



# 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



**FINAL REPORT**

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## PART I INTRODUCTION

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 (“the Synod”), now part of the Ordinary Magisterium of the Pope, has recognized the digital environment as a true culture, with its own dynamics, languages, and modes of interaction. Indeed, as the Synod affirmed in the *Final Document* of the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (FD) ratified by Pope Francis, “digital culture constitutes a crucial dimension of the Church’s witness in contemporary culture and an emerging missionary field” (FD, no. 149c). We are called to evangelize this culture 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”.<sup>1</sup> 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”.<sup>2</sup> 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”.<sup>3</sup>

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 culture. 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), and, more explicitly, in paragraphs 58, 59, 113, and 149 of the *Final Document*, each approved by Pope Francis.

In February 2024, Pope Francis directed the General Secretariat of the Synod to constitute Study Group 3 to make concrete recommendations regarding the topic of “the mission in the digital environment” in light of chapter 17 of the first *Synthesis Report*.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 17 underscored “the importance for the Church of carrying out the mission of proclaiming the Gospel also in the digital environment, which involves every aspect of human life and must therefore be recognized as a culture and not only as an area of activity”.<sup>5</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> LEO XIV, *Address to the Catholic Digital Missionaries and Influencers*, 29 July 2025.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>4</sup> Cf. FRANCIS, *Letter to His Eminence Cardinal Mario Grech*, 22 February 2024.

<sup>5</sup> 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”.

Church is already witnessing and can most effectively continue to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a digital culture 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.<sup>6</sup>

Pursuant to this mandate, our Group sought to address the questions<sup>7</sup> set forth by the General Secretariat of the Synod<sup>8</sup> concerning how the Church can learn from, adapt to, 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 the digital culture continues to evolve, the Church's adaptation and discernment of how to live her mission within it 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 the digital culture 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. 113).
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 is a place where people genuinely search for God and express deep spiritual needs (cf. SR, no. 17b). It is also 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 culture, 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

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<sup>6</sup> LEO XIV, *Address to the Major Superiors...*, cit.

<sup>7</sup> (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?

<sup>8</sup> Cf. GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD, *Study Groups for questions...*, cit.

mission – is to nurture a culture of Christian humanism, and to do so together. This is the beauty of the “network” for all of us”.<sup>9</sup>

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 understand this new culture while 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 reflects 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).<sup>10</sup>
5. Fifth, at the same time, the **digital environment poses immense challenges**. It is shaped by 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 cultures 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.<sup>11</sup> This underscores why the digital culture must lead toward communion, embodiment, and shared life.

These convergences are the result of our synodal work of listening and dialogue with many individuals and groups, including Episcopal Conferencess, 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 below.

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<sup>9</sup> LEO XIV, *Address to the Catholic Digital Missionaries...*, cit.

<sup>10</sup> 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>.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. LEO XIV, *Address to the members of the International Youth Advisory Body*, 31 October 2025.

## PART II

### WHAT WE HEARD, WHAT IT MEANS, AND WHAT WE RECOMMEND

#### 1. What can a missionary synodal Church learn from greater immersion in the digital environment?

##### A. What We Heard

Digital culture is already a place where people live, search, and form community, and should be treated as a true place of mission.<sup>12</sup> Digital spaces are “as real as the physical environment in which we also live,” and “form a legitimate place for evangelization, because, like with any human place, people gather there to make connections and to find information”.<sup>13</sup>

Many cross-continental contributions strongly echo this conviction. One group noted that “rather than seeing digital spaces as secondary or supplementary, the Church must recognize them as integral to its mission, particularly in a world where many people’s primary means of engagement is online”.<sup>14</sup> The digital realm is where the next generation is already immersed; it is their natural living environment.<sup>15</sup>

Several also emphasized that the Church is already reaching out to people in the digital world, not waiting for people to come to it through institutional channels. “We have to engage with the world, not waiting for people to come to us, but going ‘out there,’ meeting them where they are, and today they are in digital media.”<sup>16</sup> The digital culture has enabled many Catholic believers to reach young people and others on the existential peripheries, echoing the broader synodal desire for a Church that is not self-referential but outgoing and relational.

The digital environment is also clearly already a space of spiritual encounter: “People go to the digital environments for all manner of things, including information about the gospel and about finding God”.<sup>17</sup> These online platforms are not simply information-sharing tools; they are spaces where liturgies are streamed, prayers are shared, and faith-based communities are formed.

At the same time, this is not a one-way dynamic. As several contributions noted, digital platforms make it possible for the Church to listen to those in need. “Digital platforms provide a means for real-time interaction, allowing the Church to listen to people’s concerns, experiences, and questions. The interactive nature of social media and online forums can teach the Church how to better engage in synodal listening.”<sup>18</sup> These tools can foster communion even across physical distance: “Digital

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<sup>12</sup> The Synod accepted and recognized the digital mission as part of the Church's mission: “Local Churches should encourage, sustain and accompany those who are engaged in mission in the digital environment” (FD, no. 113).

