and reflects the dignity of the person as transcending their situation, for example via ‘person first language’ such as persons with disability rather than disabled persons.
- 5.16 That the Synod Secretariat gather and create resources for listening and host an Online Resource Center for learning to listen and building listening capacities, including offering ongoing examples of good practices.
- 5.17 That formation for listening includes:
- 5.17.1 developing intercultural competency for working across different cultures;
  - 5.17.2 ensuring the voices and experiences of women are heard;
  - 5.17.3 ensuring the voices and experiences of people with disabilities are heard;
  - 5.17.4 being sensitive to the LGBTQ+ community,
  - 5.17.5 hearing and responding to the cry of the earth.
- 5.18 That formation for listening be accompanied by social analysis, particularly gender and cultural analysis, understanding the abuse that can occur in cultural, religious and political systems, and learning about structural ways of responding (FD, no. 28)
- 5.19 That the experiences of women religious and men religious be engaged as resources for accompaniment and listening to the peripheries.
- 5.20 That implementation paths of dioceses evaluate the impact of experiences of encounter, education and integration during formation and beyond formation in all places of ministry in local Churches.

## APPENDIX A

### QUESTION 1: EXISTING AND NEW MEANS OF LISTENING

*What means does the Church already have at her disposal to reach out to those, including the earth, asking to be listened to? What new ones would be useful to introduce?*

The ancient Jewish prayer – “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (*Deut 6,4*) is foundational for a people’s life of faith. The imperative to hear, to listen, is a way of remaining close to God and putting into action our trust in God. Jesus listened to both God and to the needs of people, for his love was one. We are invited to follow Jesus’ advice: “pay attention to how you listen” (*Lk 8,18*). Through listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches (*Rev 2,17*), we will be able to better respond to the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of God’s people and of all creation.

#### **Current Means of Listening**

##### **Spaces of Listening**

There are many spaces of listening within the Church at the local, national, continental, and international levels in which the cries of the poor and of the earth are currently being heard.

Parishes, local faith communities, and Basic Ecclesial Communities are grassroots spaces of embodied encounter where people meet, share stories, and integrate their faith and daily life. Some listen directly to the cry of the poor because they are made up of poor people – they are the Church of the poor. Others reach out in friendship to members of their local community, or live and do mission with those made poor, marginalized, or vulnerable – they are the Church with and for the poor. Increasingly local faith communities are also listening to the cry of the earth and embracing care for creation, conscious that they are part of the larger ecological community.

Church ministries provide humanitarian aid, psychosocial support, social care, community development or youth and family services, creating spaces of listening for those pushed to the margins, experiencing vulnerability, or living at the ‘existential peripheries’. Catholic healthcare ministries are spaces of encounter with people in their vulnerability, addressing their physical and spiritual needs, offering healing, and accompanying them to the end of life. The Church’s educational ministries - schools, informal education programs, popular education, adult education, training centres, tertiary education - are established to serve the poor or include them through means such as bursaries. These learning communities are spaces of listening where the desire for integral human development is heard and addressed.

As responsible citizens Christians, especially the laity, are active in social movements and civil society organizations that create public spaces for hearing the cries of the poor and the earth, denouncing injustices, inviting dialogue, and proposing alternatives. Through them the Church is

present at the peripheries, listening to and working with others of good will towards the common good.

### **Times of Listening**

Christian people, and the whole faith community, regularly listen to the poor and the earth at particular times.

In every parish the celebration of the Eucharist is a time of encounter with one another and with God. The general intercessions at Mass both call the worshipping community to listen to the poor and the earth and they reflect how that community has heard their cries at that moment in space and time.

The Feast of St Francis of Assisi, and the ecumenical Season of Creation, are times that invite us to listen to how God is at work in the love of simplicity, care for the poor, and for creation. Local liturgical calendars also commemorate holy women and men from every part of the world who have shown us how to listen to the cries of the poor and the earth.

The season of Lent invites us to listen to God's call to repentance and conversion, and to renewed commitment to building God's Reign. It is a time to reflect on our behaviour, both personal and collective. We lament our complicity in structures and institutions that harm creation and wound our sisters and brothers. We incline the ear of our hearts to those made poor, marginalized, or vulnerable. We open our hearts to learn from their sharing in Christ's suffering and their reliance on God.

The Advent season invites us to listen for signs of a new heaven and earth breaking in. We listen to the story of God with us – Emmanuel – as an event of both past and present. We contemplate God's presence in history – past, present, and future – noting God's preferential love for the poor. We ask, “where is Jesus being born today?”, “where is the Holy Family fleeing today?”.

Our personal prayer and retreats are times when we look and listen for God's presence in our lives and in our world. The poor and the earth often reveal God's call to us personally and collectively. There are also special times when Christian communities make a collective discernment of the signs of the times, such as diocesan assemblies or synods, and plenary councils. In our parishes and Catholic organizations strategic planning follows from discernment for mission. Preparation for such times often involves community consultation and listening especially to the poor, marginalized and vulnerable, to those who are usually excluded.

Special days such as Migrant and Refugee Sunday, the International Day of the Poor and the International Day of Persons with Disability invite us to reach out to encounter the people concerned and listen to them. This can be done within and beyond the context of the liturgy.

### **Processes of Listening**

The Church's existing processes of listening range from interpersonal listening to local, national, continental, and international processes. They may be formal or informal, intra-Church or community wide. We listen with Christians of other confessions, with our neighbours of other

religions, with experts from various disciplines, civil society, government, and international organisations or networks.

