

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. 3 THE MISSION IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

[Original text: English.]

God calls every baptized person to proclaim the Good News, entrusting this missionary mandate to all. Within our missionary Church, charisms have historically developed to live out this mission in response to the needs of different times and cultures. In the present historical moment, the *Final Document* of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (FD), now part of the Ordinary Magisterium of the Pope, has recognized the digital environment as a culture, with its own dynamics, languages, and modes of interaction. In this perspective, the Synod affirms that “digital culture constitutes a crucial dimension of the Church’s witness in contemporary culture and an emerging missionary field” (FD, no. 149).

We all, as the baptized, are called to bring the Good News to people we meet in this environment through missionary approaches that respond to its specific characteristics, engaging its opportunities while facing its challenges and risks directly.

Continuing the path opened by his Predecessor, Pope Leo XIV invited the participants in the Jubilee of Digital Missionaries and Catholic Influencers to “renew your commitment to nourish Christian hope in social networks and online spaces”.¹ Pope Leo XIV has affirmed that “we need missionary disciples who convey the gift of the Risen Lord to the world; who voice to the ends of the earth the hope that Jesus gives us (cf. *Acts* 1:3-8); and who go wherever there is a heart that waits, seeks, and is in need. [...] Always look for the “suffering flesh of Christ” in every brother and sister you encounter online”.² The Pope has likewise emphasized that “we need to discern how to use digital platforms to evangelize, to form communities and to challenge the false gods of consumerism, power and self-sufficiency”.³

Over the course of both Synodal Assemblies, the Synod identified a growing call to understand how the Church’s mission can best be lived out in this digital era. This theme was articulated in Chapter 17 of the *Synthesis Report* of the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (SR, no. 17), and, more explicitly, in paragraphs 58, 59, 113, and 149 of the *Final Document*.

Study Group 3 was entrusted with the task of identifying concrete ways through which the Church’s digital mission might be faithfully carried forward. Our work has focused on how the Church is already witnessing and can most effectively continue to witness to the Gospel of Jesus

¹ LEO XIV, *Address to Catholic Digital Missionaries and Influencers*, 29 July 2025.

² *Ibid.*

³ LEO XIV, *Address to the Major Superiors of the Society of Jesus*, 24 October 2025.

Christ in a time in which digital and physical environments are closely interconnected in every area of social life, especially among young people. This digital revolution stands at the heart of an epochal shift, one that challenges us to respond faithfully and to carry out our Gospel mission in this new context.⁴

Pursuant to this mandate, our Group sought to address the questions⁵ set forth by the General Secretariat of the Synod⁶ concerning how the Church can learn from, engage with, and carry forward its mission within the digital environment. Our Group shared these questions with diverse groups and individuals around the world, reflecting the Church’s ongoing commitment to listening and dialogue.

It is important to acknowledge from the start that even with this broad consultation, our conclusions are preliminary. The Church has been engaged in the digital environment from its beginning, yet fostering this engagement across all levels of the Church takes time. As digital technology continues to evolve, the Church’s discernment of how to live her mission remains an ongoing journey rather than a finished task.

At the same time, we learned a great deal during our extensive synodal consultation and listening efforts. This report identifies many current expressions of mission in a time so characterized by digital technology and continuous innovations, and draws from them valuable lessons learned to date. Building on these insights, we offer concrete suggestions for how the Church can continue to advance the mission of proclaiming the Gospel in the digital world and live out this new chapter in her missionary history. Five themes frame our recommendations:

1. First, **the digital environment is not merely a set of tools to be mastered; it is a culture.** Understanding it involves understanding how we relate to one another, how we form community, and ultimately how we share the Gospel in a world that is increasingly digitally mediated (cf. FD, no. 113a).
2. Second, **digital engagement enables listening to, accompanying, and raising the voices of those whose voices are not heard, and is an expression of the Church’s social mission.** We have consistently heard that the digital environment can be a place where people genuinely search for God and express deep spiritual needs (cfr. SR, no. 17b). It can therefore be a way of living out the Church’s social mission, and a new dimension of the preferential option for the poor.