<sup>13</sup> *Scholars and Pastoral Experts Working Group Report.*

<sup>14</sup> *Faith Communication in the Digital World Alumni Working Group, Report for Study Group 3, 2024.*

<sup>15</sup> “There is a higher percentage of young people whose natural world is social media. By getting more deeply involved in the digital environment, the Church has the opportunity to better understand the current generation, which was born connected.” *Brazil, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>16</sup> *United States, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>17</sup> *Scholars and Pastoral Experts Working Group Report.*

<sup>18</sup> *Faith Communication in the Digital World Working Group Report.*

platforms can foster new forms of community [...] that keep the community connected even when physical meetings are not possible”.<sup>19</sup>

Contributors also emphasized that digital culture requires institutional responsibility, especially in the area of safeguarding and protection. One report shared that digital engagement “offers the chance for global collaboration in sharing resources, training, and experiences across borders, making it easier to set universal standards for safeguarding and protection applicable to the church community”.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, digital life is part of ecclesial life, and its risks must be taken seriously, especially those affecting the vulnerable. This includes not only conditions such as economic status or access, but also the particular vulnerabilities of those unable to recognize the falsehoods created by AI, or those who bear the weight of hostility from those who seek to drive division.

Finally, for many, the heart of the matter is that digital mission<sup>21</sup> is not a strategy but a way of being Church in our current historical moment. “In this environment, interaction is bidirectional [...] It is an invitation to continuously renew ourselves, to be a Church that goes out to welcome everyone and adapts to bring Christ’s message to every corner of the web.”<sup>22</sup>

## **B. What This Suggests**

Engagement with digital culture is essential for living out our Gospel mission, and has profound potential for building the synodal dimension of the Church.<sup>23</sup> It allows for the building of relationships among the faithful and offers channels for sharing insights, stories, and faith experiences essential for discernment in communion.

This is not merely an opportunity ahead of us; it is already happening. In practice, lay Catholics, clergy, religious, and those who are especially involved in evangelization in digital environments seek to proclaim and witness to the faith and build up communion across digital platforms. To better live our mission, the Church should enter this space with greater humility and intention.

Many who are active online express a strong vocational call to share their faith and accompany others, and digital evangelization is a concrete expression of missionary discipleship. These individuals educate in discipleship and accompany through witness, particularly among young people and those spiritually searching. Their efforts align with the Church’s mission not to impose but to accompany and listen.

This mission also requires spiritual and pastoral formation. The Church should ensure that its digital missionaries,<sup>24</sup> in particular, are not left isolated or with too little formation, but where possible are included in pastoral teams that foster both collaboration and accountability. Many desire support

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<sup>19</sup> *Philippines, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>20</sup> *Pontifical Commission on the Protection of Minors. Contribution to Study Group 3.*

<sup>21</sup> The term “digital mission” is used to refer to all Church activities related to pastoral care carried out either directly in digital spaces (social networks) or in any other way by the Church in its activities in today’s culture (such as homiletics or catechesis).

<sup>22</sup> *Colombia, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>23</sup> As the Synod recognized, “The internet, constituted as a web of connections, offers new opportunities to better live the synodal dimension of the Church” (FD, no. 113).

<sup>24</sup> This term is used to refer to people who in some way carry out their evangelizing task with a certain specificity and dedication, specifically in digital environments, and who have an echo with sufficient relevance to require particular attention from the Church.

from bishops and pastors, not only for coordination but for guidance and accompaniment. This includes learning the use of storytelling, images, music, and community-building as part of faith-sharing in this culture. At the same time, a significant challenge involves self-identified Catholic influencers<sup>25</sup> who do not seek such formation and accompaniment but instead seek to draw attention to themselves, as well as those who often act apart from full communion with the Church. Their presence highlights the need for clearer guidance and stronger pastoral engagement in the digital culture.

The Church's immersion in digital culture is also a call to our social mission and to solidarity. The online world is split between the digital haves and have-nots, and digital access is uneven and both environmentally and economically costly. The Church should promote digital inclusion, attend to the structurally disconnected, and approach digital mission as a matter of justice.

Digital platforms also raise ethical and moral questions that must be addressed through discernment. Algorithmic bias and discrimination, surveillance capitalism, and the spread of misinformation and hateful attitudes are not neutral issues. They require prophetic engagement and protection of the common good. This reinforces the importance of institutional safeguarding efforts online, especially for children and the vulnerable.