Visiting those who are poor or vulnerable in their homes, drawing close to them like the Good Samaritan, hearing their stories, and becoming real friends, is a process of listening used by parish care groups, various lay organisations, and religious institutes. Similarly, accompanying, serving, and pleading the cause of those made poor, marginalized, or excluded ensures responses remain grounded in listening directly to the people.

The participatory bodies of the Church named in no. 103 of the *Final Document*, such as parish councils, can provide processes of listening to the poor and the earth. In some places, Diocesan Commissions listen closely to the poor, marginalized, or those who speak for the earth. There is potential to better integrate insights from such bodies into decision making, discernment, and planning processes at diocesan and national levels. Feedback loops between participatory bodies at different levels can help ensure the cries of the poor and the earth are heard. Appointing more people who are poor or from marginalized groups to participatory bodies could prophetically expand their inclusiveness, enhancing processes for listening to these cries.

In some places diocesan or national bodies of Indigenous Catholics enable local Churches to listen to their wisdom, experiences, and concerns. They have much to teach about listening to creation. Protocols of consultation within Indigenous communities before representatives can speak on behalf of the community are often extensive and may require long and open time frames. Furthermore, acknowledging Church entanglement in the process of colonisation, consultation with Indigenous bodies requires interlocutors with established relationships of trust. Study Group 2 did not have sufficient time or resources to consult adequately with Indigenous communities on ways of improving the Church's listening to them. A specific consultation, planned with Indigenous Catholic groups, and a longer timeframe would be desirable.

Many local Churches have established safeguarding bodies to prevent and address abuse of children and vulnerable adults. Yet the reports of abuse of some vulnerable groups are still not effectively heard. International processes may be needed to support more local efforts in some instances. For example, a safeguarding body at the Asian and/or global level where Dalit Catholics in Asia and in diaspora could safely raise their concerns could be established to monitor casteism issues within the Church.

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors promotes processes for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and is a means of listening to victims of abuse. Its mandate in relation to vulnerable adults could be better communicated, including through renaming, and be further developed. For example, its definition of vulnerable adults could explicitly include victims of caste discrimination and a dedicated staff position or pilot program addressing this issue could be established.

We heard that many Church aid and development agencies take a participatory or community-driven approach and include people who are poor, marginalised, or vulnerable in the design, implementation, evaluation and governance of their projects and programs. They typically operate from a partnership model where community engagement ensures groups in need are listened to, are protagonists in identifying issues and priorities, and participate meaningfully in co-designing

responses and evaluating outcomes. These processes could also be used in parishes and other Church entities.

Furthermore, we can recognise that the poor are not voiceless, but rather unheard. We can give them the word and amplify their voices rather than speaking for or about them. We can choose to listen to the faithfully documented voices of poor or marginalized people for instance via their own statements and cultural creativity such as music, dance, literature, prayers, and spiritual traditions or popular religious practices (see [Appendix E](#)).

Networks at national, regional, and international levels listen by reaching out in solidarity to ally with those in need, addressing human rights, poverty, ecology, and peace. These networks support the poor, marginalized, or excluded to speak for themselves in policy forums at all levels and be heard. More recently such networks have developed in solidarity with creation, for example the [Laudato Si' Action Platform](#).

## **Towards a Listening Heart**

Scripture often encourages us not to be afraid, yet fear hinders us from listening to the cries of the poor and the earth. Are we afraid to listen, lest we, like the rich young man (cf. *Mt* 19,16- 22), turn away sad because of our many possessions? If we hear the poor, marginalized, or excluded, and the cry of the earth, we cannot escape the need for personal and structural change. This is Good News, calling us to participate in the Reign of God.

We have learned throughout the Synod process that the Church is not as inclusive as we hope. We need to move out from ourselves to listen to the cries of the poor and the earth. Pope Francis's social teaching called us to develop a culture of encounter, listening and dialogue (cf. FT, no. 216) to ground our positions, priorities, and actions. However, encounter and dialogue are time-consuming and demanding both psychologically and in terms of resources, they call for decolonization of our minds, and the outcomes are unpredictable. Are we willing to trust in the Guiding Spirit or are we more comfortable with processes we can control?

We also learned from the effort to undertake the Synod on Synodality in a synodal manner that listening to one another may reveal rather than eliminate differences or conflicts. Do we shy away from conflict crying “peace, peace, when there is no peace” (*Jer* 6,14)? A spirituality that embraces difference as a sign of God’s abundance, and trusts that harmony can be found in diversity because we share a common origin and destiny, may support us to patiently discern together God’s call to us in time and place.

The Church has many means of listening to the cries of the poor and the earth. However, the Synod learned that women, Indigenous people, Dalits, young people, people with disability, victims of class or caste discrimination and racism, LGBTQIA+ people, those made poor, and other marginalized groups, are still asking to be heard. Creation itself is asking to be heard. We need to deepen our listening and respond with transformative action. Synodality invites us to move from *having* means of listening to *becoming* a means of listening in service of God’s mission.

## **New Means of Listening**

As we work to deepen our existing means of listening, we remain open to new means of becoming a listening Church. The Synod discussed the proposal of a specific ministry of listening and accompaniment, however some feared that the creation of a specific ministry could lead to an illegitimate delegation rather than encouraging all Church entities to listen to the cry of the poor and the earth. Experimentation with such ministries in parishes, dioceses, or at other levels in those contexts where they are discerned to be appropriate would enable reflection on experience to provide guidance.