Pope Francis’s vision of a “field hospital” Church that goes out to the peripheries is reflected in the work of missionaries in the digital environment, ready to respond to suffering individuals. Digital spaces can then become places of genuine human connection, not just information exchange. **At its best, digital engagement does not replace in-person encounters but can instead lead to them, enriching relationships and communities.** As Pope Leo emphasizes, “our mission – your mission – is to nurture

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ (1) What can a synodal missionary Church learn from a deeper immersion in the digital environment; (2) How can the digital mission be more routinely integrated into the life of the Church and its ecclesial structures, deepening the implications of the new digital missionary frontier for the renewal of existing parish and diocesan structures (cf. SR, no. 17j); (3) What adaptation to the digital environment is required by the notion of jurisdiction primarily linked to a geographic territory; (4) What practical recommendations or proposals are there concerning the Church’s mission in the digital environment; (5) Would you like to share any other contribution or good practice on this topic? Or perhaps add any other issue or challenge that should be addressed in this journey of study and reflection?

⁶ GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD, *Study Groups for questions raised in the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to be explored in collaboration with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia. Work Outline*, 14 March 2024, section 3: “The mission in the digital environment”.

a culture of Christian humanism, and to do so together. This is the beauty of the “network” for all of us”.⁷

3. Third, this **digital culture requires the same intentionality, formation, and missionary spirit that we bring to any cross-cultural ministry.** Just as missionaries throughout history have learned languages, understood customs, and adapted their approaches while maintaining the integrity of the Gospel, all the baptized are called to be salt and leaven in this new culture, remaining rooted in the truth, goodness, and beauty of our Catholic faith (cf. FD, no. 59).
4. Fourth, **at its best, digital engagement naturally fosters elements of synodality:** listening, participation, and shared responsibility. At its best, online engagement enables unprecedented opportunities to hear diverse voices from different backgrounds, geographic areas, and perspectives – especially those often marginalized in traditional Church settings. At its best, digital culture can reflect something of the Church’s own identity as a network of networks, reflecting the unity in diversity that is the hallmark of the body of Christ (cf. FD, no. 149).⁸
5. Fifth, at the same time, the **digital environment poses immense challenges.** It presents great risks, and is shaped through algorithms that can isolate us in echo chambers and manipulate us; by business models that monetize our attention and monitor our actions; and by dynamics that foster polarization rather than communion, and can drive nihilism and violence. The same platforms that enable connection can also enable dehumanization. This is why in the digital age we are called to live our faith maturely and prayerfully in face-to-face communities, nourished by the sacraments, and to foster in-person and digital interactions which respect human dignity, promote authentic encounter, and witness to the truth in love. This is especially true for young people who often encounter the faith first online. As Pope Leo XIV warns, a faith discovered only in digital spaces risks remaining “disembodied,” never rooted in real relationships or the life of the Church, and can leave individuals “alone with themselves” in algorithm-shaped isolation.⁹

These convergences are the result of our synodal work of listening and dialogue with many individuals and groups, including episcopal conferences, those involved in synodal processes, scholars and experts, young people, and those involved intentionally in the digital mission. This synodal consultation resulted in a more particularized series of insights and recommendations that we summarize in detail in the full report.

Like any new path, the common mission in the digital environment is a journey in progress. The Church is learning along the way the challenges, opportunities, and languages presented by this

⁷ LEO XIV, *Address to Digital Missionaries...*, cit.

⁸ One excellent example of this is the “Building Bridges” initiative launched in 2022 between multiple Vatican offices and universities in North and South America where students were invited to participate in synodal style listening sessions between the continents and that ultimately included a virtual conversation with Pope Francis. This model was later expanded and replicated to include students, professors, pastors and universities in Africa and Asia Pacific. Cf. *Pope encourages students from the Americas to build better world*, 24 February 2022, Vatican News, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-02/pope-encourages-students-from-the-americas-to-build-better-world.html>.

⁹ LEO XIV, *Address to the members of the International Youth Advisory Body*, 31 October 2025.

emerging culture. Concepts such as digital mission, online synodality, jurisdiction, and digital accompaniment and discernment require deeper study to illuminate their theological, pastoral, and canonical meaning. Continued reflection is also needed regarding the formation and engagement of those on this digital mission. This process of learning and discernment is, in itself, a synodal experience, as we walk together to discern how the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church to embody the Gospel with faithfulness and creativity, making digital culture a space of encounter, witness, and communion.

The mission in the digital environment is part of the pastoral, missionary, and synodal conversion process to which the Holy Spirit is calling the Church today. It is not merely about using digital tools to proclaim the Gospel, but about embodying this proclamation within the cultural evolution in the digital environment, where relationships, languages, and forms of community take on new and particular configurations. The Church's presence in the digital sphere can be a sign of communion and a witness of hope, capable of reflecting the merciful face of Christ. May this discernment help strengthen a more synodal, participatory, and missionary Church, faithful to its vocation of announcing the Gospel with creativity and fidelity.