AI tools can assist with certain tasks, but the Church's mission in digital spaces should principally remain rooted in what only humans can do: discern, love, accompany, and pray. "Between a machine and a human being, only the latter is truly a moral agent – a subject of moral responsibility who exercises freedom in his or her decisions and accepts their consequences."<sup>26</sup>

To engage digital culture as a synodal, missionary Church is to walk with people where they live today: listening, proclaiming, forming relationships that reflect the Gospel of mercy and justice, and, above all, giving witness to faith in Christ and the communion of the Church.

### **C. Recommendations**

1. As the Synod recognized, local Churches should affirm digital culture as a real space for mission, where true human relationships occur.
2. Pastors, catechists, and lay missionaries in digital environments should integrate the first proclamation (kerygma) within both digital and physical communities, highlighting that digital evangelization complements, but does not replace, in-person encounters.
3. Pastors, catechists, and lay missionaries in digital environments should also embrace the call to "Samaritanize" digital spaces with compassionate and attentive presence, especially toward those on existential peripheries, including the spiritually wounded, socially isolated, and economically marginalized, reflecting the Church's commitment to accompany the vulnerable.
4. Bishops, pastoral councils, diocesan digital teams, and others should foster a synodal attitude by engaging in active listening and respectful dialogue with a readiness to learn from diverse voices, including the unchurched and those distant from faith.

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<sup>25</sup> This expression is used to refer to "influencers" who work as influencers in the world but who carry out their vision, life, and work as Catholics (parallel to Catholic doctors or Catholic business people).

<sup>26</sup> DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH – DICASTERY FOR CULTURE AND EDUCATION, *Antiqua et Nova. Note on the relationship between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence*, 28 January 2025, no. 39.

5. Bishops, pastoral councils, diocesan digital teams, and others should resist language and culture shaped by algorithms, individualism, and echo chambers so as to better inculturate the Gospel and engage those who are often digitally excluded, such as the elderly, the poor, and the disconnected, extending the Church's outreach to the peripheries.
6. All who engage in the digital mission, including bishops, clergy, religious, and lay faithful alike, are called to embrace an attitude of listening.
7. All who engage in the digital mission should seek to draw people to Christ and the Church, ensuring that online engagement is evangelizing in nature rather than merely informational, social, performative, or self-seeking.

## 2. How can the digital mission be integrated more routinely into the life of the Church and into Church structures?

### A. What We Heard

The Church should understand digital culture as an essential dimension of our mission, both as a place to proclaim the Gospel and also as a space to embed within the ordinary life and structure of the Church. As one report noted, “multiple religious activities occur online: content creation, catechesis, information sharing, accompanying or encouraging people on a faith journey, praying together, and studying the Scriptures”.<sup>27</sup> These activities are not supplemental, but central to how faith is lived and shared today.

Contributors emphasized that digital missionaries should not work alone, but be recognized, supported, and formed by their communities.<sup>28</sup> “The Church must shift its mindset to see digital platforms as spaces where evangelization, community-building, and formation can take place.”<sup>29</sup> This shift demands more than encouragement; it requires structural changes.

Many urged the Church to create institutional support structures for digital mission, with one major report recommending that “each diocese could create a kind of vicariate for the digital mission”.<sup>30</sup> Some highlighted formal guidelines and policies as a barrier to participation, others noted that “one of the main barriers to digital engagement within Church structures is fear – fear of misrepresentation, criticism, or making mistakes. Addressing this fear is essential to fostering a culture of confident and transparent digital communication”.<sup>31</sup>

Contributors proposed the development of consistent, well-formed policies to guide digital ministry, with one noting that “the Church should develop clear, accessible communication policies that guide how diocesan and parish leaders use digital tools. This will provide clear expectations and ensure consistency across different digital platforms.”<sup>32</sup> Many recommended policies reflecting care and especially protection of the vulnerable, emphasizing that “parishes and Dioceses should have clear digital policies, including guidelines for staff, volunteers, and online engagement”.<sup>33</sup>

Integration of the mission in the digital environment also requires shared resources. One contribution recommended that the Church “leverage its collective knowledge, talents, and resources to establish a virtual library offering tutorials, guidelines, and webinars. This hub could provide practical tools for those engaged in digital ministry, ensuring access to quality content and inspiration”.<sup>34</sup>

Many contributors recommended more than just tentative, piecemeal digital efforts, but full incorporation of the digital mission into the ordinary structures, staffing, and vision of the Church at every level.

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<sup>27</sup> *Scholars and Pastoral Experts Working Group Report.*

<sup>28</sup> The recent Jubilee of Digital Missionaries and Catholic Influencers drew participation from approximately 1,380 missionaries representing 75 countries, highlighting the global diversity and scope of initiatives in digital evangelization.

<sup>29</sup> *United States, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>30</sup> *France, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>31</sup> *Faith Communication in the Digital World Working Group Report.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Pontifical Commission on the Protection of Minors...*, cit.