Such ministries or structures could address emerging pastoral needs. For example, the *Final Document* recommends establishing an Ecclesial Observatory on Disability (no. 63). At [Appendix B](#) we offer a practical proposal for implementing this recommendation at the international level. This model of listening to a marginalized group and empowering them to lead responses is both scalable and generalizable. Similar bodies could be established at diocesan, national or regional levels enabling a multi-layered response. They could also be established for other groups asking to be heard, such as women, Indigenous People, or victims of caste discrimination.

Ecclesial Networks and Conferences are new means of listening. They have potential to place the collegiality of bishops within the broader dynamic of synodality among the whole People of God, while recognizing the primacy of the Pope. They could operate at diocesan, national, or regional levels and ensure that the poor, those who speak for the earth, and members of marginalized groups, are represented and heard. They could provide processes of intercultural dialogue and a decolonial reading of the Church's relationship with Indigenous peoples.

## **Recommendations**

- 1.1. That the establishment of online platforms for sharing examples of good practice from around the world, be encouraged to assist the further development of a culture of encounter, ecological culture, dialogue, and deeper listening, by promoting and better utilising the material and personnel resources available within the Church. The new website of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development's *Laudato Si' Action Platform* is an example of how existing good practices can be shared and promoted.
- 1.2. That Bishops Conferences encourage use of the Mass for the Care of Creation recently added to the Roman Missal, especially during the ecumenical Season of Creation.
- 1.3. That leaders in parishes and dioceses be encouraged to expand the inclusiveness of the participatory bodies of the Church named at no. 103 of the *Final Document* by ensuring the appointment of more people who are poor or from marginalized groups, including from the very local parish level, and those who speak on behalf of the territories most affected by the climate crisis, depopulation, and wars. Pastoral and parish councils should formalize this inclusive vision in their handbooks, ensuring that council members are representative of the entire parish or diocese, especially the vulnerable.
- 1.4. That regional working groups or an international working group on listening and responding to Indigenous Peoples' concerns be established with terms of reference developed in dialogue with existing national or continental bodies of Indigenous Catholics.

- 1.5. That the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences study the possibility of establishing a safeguarding body where Dalit Catholics can safely raise their concerns, and which would monitor casteism issues within the Church in Asia and the diaspora.
- 1.6. That the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors be renamed to better communicate that its mandate includes safeguarding vulnerable adults as part of its scope, that victims of caste discrimination be included in its definition of vulnerable adults, and that it consider the establishment of a dedicated staff position or pilot program on safeguarding mechanisms for these people at different levels in the Church.
- 1.7. That an Ecclesial Observatory on Disability be established pursuant to no. 63 of the *Final Document*, in accordance with the proposal at [Appendix B](#) which was prepared by the Disability Subgroup of Study Group 2, the majority of whose members are persons with disability.
- 1.8. That Bishops and groupings of Bishops be invited to adapt the proposal for an international Ecclesial Observatory on Disability to establish similar bodies at the diocesan, national and regional levels, and to use this model to create structures and processes for listening to other marginalised groups. Equal representation of women and men in the membership of such bodies, especially in leadership roles, is highly desirable.
- 1.9. That dioceses and Bishops Conferences consider forming groups, where they do not already exist, for single parents, widows, and widowers for support and empowerment and as a means of listening to their experiences and needs.
- 1.10. That further study on effective ways of listening to those affected by war, conflicts and violence be undertaken.
- 1.11. That dioceses, Bishops Conferences, and other groupings of Bishops develop plans to make resources available to facilitate the implementation of those recommendations in this report of greatest priority in their own context.

## APPENDIX B

# PROPOSAL FOR AN ECCLESIAL OBSERVATORY ON DISABILITY

### **Introduction**

Paragraph 63 of the *Final Document* recommended the establishment of a Church-based Observatory (hereafter, The Observatory), not as a passive observer but rather to enhance the “participation in the life of the Church” of persons with disability by listening to their concerns and issues as agents of evangelisation and ensuring that they are acted on.

Convened by Study Group 2 of the Synod, this Subgroup (consisting mostly of persons with disability) therefore recommends the following structure be established to give effect to paragraph 63 of the *Document*.

### **Structure**

1. The Observatory is autonomous in governance, is an Institution Connected with the Holy See, according to Article 241 of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*.
2. It has a Bishop and a person with disability as co-chairs.
3. It has a board constituted as follows:
  - (a) up to ten persons (men and women) with disability (physical, organic, sensory, cognitive);
  - (b) up to two relatives/caregivers of persons with disability; and
  - (c) one representative from each of the Dicastries for Promoting Integral Human Development and for the Laity, the Family and Life.
4. It has a General Secretary and a small number of officials in Rome to ensure its functioning. We propose that the board and advisory body convened by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life to provide input to the Synod form the initial nucleus of the Observatory.
5. No substantive decision will be able to be taken without the consent of the majority of the board, including a majority of those with a disability.
6. The Observatory has a physical office, and such permanent and temporary staff as may be required to fulfil its objectives. Given that persons with disability have varying degrees of movement and accessibility, however, the Observatory facilitates remote access and has all the technology required to meet electronically. Personnel selection must adhere to the guidelines of *Praedicate Evangelium*, particularly principles and criteria outlined in Articles 7 and 131 of the Roman Curia’s service principles.

## Objectives

To fulfil its nature and purpose, the Observatory will pursue the following specific objectives:

1. To ensure that the Gospel is proclaimed to persons with disability.
2. To listen, understand and report the realities of men and women with disability – their achievements, aspirations, demands, and needs – considering their diverse situations across territories, continents, and cultures.
3. To promote the co-responsible participation of men and women with disability in the life and mission of the Church at all levels: universal, continental, national, diocesan/eparchial, and parish, clerical, religious and lay, to give public voice to their concerns, joys, hopes, and fears. This will include dissemination of information, collection and distribution of data and raising of awareness of disability related issues at all levels (including researching and developing appropriate teaching and learning materials) as well as collaboration with existing structures and research initiatives.
4. To collaborate with other civil and ecclesial entities, internationally and domestically, and in both Latin and Eastern Churches, to promote the integral development and social inclusion of persons with disability in various contexts and situations.
5. To encourage theological reflection and research on the reality of disability and the pastoral responses needed from a synodal Church in mission and the formation of theologians with disability (including the service of their spiritual and pastoral needs). This will include separating the notion of disability and inherent human limitation from that of sin and avoiding a “dolorist,” paternalistic or assistential view of disability and, in so doing, deepening reflection on the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.
6. To coordinate the work of Dicasteries and other entities within the Church in relation to the world of persons with disability aware that “the whole People of God is an agent of the proclamation of the Gospel. Every baptised person is called to be a protagonist of mission since we are all missionary disciples” (FD, no. 4). This will include ensuring liturgical and pastoral access for persons with disability at all levels.
7. To ensure that the evangelising work of persons with disability and the work of The Observatory is harmonised with the broader work of the Church to welcome the poor and heal the Earth as our common home in accordance with *Laudato Si’*.
8. To directly advise the Holy Father on actions regarding persons with disability, especially in his annual exhortations on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and other similar interventions.

The Observatory has all the powers necessary to give effect to these objectives. While in receipt of funding through normal Curial channels, it has the ability to raise funds and seek such external advice as may be required.

### **Disability Subgroup, Study Group 2**

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## APPENDIX C

### QUESTION 2: LINKING THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND THOSE WHO WORK CONCRETELY IN THE SERVICE OF CHARITY, JUSTICE, INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT, AND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

*How can we reinforce the link between the Christian community that listens and those who work concretely in the service of charity, justice, integral development, and integral ecology in order to avoid abdication of responsibilities and illegitimate delegation?*

The call to listen to the cry of the poor and of the earth (cf. LS, no. 49) may lead us to ask, “who are the poor to whom we must listen?” and “what is the earth that cries?” This sounds like the scribe asking Jesus, “who is my neighbour?” In the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10,25-37), Jesus does not provide a list of categories or definitions. He gives a dynamic response: our neighbour is the one in need, and responding makes us a neighbour in the image of Christ. The priest and the Levite were respected religious members of society, but they failed to listen to the cry of the traveller left half-dead on the road. The Samaritan, on the other hand, was moved by compassion, stepped out of his way to accompany the wounded man, and enlisted the help of the innkeeper to ensure a sustainable response. Like the Samaritan we need to engage and dialogue with others to address violence or injustice. We need help from experts from various disciplines to understand root causes and impacts, as well as help from grassroots, pastoral, and professional theologians to discern the situation in the light of our faith tradition. We engage with rather than simply delegating to ‘innkeepers’ such as Church, government, and civil society groups at the local, regional, or global levels, and with people and organizations from other Christian faiths and religions.

#### **Social Ministry is Integral to Evangelisation**

Responding concretely to those made poor or to Creation cannot be seen as an optional activity for some Christians, and certainly not as something only for professionals or for special ministries or organizations. While we need help from people with various kinds of expertise and skills if our responses are to be effective and sustainable, it is not legitimate to simply delegate responsibility for responses to them. Everyone has something to bring to heeding the cry of the earth and of those made poor, and we cannot abdicate our responsibility. Responding to these cries is integral to the mission of our entire faith community - individuals, families, parishes, dioceses, and every kind of Church entity!

As we note in [Appendix A](#), “the Synod discussed the proposal of a specific ministry of listening and accompaniment, however some feared that the creation of a specific ministry could lead to an illegitimate delegation rather than encouraging all Church entities to listen to the cry of

the poor and the earth. Experimentation with such ministries in parishes, dioceses, or at other levels in those contexts where they are discerned to be appropriate would enable reflection on experience to provide guidance.” Such ministries should not be an end in themselves but serve to promote transformative action that supports the voice and agency of those who ask to be heard, as suggested in the recommendations of [Appendix A](#).

## **Staying Connected**

There are many ways in which parishes, local Christian communities and specialized ministries and agencies working concretely in the service of charity, justice, integral development, and integral ecology can and do stay closely linked. For example, in one region every pastoral agent undertakes volunteer commitments designed to deepen solidarity with the local Church’s expressed priorities, including accompanying Indigenous or immigrant communities.

Two-way communication is crucial. Pastors and the diocesan bishop should be continually informed of and invited into participation in responses to the cries of those made poor and the Earth. They in turn have a responsibility to ensure that the faithful in parishes and other church entities are informed of the ways in which ministries and agencies of the Church are concretely engaged in the service of charity, justice, integral development, and integral ecology, and how the Christian community can get involved in and support this work.

Those ministering in agencies and Catholic social movements, whether they share our Catholic faith or not, could be helpfully accompanied in their work lives by the presence of chaplains, pastoral workers, or theologians. The inspiration and encouragement of the Gospel message must reach beyond the confines of parish structures. Furthermore, the reflection on experience of people engaged in social ministry can help the Christian community to receive the evangelizing message of those made poor, pushed to the edges, or excluded.