<sup>34</sup> *Faith Communication in the Digital World Working Group Report.*

## **B. What This Suggests**

Integration of the digital mission into Church structures calls for a renewed understanding of both formation and community. The Church's leaders, including bishops, pastors, lay ministers, and others, need dedicated formation. In addition, while those working in the digital culture have already formed some networks and communities that support each other and share resources, they also express their desire for their bishops to meet with them regularly, to offer guidance and spiritual support, to listen to them, and to learn from them.

Integration of the digital mission should not merely be administrative. It should recognize that digital mission is a real vocation, and that its ministers need the same care, accompaniment, and spiritual support as other pastoral agents. The Church should resist efforts that divide online and face-to-face encounters; those served online are not separate from the rest of the Body of Christ.

Our synodal consultation further affirmed that those who minister in digital environments are often engaged in catechesis, evangelization, and spiritual accompaniment, and that because this work often bridges both digital and physical spaces, often the same individuals bring experiences and examples from one space into the other. Those involved in digital ministry need both spiritual leadership and formation; the digital mission should not remain on the margins of ecclesial life.

To integrate the digital culture is also to respond to the Church's vocation to hospitality and inclusion. Hospitality and welcome should be hallmarks of the Church and its online activities, and parishes and local communities should extend that hospitality to those who engage online.

Integration of the digital mission also entails pastoral planning and discernment. It calls for thoughtful investment, not only in policies and resources, but in people. As one contribution pointed out, "the Church must move beyond seeing digital work as a secondary or optional activity. Digital mission should be integrated into the overall strategy of evangelization at every level".<sup>35</sup>

In addition, as *Antiqua et nova* explains, while AI can assist with administrative and research tasks, it cannot replicate the pastoral discernment, empathy, or spiritual presence that are essential to ministry. Forming those engaged in pastoral ministry in "digital discernment" will be key to integrating digital tools in a way that respects the irreplaceable human nature of pastoral care.

This strategy should prioritize formation, support, visibility, and resource provision, helping ensure that those who evangelize in digital spaces are not isolated and that their work is connected to parish and diocesan life and/or other church structures. This will also allow the Church to address issues of access, representation, and support for the digitally underserved, including those with disabilities, those in rural areas, the elderly, the poor, and others often left out of digital conversations.

## **C. Recommendations**

1. Supported by local dioceses and Catholic universities, the Vatican could "leverage its collective knowledge, talents, and resources to establish a virtual library offering tutorials, guidelines, and webinars. This hub could provide practical tools for those engaged in digital ministry, ensuring access to quality content and inspiration".<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

2. Following the lead of the Synod, local Churches should recognize digital mission as part of parish and diocesan structures, thinking through the structural questions regarding what dedicated roles and coordinated teams are necessary to intentionally include outreach to the digitally underserved, and reflecting the values of solidarity, inclusion, and participation.
3. Episcopal Conferences, in collaboration with bishops and diocesan digital teams, should provide holistic formation involving technical, theological, spiritual, and synodal dimensions.
4. Episcopal Conferences, bishops, diocesan digital teams, and others should promote digital pastoral care that is native to this culture, not just a transfer of traditional models.
5. Episcopal Conferences should encourage inclusive digital engagement that reflects the mission to embody hospitality and promote dignity for all, especially by prioritizing accessibility and digital inclusion for the elderly, disabled, and those with technological or economic barriers.
6. Bishops, pastors, diocesan digital teams, and others should prioritize the involvement of young people in leadership roles in digital spaces to strengthen intergenerational collaboration and renewal, and to promote communion among Catholics in digital environments.

### **3. What adaptations to the digital environment does the notion of jurisdiction mainly linked to a geographical territory require?**

#### **A. What We Heard**

Contributors to our consultation consistently noted that the Church's existing jurisdictional structures, organized primarily by geographic territory, do not adequately account for the borderless nature of digital culture. Many affirmed this challenge: "The digital environment appears 'placeless,'" yet it remains deeply embedded in real-life human communities. People engaging in ministry online "do not think of their work as bounded by Diocese, province, or Episcopal Conference," but rather as part of a shared effort to proclaim and live the Gospel.<sup>37</sup>

As one contribution put it, "In the digital environment, geographic borders become blurred [...] a user can interact with content and people from multiple jurisdictions without territorial limitations".<sup>38</sup> This creates ambiguity around authority, accountability, and ecclesial oversight. Contributors stressed that these realities demand new forms of governance and care, not simply the extension of old structures into new spaces.