## **Recommendations**

- 2.1. That pastors, bishops, ministries, and agencies of the Church stay constantly in touch with one another and ensure thorough two-way communication and collaboration between the Christian community and those who work concretely in the service of charity, justice, integral development, and integral ecology.
- 2.2. That parishes, dioceses and other Church entities invite all pastoral personnel, whether they are paid employees or volunteers, to participate in an ongoing social justice or ecological justice training or formation experience as part of their orientation to pastoral positions. Such experiences should involve spending time with the people and training for deep listening.
- 2.3. That dioceses offer spiritual and pastoral support to people and organisations working concretely in the service of charity, justice, integral development, and integral ecology by providing lay, religious, or ordained chaplains, pastoral workers, or theologians to accompany them.

## APPENDIX D

### QUESTION 3: NETWORKING INITIATIVES AND COMBINING THE SERVICE OF CHARITY AND THE PROTECTION OF RIGHTS

*How can we better network initiatives of welcome, care for creation, 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, no. 4f)?*

St Paul reminds us that the Body of Christ is made up of many parts with different functions (cf. *1Cor* 12,13-27). Similarly, the many different social and ecological ministry initiatives and strategies are like parts of the body. Advocacy cannot say to direct service “I do not need you.” Nor can direct service say to research into causes and impacts “I do not need you.” If all social and ecological initiatives were identical, the social mission of the Church would not be whole, and important functions would be missing. Each part is connected to and belongs to the body, which is greater than the sum of its parts.

#### **Networking Initiatives**

Since the beginnings of the Church until today, there have been countless examples of hearing the cry of the poor. More recently Church teaching, especially *Laudato Si’* and *Laudate Deum*, have encouraged hearing the cry of the earth, too. A variety of means of listening to those made poor and the earth are described in [Appendix A](#).

We have become more aware that “a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (LS, no. 49; cf. no. 139; EG, no. 198). It is not simply that both cries are important. They are so interrelated that they can only be effectively addressed in an integral way. The siloing of different kinds of social and ecological initiatives should be avoided.

Charitable works which provide direct assistance are always necessary, but they are not sufficient on their own because they do not address root causes. Formation in the social teaching of the Church, social analysis, and openness to the help of those with relevant expertise, can shed light on the cries of those made poor and the earth in order to grasp the problems and most appropriate solutions. We heard that Catholic agencies have been moving from an understanding of charity as service to or for others towards being something done with people in need, including through fostering “by and for” organisations that empower people and communities to speak and act on their own behalf. The expertise of lived experience should not be neglected.

Pope Francis taught that the Gospel has a political dimension: to transform the social, including religious, mindset of the people. Advocacy is not, therefore, an afterthought for the Christian, but rather a responsibility. In fact, political love is “one of the highest forms of charity as it seeks the

common good” (FT, no. 180). Yet fear of accusations of partisan politics, or of reprisals from powerful authorities, can prevent Christians from building on charitable works of direct assistance to include the public denunciation of injustices and proposals for systemic change towards social and ecological justice. Political love is also an art and practice to be developed with prayerful discernment and care for the common good. Closeness to those made poor and to the rest of creation guarantee the authenticity of advocacy.

Research into causes, the analysis of impacts, the denunciation of injustices, and the advocacy – and even witness through modelling – of alternatives, are needed as well as direct assistance. The experience of Church ministries and organisations is that all these efforts can be more effective when they are part of multilayered and interconnected networks of initiatives of different kinds. Such networks exist in fields such as integral human development, human mobility, ecological action, and advocacy, and can provide examples of good practice. For example, we heard how, in one continent, a mapping tool is used in one sector to gather and share institutional information on who is doing what in order to facilitate networking. Several submissions received by Study Group 2 urged the Church not to restrict its networking to its own members, and shared positive experiences of embracing working with persons of other Christian traditions, other religions, or no religion.

In an integral approach to social ministry the spiritual dimension must not be neglected. All those who are involved should be supported to access the many scriptural, classical, and contemporary forms of prayer, spirituality, and liturgy, available to nourish Christian listening to the cry of those made poor and the earth.

## **Self-Reflection and Evaluation**

Good initiatives can be left incomplete without reflection, evaluation, and communication. To reflect is to draw out the fruit of experience. It can be used to improve listening, deepen understanding of what works, and to correct any inadequacies – and to inspire others. Many experiences shared with Study Group 2 demonstrated that including stakeholders and program participants in evaluation processes is an important way of listening to those made poor or excluded, or who speak for the earth, respecting their agency, and making action more effective.

One area for ongoing improvement is attention to the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of women and girls. Everywhere women and girls are among the poorest of the poor and those who suffer the most from the effects of the ecological crisis. Including a gender lens in reflection and evaluation, and promoting the leadership of women, will enable a more holistic understanding and the development of a more synodal approach.

## **Recommendations**

- 3.1. That all Church ministries from local parishes to the international level continue to work towards better hearing both the cry of the poor and of the earth, attending to the interconnection of these cries, and involving relevant bodies to ensure that further action is taken.
- 3.2. That all social ministries promote political love as “one of the highest forms of charity” (FT, no. 180) by linking charity with advocacy for justice and defence of human rights in their own

responses to the cries of the poor and the earth and/or through popular participation in advocacy networks or alliances. The Church must make its voice heard and show how people experiencing poverty struggle daily to survive, accompanying them closely.

- 3.3. That social ministry initiatives engage in broad networks, including with people of other Christian traditions, other faiths, or none, and make use of the assistance of relevant experts and Christian leaders, expanding cooperation in other social areas and with other actors such as representatives of governments, non-profit organisations, social movements and other organisations working for the common good.
- 3.4. That parishes, dioceses and social ministry organisations ensure that their members who are concretely engaged in listening and responding to the cries of those made poor and of the earth have access to formation in the social teaching of the Church and social analysis, conflict resolution, and to assistance from people with relevant expertise such as lived experience, alliance building, care or advocacy.
- 3.5. That social ministry initiatives engage in regular self-critical reflection, evaluation, and reporting to ensure transparency and accountability, and to continually improve listening, deepen understanding of what works, correct any inadequacies, and inspire ever more effective action. This should include the application of gender, intergenerational, and ecological lenses as well as opportunities for input from people with lived experience, giving feedback from people, providing frameworks and other resources to enable more effective implementation on the ground.
- 3.6. That those involved in social ministry be supported to access the many scriptural, classical, and contemporary forms of prayer, spirituality, and liturgy, available to nourish listening to the cry of those made poor and the earth, encouraging prayer moments for causes of justice, hope and resilience for those suffering in war zones.
- 3.7. That methods of communal spiritual discernment such as the spiritual conversation method be used when and where those involved in social ministry come together for evaluation, sharing, accountability and planning.

## APPENDIX E

### QUESTION 4: THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

#### *LISTENING THE POOR AND THE EARTH*

#### HOW CAN THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH LISTEN TO WHAT THE POOR AND THE EARTH CAN TEACH THE CHURCH?

*How can theological research listen to what the poor and the earth have to teach us since “through their sufferings they have a direct knowledge of the suffering Christ (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, n. 198)” (SR, no. 4h)?*

#### **Theology for a Synodal Church in Mission**

In Jesus, the God of all creation joined humanity in vulnerability, communicating God’s preferential love for the poor, the marginalized, and all creatures who are excluded from full participation in the goodness of the earth. A synodal Church is called to listen to how God is speaking in and through communities/ecosystems made poor and vulnerable. A synodal theology that can discern the signs of the times for following Jesus in missionary discipleship arises from fidelity to the lived faith experience of ecological communities in whose struggle for life the God of life is revealed. This theology is contextual, intercultural, transdisciplinary, ecclesial, and rooted in the Word of God.

#### **The Vocation of the Theologian**

A theologian is called to live, reflect, and communicate the communion of the love of God and love of neighbour that is at the heart of the good news of Jesus Christ. Theologians who remain exclusively within the academy or caught up in academic careerism and who do not belong to or have no sustained encounters with marginalized communities may fail to hear the cry of the poor and the earth, or even instrumentalize the poor. Theologians, whom God can raise up in many ways, bear responsibility for producing scholarship that at its deepest level unites, in difference, the common search for the knowledge of God and God’s wisdom. It is vital that theologians overcome the alienation that too often separates groups of people into an us and them, for all people have the capacity to teach and shine light on the mystery of God. All have a vocation to discern how God is leading the Church. The knowledge and wisdom that the poor and marginalized have of God is to be received as a pearl of great price (*Mt 13,35*), for ultimately, it is to them that God is preferentially revealed (*Mt 11,25*).

- 4.1 **We recommend that Church authorities** appoint a significant number of theologians from communities made poor or marginalized, and/or theologians working with them in a non-instrumental way, to serve in advisory bodies at all levels of the Church from parishes to the Vatican, with active participatory roles in drafting Church statements. The appointment of women, people with disabilities, and people of colour should be a key priority.
- 4.2 **We recommend that Church authorities and theological schools** facilitate the access of lay people, especially women from poor or marginalized communities, to theological studies.

## Doing Theology

Spirituality, the way one lives according to the Spirit in the following of Jesus, is the foundation for all theologizing. Every theological vocation is expressed uniquely according to the gifts of the Spirit and the opportunities encountered in a particular context and culture. However, theologians can cultivate and deepen a preferential option for the poor and the earth through sustained encounter and solidarity with marginalized communities, and by drawing from their own lived experience of poverty, marginalization, or exclusion. The spirituality of communities who struggle for life amid death-dealing poverty is not an option for doing theology, but the very source and guarantee that theology can say something true, relevant, and universal about God's reign in history.

### 4.3 We recommend that theologians:

- 4.3.1 become involved in ecclesial communities and movements with people in precarious situations, in order to deepen and expand ways of doing theology rooted in the suffering of the poor and the earth;
- 4.3.2 develop their competency in intercultural approaches and dialogue;
- 4.3.3 listen to poor and marginalised people's own voices through their stories, music, art, and spiritual practices;
- 4.3.4 meet face-to-face with communities pushed to the margins for mutual learning;
- 4.3.5 engage with science, philosophy, the humanities, and the arts to think critically and analytically;
- 4.3.6 work in a transdisciplinary way to make theological language more relevant and to thoughtfully highlight the faith expressions of people made poor.

## An Ecclesial and Community-Based Theology

Theologians are invited to recognize themselves as active participants and members of, ecclesial communities. In this way, their questions can more naturally arise from the life of communities. The wisdom and knowledge of all members of the People of God, in light of the *sensus fidei* and living Tradition of the Church, should echo through every thread of theology, woven as a tapestry by many hands. Theologians can help to systematize and disseminate life-giving responses to urgent pastoral and systematic questions.

The Synod processes for communication between and among local contexts and for regional/national or continental discernment could be a starting point for developing further networks of mutual accompaniment among theologians and ecclesial communities.

- 4.4 **We recommend that theological societies, with the support of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development,** collaborate to develop scalable global networks (in person and online) that connect theologians with organizations closest to the reality of the world of the poor. The lived experience and faith reflections of people/ecological communities made poor can challenge theologians' way of doing theology. In turn, theologians can offer their expertise for: research, analysis of ecclesial cultures, engagement

with canon law, biblical formation on pressing issues, the production of public theology, facilitating meetings with local ecclesiastical leaders, or pastoral accompaniment.