Across the globe, many called for clarity around how bishops and local churches should relate to digital missionaries. One report recommended that instead of imagining "digital dioceses," the Church should "emphasize the language of accompaniment by the bishops in the already existing geographical dioceses to the digital missionaries of their dioceses".<sup>39</sup> In other words, the response should be pastoral rather than juridical. In a similar vein, others emphasized that "a relationship [...] is crucial for effective care of the People of God. Bishops can empower, guide, and support these missionaries".<sup>40</sup> This is a synodal approach to leadership: collaborative, listening, and responsive.

Missionaries who work in digital spaces, like traditional missionaries, often cross boundaries in their work. Some contributors noted that these individuals should receive some kind of recognition for their contribution to the Church's mission: "Offer some recognition to digital missionaries who, like traditional missionaries, travel beyond their diocesan boundaries".<sup>41</sup>

Accountability, too, was a recurring theme. For instance, some recommended that "accountability and responsibility shall be ensured by the ongoing conversion of the Church, at the global and local level, requiring justice to be done with processes that also address the needs of victim/survivors".<sup>42</sup> The need for safeguarding and pastoral oversight is urgent even when ministries operate in decentralized or online contexts.

#### **B. What This Suggests**

Much more consultation and discernment remains to be done in this area. The Church's engagement with digital culture could call for considering some form of jurisdiction organized not territorially, but through pastoral relationships rooted in accompaniment. The Church cannot oversee

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<sup>37</sup> *Scholars and Pastoral Experts Working Group Report.*

<sup>38</sup> *International Leaders Group, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>39</sup> *Scholars and Pastoral Experts Working Group Report.*

<sup>40</sup> *Philippines, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Pontifical Commission on the Protection of Minors...*, cit.

the digital environment in the same way it oversees a geographic diocese, but it can and should be present to those who minister there.

In addition, digital spaces should also reflect the growing synodal nature of the Church. Many contributors invited bishops, superiors, and Church leaders to accompany those who realize this new mission in the digital culture, not through control, but through encouragement, spiritual leadership, and formation. Such accompaniment could be tied to renewed relationships, suggesting an ecclesiology rooted in communion. Strengthened synodality and collegiality might also help local Churches and bishops when their work is affected by those engaged in digital environments who are primarily connected elsewhere.

These questions call for dialogue, discernment, and potential joint action between local Churches, bishops, Episcopal Conferences, and religious superiors to address potential tensions while maintaining communion. While these challenges are particularly acute for digital missionaries who are members of the clergy or religious orders, lay individuals and groups also require institutional guidance to navigate the complexities of digital ministry. The Church could promote community through efforts to promote mentorship, accountability, and safeguarding.

This also highlights the importance of formation for bishops, pastors, and seminarians. Formation could include training in digital ethics, spiritual accompaniment, preaching (including homiletics and catechesis), discerning vocations involving engagement in digital culture, and an understanding of digital mission as a vital dimension of pastoral life. Integrating such efforts into seminary curricula and ongoing priestly formation could better prepare clergy to accompany, support, and collaborate with those engaged in the digital mission, ensuring that their work is fully recognized and integrated within the broader ecclesial community.

Finally, the question of accountability and safeguarding is not only a structural matter; it is a moral one. In the digital environment, personal information becomes a commodity; governments and political movements unleash propaganda, and prejudice and fake news proliferates. These risks do not eliminate the Church's mission online; they deepen it. Just as the Church protects and accompanies the vulnerable in physical communities, so too must it adapt to the realities of digital ministry.<sup>43</sup>

### **C. Recommendations**

1. Episcopal Conferences, bishops, diocesan digital teams, and others should emphasize episcopal accompaniment of digital missionaries, prioritizing pastoral presence.
2. Local Churches should recognize the digital mission as a new charism within the life of the Church that deserves formation, accompaniment, and ecclesial supervision.
3. Establish Vatican as well as diocesan structures and coordinators to guide digital ministry, rooted in local Church realities.
4. Appropriate Vatican bodies should study potential canonical adaptations to accommodate supra-territorial digital realities.

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<sup>43</sup> “Although digital media has great potential to improve our lives, it can also cause harm and injury through bullying, misinformation, sexual exploitation and addiction. Church educational institutions must help children and adults develop critical skills to safely navigate the web” (FD, no.149).

5. Local Churches should promote networks of communion between digital missionaries and Church authorities to avoid isolation and help promote accountability.

## 4. What are practical recommendations or proposals regarding the Church's mission in the digital environment?

### A. What We Heard

Contributors have a unified call: the Church's digital mission should be taken seriously, not as a side project, but as a vital part of its evangelizing presence, and adequate formation is key to this effort: "Many clergy feel ill-equipped to navigate digital spaces. Offering training on social media engagement, digital storytelling, and online pastoral care will help build confidence and competence in this area".<sup>44</sup>

Many contributors emphasized the need for both technical and theological formation, particularly for lay leaders and clergy already active online. After all, digital missionaries have the potential to engage large audiences beyond those who attend Holy Mass, offering the Church an extraordinary resource to listen to and understand persons, and to share the Good News of Christ. Because of that, formation is key. One group recommended the creation of "a training plan for digital missionaries that covers not only the necessary technical aspects but, above all, basic theology, language for the *ad gentes* mission, and spirituality".<sup>45</sup> This echoes a broader concern that evangelization in digital spaces must reflect theological integrity and spiritual maturity.