- 4.5 **We recommend that the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, and the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue** and/or their counterparts in local Churches strengthen dialogue among people made poor and vulnerable, Christians of other confessions, and neighbours of other religions in addressing theological and pastoral issues related to marginalization and the earth.

## **Communication**

Theological reflection on faith must lead to action transforming individuals, communities, and society. It must facilitate the agency of those made poor, marginalized, or excluded, amplifying their voice and action. Thus, theologians must learn how to communicate their reflections to contemporary society, for instance, through social media, pastoral seminars, and meetings of basic ecological communities.

- 4.6 **We recommend that Catholic media organizations and the schools or departments of theology at Catholic universities, theologates and seminaries, with the support of the Dicasteries for Communication, and Culture and Education,** collaborate together with young people, to offer training on how to share ideas widely and to turn research into action that engages and helps communities.
- 4.7 **We recommend that theological societies and Catholic universities** organize conferences with people who are made poor and vulnerable, along with faith-based centers, GOs and NGOs working with them, and experts from other disciplines. They should discern and publish together in free easy to read formats their theological reflection on their lived experience and ensure that these are widely promoted.

It is in these ways that we believe that a synodal Church will be better equipped to listen and respond to the cry of the poor and the earth.

### **Theology Subgroup, Study Group 2**

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## APPENDIX F

### QUESTION 5: FORMATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS

#### RESPONDING TO THE FORMATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF THOSE WHO ARE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE SERVICE OF CHARITY, CARE FOR CREATION, THE PROMOTION OF JUSTICE AND INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

*How can the Church respond to the formational and spiritual needs of those who are directly involved in the service of charity, care for creation, the promotion of justice and integral human development? How can we develop a spirituality that sustains them?*

*“Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately.” (Acts 18,24-26)*

Formation is a key component of the *Final Document* of the Synod. A synodal Church requires formation that is integral, engaging the intellectual, affective, relational and spiritual dimensions of the person (cf. FD, no. 143). It must be ongoing, as it was for Apollos. It should be “common and shared formation” in which “men and women, laity, consecrated persons, ordained ministers and candidates for ordained ministry participate together, thus enabling them to grow together in knowledge and mutual esteem and in the ability to collaborate” (*Ibid.*).

In order to discern, we need to listen. As the *Final Document* explains, “decision-making processes need ecclesial discernment, which requires listening in a climate of trust that is supported by transparency and accountability. Trust must be mutual: decision-makers need to be able to trust and listen to the People of God” (no. 80). Formation is needed in order to engage in these processes. Such formation “is not only technical; it also needs to explore theological, biblical, and spiritual foundations. All the Baptised need this formation in witness, mission, holiness, and service, which emphasises co-responsibility. It takes on particular forms for those in positions of responsibility or at the service of ecclesial discernment” (*Ibid.*).

In all of this, formation for listening to the cry of the people made poor and the earth is essential. We are reminded that “God’s heart has a special place for the poor” (EG, no. 197), the marginalized and the excluded. Furthermore, “the Church is called to be poor with those who are poor, who often constitute the majority of the faithful, to listen to them, learning together how to recognize the charisms they receive from the Spirit. The Church also needs to learn to recognize them as agents of evangelization” FD, no. 19).

Study Group 2 sought to listen to what is already happening in formation for those engaged in the service of charity, care for creation, the promotion of justice, and integral human development as well as to suggestions for deepening listening to those made poor or vulnerable and to the earth.

The following insights are derived from our survey of theologians and formators, submissions received, correspondence with formation programs across continents, and a survey of more than 200 women's religious institutes conducted by the International Union of Superiors General.

## **Current Practices**

Many formation programs include direct service to persons made poor or in vulnerable situations. These include assistance, such as volunteering with food and housing programs, social services and health services. There is often a great desire to "serve" among those in formation.

Some programs have regularly scheduled times for service (for example, a certain number of hours, particular days, weekends in the course of a semester or a year). Similarly, religious formation programs may include experiences of immersion among the persons made poor, and these can be short term (days and weeks) to longer term (for example, months, a summer, or a year). Some religious congregations intentionally chose to locate their formation programs in close proximity to the people in vulnerable situations.

A number of UISG survey responses shared that there were many coordinated opportunities to have some closeness to persons on the peripheries. Listening and interacting with persons were usually part of the experience in formation programs. The experiences of listening that were offered included encounters in the forms of pastoral visits and listening to persons; 'being with' simply in order to listen rather than only to offer a response of 'doing' something. Some spoke of the power of storytelling. Praying with the person could also be part of the experience.

Building relationships among the persons on the peripheries was mentioned many times, as was holding them in prayer. Words such as 'presence', 'tenderness' and 'respect' were mentioned as important.

Some groups shared that there are opportunities for reflection on the experience of interaction, either with peers or with a formation director. Often the direct interaction is the highlight for persons in formation. Some groups had monthly integration time for people in formation which included personal and private prayer followed by group sharing. Conversation also included a consideration of the socio-economic, political, cultural and even religious factors related to the realities of those they have encountered.

Directors of Theological Field Education programs within Theology programs who responded to questions about their curriculum shared that social analysis is part of the preparation and overall experience. Some specifically mentioned a goal being to learn how to "strategize on behalf of the poor and marginalized". Other programs described a "reading the signs of the times," or utilizing a multivalent analysis of the realities in which persons on the peripheries are living.

It is important to acknowledge that persons who are themselves from the communities who have been made poor are also participants in formation programs. They are a rich source of wisdom and often are 'agents of evangelization' (FD, no. 19) in their communities and programs.