Safeguarding and ethical use of technology also emerged as cross-cutting concerns. "The Church should actively address the ethical use of digital spaces, promoting respect for privacy, combating misinformation, and fostering responsible communication online."<sup>46</sup> Ethical norms must shape the Church's online behavior just as much as its physical activities.

Many also cited the misuse of digital platforms for polarization, manipulation, or the spread of false information as a significant challenge. Pope Leo XIV has warned that "there is so little dialogue around us; shouting often replaces it, not infrequently in the form of fake news and irrational arguments proposed by a few loud voices. Deeper reflection and study are essential".<sup>47</sup> At the same time, the Holy Father has also recognized that the Church is called to judiciously engage emerging technologies: "I am thinking in particular of artificial intelligence, with its immense potential, which nevertheless requires responsibility and discernment in order to ensure that it can be used for the good of all".<sup>48</sup>

Respondents also emphasized the importance of connection to the institutional Church for financial and structural sustainability.<sup>49</sup> Ongoing investment and institutional support are necessary to avoid burnout, fragmentation, or marginalization of this work. Other specific recommendations involved openness "to innovation [...] while ensuring ethics and responsibility in handling personal data";<sup>50</sup> avoidance of "a closed 'Catholic digital space'; and the promotion of "ecumenical and

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<sup>44</sup> *Faith Communication in the Digital World Working Group Report.*

<sup>45</sup> *iMisión, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>46</sup> *Pontifical Commission on the Protection of Minors...*, cit.

<sup>47</sup> LEO XIV, *Address to Members of the "Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice" Foundation*, 17 May 2025.

<sup>48</sup> LEO XIV, *Address to Representatives of the Media*, 12 May 2025.

<sup>49</sup> *Brazil, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>50</sup> *Dominican Republic, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

interreligious collaborations”, as well as collaboration with secular institutions that have values aligned with those of the Church.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, contributors recommended that digital platforms not be reduced to megaphones, but instead facilitate community, prayer, and ongoing formation: “Digital platforms should be used not only for content dissemination but for building online faith communities that offer opportunities for shared prayer, formation, and mutual support. Digital and in-person experiences should be intertwined”.<sup>52</sup>

## **B. What This Suggests**

The Church’s digital mission should be rooted in robust formation, ethical discernment, and an understanding of mission as ongoing, relational, and incarnational. Formation for working in the digital environments extends beyond the spiritual to the practical. This formation is needed not only for digital missionaries but also for Church leaders who must accompany, support, and evaluate their work.

This need for incarnational witness takes on particular urgency for young people. As Pope Leo XIV has reflected, many discover the faith online, yet often in ways that remain “disembodied,” detached from the “ecclesial body” and from real relationships of accompaniment and shared life.<sup>53</sup> Without community, experiences of faith risk becoming solitary, overly individualized, or shaped by algorithms that “send back” only what a person already prefers. This challenge highlights why the digital culture should always point toward communion, embodied encounter, and life in the Church.

This work also requires a culture of safeguarding. The risks of the digital environment, including manipulation, exploitation, and disinformation, must be met with clear protocols, pastoral accountability, and training that helps all recognize and respond to ethical risks and polarization online with integrity and care. This responsibility is not peripheral to the mission; it is part of the Gospel’s call to protect the dignity of every person. The Church must advocate for engagement in the digital culture that promotes human dignity and the common good, while resisting trends that depersonalize or exploit.

Digital mission must also remain rooted in missionary discipleship. The Church enters digital spaces not to proselytize but to witness to the Risen Lord. This mission should be relational, not programmatic, and rooted in presence, compassion, and integrity. Likewise, the Church also should integrate its commitment to the common good and its social teaching into its engagement in digital culture, and the Church should work to appropriately influence laws and practices in civil society. Digital mission includes advocacy, education, and engagement at social and political levels, and is an integral expression of the Church’s evangelizing action in the world.

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<sup>51</sup> *Italy, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>52</sup> *Faith Communication in the Digital World Working Group Report.*

<sup>53</sup> LEO XIV, *Address to the members of the International Youth Advisory Body*, 31 October 2025.