## Challenges for Formation

It was difficult to get a sense of how persons in formation were being trained to listen as this was often not explicitly articulated. There were, however, a few indicators. For example, one respondent shared that novices were taught about listening through a course on Pastoral Care of Marriage and Family and the Accompaniment of Families, and one school of theology wrote that “before being sent into the various ministry sites, the students take Basic Pastoral Care and Counselling [a course] that focuses on the importance of listening over problem solving”. How might formators focus more explicitly on training for listening?

Listening to the people made poor is sometimes equated with service to the people, raising the question whether in the desire to serve others’ immediate physical needs, listening to persons can be lost. Listening is also a very important ‘service’.

It also appeared at times that academic formation and pastoral formation, while presumed to be interconnected, were not necessarily explicitly linked. Examples of how direct service is linked to academic programs of study (beyond those explicitly training persons for social work, medical fields, etc) in formation programs (or how they could be more explicitly linked) would be helpful.

A key challenge for formation is evaluating whether, or to what extent, formation influences subsequent professional experiences in the ministries. Are the encounters with those experiencing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability continued in some manner after a formation program has concluded? Are parishes, congregations and/or ministries directly impacted?

Deeper and more extensive research on formation is warranted. On the basis of our listening, Study Group 2 makes the following recommendations as useful steps towards more synodal formation for listening to the cry of those made poor and of the earth.

## Recommendations

### *Encounter*

- 5.1. That formation programs prioritise direct encounters with persons who are made poor or in vulnerable situations.
- 5.2. That experiences of *listening* to persons on the peripheries include the diversity of those made poor and/or on the peripheries (e.g., listening to women, children, indigenous persons)
- 5.3. That formation programs include respectful encounters with other creatures and elements of creation in our Common Home.
- 5.4. That both before and during encounters with the people and the earth, formation programs include training in and developing competency in listening.
- 5.5. That formation programs recognise those made poor and vulnerable as agents of evangelization.
- 5.6. That formation includes opportunities for insertion in social movements and networks (e.g., indigenous communities, integral ecology, human rights, rights of women, Dalits, the LGBTQ+ community, those that link ecclesial and civil society networks) for cross-cultural learning, and to better understand the relationship between encounter, realities, and advocacy.

- 5.7. That formation programs engage with the great richness in the training provided within ecclesial networks on integral ecology, human rights, rights of women and children, the solidarity economy, migrants and other issues in partnership with civil society networks.

#### *Education for Integration*

- 5.8 That formation in the Catholic social justice tradition:
- 5.8.1 explains how listening is integral to the development of Catholic Social Teaching, to Catholic social thought and action, and to processes of engaging experience, social analysis, theological reflection and action;
  - 5.8.2 makes explicit the spirituality embedded in it and presents listening as a spiritual experience rather than a strategy;
  - 5.8.3 includes social teaching, thought and action emerging from the peripheries, for example the statement from the Catholic Episcopal Conferences and Councils of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean on the Occasion of COP30, [\*A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home: Ecological Conversion, Transformation and Resistance to False Solutions\*](#);
  - 5.8.4 includes education for advocacy and action that respects the agency of those made poor or experiencing vulnerability.
- 5.9 That spiritual traditions, including the rich histories of religious congregations, are explored as resources for a spirituality of justice that can sustain people in ministry and also those on the peripheries.
- 5.10 That formation programs and resources make explicit the interconnection between care of those made poor and care of the earth so that listening in one area impacts all else.
- 5.11 That formation be done by lay, religious and seminarians (FD, no. 143) together as much as possible, with deliberate diversity within formation faculties (e.g. including lay, religious and clergy, different genders, cultures, and experiences of accompanying those made poor or in vulnerable situations).
- 5.12 That Programs of Priestly Formation, Religious Life Formation, and for Ecclesial Lay Leadership, include listening to the people made poor and the earth within their Goals and Orientations. Formation programs need to include Skill-building, Competency Assessments and Growth Plans. Local Churches and Religious Institutes should make specific recommendations based on their specific contexts.
- 5.13 That as part of the evaluation process, formators seek feedback from local communities about the capacity of people in formation to be with and listen to the people.

#### *Enlarging the Space of Our Tent*

- 5.14 That access to formation opportunities be ensured for persons on the margins or in vulnerable situations including First Nations people, women, and people with disability.
- 5.15 That language for persons on the margins or in vulnerable situations honours the diversity of their experience and reflects the dignity of the person as transcending their situation, for

example via ‘person first language’ such as persons with disability rather than disabled persons.

- 5.16 That the Synod Secretariat gather and create resources for listening and host an Online Resource Center for learning to listen and building listening capacities, including offering ongoing examples of good practices.
- 5.17 That formation for listening includes:
  - 5.17.1 developing intercultural competency for working across different cultures;
  - 5.17.2 ensuring the voices and experiences of women are heard;
  - 5.17.3 ensuring the voices and experiences of people with disabilities are heard;
  - 5.17.4 being sensitive to the LGBTQ+ community;
  - 5.17.5 hearing and responding to the cry of the earth.
- 5.18 That formation for listening be accompanied by social analysis, particularly gender and cultural analysis, understanding the abuse that can occur in cultural, religious and political systems, and learning about structural ways of responding (FD, no. 28)
- 5.19 That the experiences of women religious and men religious be engaged as resources for accompaniment and listening to the peripheries.
- 5.20 That implementation paths of dioceses evaluate the impact of experiences of encounter, education and integration during formation and beyond formation in all places of ministry in local Churches.