### **C. Recommendations**

1. Episcopal Conferences, bishops, diocesan digital teams, and others should incorporate digital tools across Church ministries not only to evangelize, but also to help ensure participation by those who may be physically or economically excluded from parish life.
2. Pastors, catechists, and formators should offer specific formation in digital communication, literacy, and theology for all pastoral ministers.
3. The Vatican, Episcopal Conferences, bishops, diocesan digital teams, and others should help ensure sustainable financial support and institutional recognition for digital mission efforts.
4. Episcopal Conferences, bishops, diocesan digital teams, and others should use digital platforms for synodal dialogue and ecumenical and interreligious collaboration.
5. Episcopal Conferences, bishops, diocesan digital teams, and others should prioritize accessibility and inclusion of underserved communities, those in remote areas, the elderly, the disabled, and the economically disadvantaged, demonstrating the Church's commitment to principles of solidarity and the preferential option for the poor.
6. Digital safety and welfare, as well as media literacy, should become part of Catholic education and seminary formation.

## **5. Do you have any other input or good practices to share on this topic and possibly any other questions or challenges that need to be addressed in this journey of further study?**

### **A. What We Heard**

Contributors again emphasized that the Church's mission in the digital environment must be spiritual, prayerful, and rooted in authentic witness; as one group responded, "the Church must move beyond maintaining an online presence to actively engaging in digital ministry, rooted in mission and formation". Prayer and discernment are, of course, essential; "Prayer is essential to sustain online evangelizing work... ensuring that digital missionaries act under the guidance of the Holy Spirit".<sup>54</sup> This spiritual grounding can help ensure that digital presence is not reactive, but intentional and faithful.

Authenticity was also seen as central. "Content should be genuine and reflect true experiences of faith to build a deeper connection with the audience."<sup>55</sup> In this way, digital content becomes not just information but formation, shaping hearts and inviting others into community.

Contributors also called for the Church to intentionally engage the peripheries in its digital outreach. "The Church should expand its digital presence to intentionally reach marginalized groups, fostering inclusive ministry online through intentional outreach to underserved populations."<sup>56</sup> This includes the spiritually distant, the economically excluded, and those who have felt pushed to the margins of the Church.

Alongside outreach, contributors emphasized the importance of fostering community and belonging. "The Church can create positive online campaigns that foster a sense of belonging, responsibility, and respect, highlighting the digital environment as a place for spiritual growth."<sup>57</sup>

Finally, once again, contributors emphasized that the digital mission must prioritize dialogue and encounter. This includes collaboration with other Christian communities and interfaith partners to promote "ecumenical and interreligious collaborations".<sup>58</sup>

### **B. What This Suggests**

The responses to the final question underscored some consistent themes: (1) the Church's digital presence must be rooted in prayer, discernment, and relationship; (2) formation in the digital culture must begin not with technology, but with spirituality; and (3) those engaged in digital ministry are not simply content creators; they are pastoral agents, and their work must be connected to local face-to-face communities and the sacramental life of the Church, helping ensure that online efforts do not become detached from the Body of Christ.

Digital culture opens space to accompany the excluded, the skeptical, and those who feel forgotten. Formation should reflect this mission of compassion and solidarity, and should also help

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<sup>54</sup> *Argentina, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Faith Communication in the Digital World Working Group Report.*

<sup>57</sup> *Pontifical Commission on the Protection of Minors...*, cit.

<sup>58</sup> *Italy, Summary of Responses Received by The Church is Listening Project.*

shape responses to the distinctive ethical challenges posed by digital platforms, including misuse of authority, doctrinal drift, sensationalism, and manipulation.

Digital mission is not an add-on; it is a real and evolving expression of how the Church is present in the world. There is a need not only for pastoral integration but for theological development as well, and the Church should encourage theological reflection on terms like “digital missionaries”, “digital culture,” and the “digital mission” within the Church’s tradition. Finally, digital culture should reflect the synodal Church: inclusive, discerning, and connected to the peripheries.

### **C. Recommendations**

1. The Vatican should encourage theological reflection on new concepts and terminology specific to digital culture within the Church’s tradition.
2. Episcopal Conferences and diocesan digital teams must deepen the spiritual formation of digital missionaries to root their work in prayer and discernment, ensuring that they are grounded in accompaniment and the dignity of every person, especially the vulnerable.
3. Avoid isolation by connecting them to local churches and face-to-face community life.
4. Episcopal Conferences and Diocesan digital teams should expand digital outreach to existential and social peripheries, including the excluded, the skeptical, and those who feel forgotten, so that the Church’s digital presence reflects its mission of compassion and solidarity.
5. Episcopal Conferences and Diocesan digital teams can form digital ministers to recognize and respond to ethical risks and polarization online with integrity and care.
6. Episcopal Conferences and Diocesan digital teams should recognize ethical risks and the possibility of polarization. These often appear built into the social media platforms, so all who engage in the digital evangelization should be aware of any misuse of authority, any doctrinal drift, sensationalism, and manipulation.
7. Local churches must recognize that mainstream digital platforms are not neutral but have algorithms that may hinder the spread of positive messages.

## PART III

### PROPOSALS FOR NEXT STEPS

#### A. Proposals at the level of the Holy See

1. **Creation of an Office, Department, or Commission responsible for accompanying the mission in the digital environment:** A Pontifical Commission for Digital Culture and New Technologies, for example, could monitor emerging theological, pastoral, and canonical issues; prepare documents, guidelines, and vademecums; define training strategies for different levels (bishops, priests, religious, laypeople); and support Episcopal Conferences in integrating the digital mission into their pastoral plans. It could also convene working groups to study necessary canonical adaptations relevant to digital mission oversight, and work synodally with all Vatican Dicasteries, Commissions, and Offices to share best practices and accompany them in living their mission in the digital culture.
2. **Study, discern, and implement potential canonical adaptations to accommodate supra-territorial digital realities.** Much more consultation and discernment remains to be done regarding jurisdictional issues. The Church's engagement with digital culture could call for considering some form of jurisdiction organized not territorially, but through pastoral relationships rooted in accompaniment.
3. **Training and Accompaniment Support:** Offer differentiated training strategies according to roles (bishops, priests, religious, laypeople). Provide comprehensive formation rooted in theology, pastoral ministry, communication, and digital culture (including train-the-trainers models). Support spiritual accompaniment and formation programs for digital missionaries grounded in discernment and mission, and encourage mechanisms for ongoing spiritual direction and pastoral accompaniment. Develop specific pastoral guidelines and training for bishops to accompany and commission digital missionaries.
4. **Development of Guidelines on Risks in the Digital Realm:** Develop guidance addressing polarization, manipulation, polarization, and other risks. Establish standards for safe digital environments, ethical use of technology, and abuse-prevention protocols. Promote ethical leadership, accountability, theological integrity, and synodal dialogue. Explicitly differentiate between *digitalization of pastoral care* (moving existing ministries online) and *digital pastoral care* (ministry exercised natively online). Include norms and guidance for online pastoral care tools (e.g., digital chaplaincy, spiritual accompaniment).
5. **Promotion of Digital Missionary Networks and Synodal Structures:** Foster national and international networks of those engaged in digital mission to strengthen coordination, ecclesial communion, and exchange of best practices. Encourage synodality, common reflection, and discernment across digital platforms and support Vatican-level convenings to connect local, national, and international efforts.
6. **Fostering Alliances with Interreligious and Ecumenical Initiatives:** Encourage and coordinate partnerships in areas such as integral ecology, social peace, and peaceful coexistence. Promote collaboration with initiative, including ecumenical/interreligious digital dialogues.

7. **Encourage Church-wide Resource & Funding Frameworks:** Promote the development of a Church-wide digital resource hub and endorse solidarity-driven funding models (partnerships, crowdfunding, pooled funds) as frameworks that Vatican entities can recommend and help seed. Provide templates and guidance for ethical fundraising and sustainability for digital missionary projects.

## **B. Proposals at the level of Episcopal Conference**

1. **Promote Pastoral Work in Digital Environments:** Accompany and train those engaged in digital mission at the national level; produce materials and training itineraries; and support the systematic inclusion of digital mission in national pastoral plans in coordination with dioceses. Ensure strategies specifically reach communities facing economic, geographic, or cultural exclusion.
2. **Launch Episcopal Conference-level Committees and Diocesan Commissions:** Establish episcopal conference-level coordinating committees to shepherd accompaniment, training, and the development of digital missionary spirituality. Encourage Episcopal Conferences to launch or support diocesan commissions that ensure the digital mission is embedded in diocesan pastoral priorities.
3. **Ethics, Safety, and Abuse Prevention:** Disseminate the proposed Vatican guidelines on digital risks and misconduct, and implement national strategies for ethical leadership and abuse prevention. Promote national ethical digital campaigns that foster safe, inclusive, Gospel-centered online environments and standards for accountability.
4. **National Networks and Gatherings:** Form national networks of digital missionaries to foster coordination, communion, and exchange of best practices. Organize national gatherings of digital evangelizers to share experiences, strengthen communion, and promote collaborative pastoral projects in response to local challenges.
5. **Create a Church-wide Digital Resource Hub and Evaluative Tools:** Develop (or coordinate with the proposed Vatican office to develop) an episcopal conference- or Church-wide digital resource hub containing training, best practices, toolkits, and collaborative content development. Build evaluative tools and metrics to assess digital missionary projects not only for effectiveness but for impact on reaching the poor, the isolated, and the spiritually distant (prioritizing care for the peripheries).
6. **Support Funding & Sustainability Models:** Promote and facilitate solidarity-driven funding models (partnerships, grants, crowdfunding guidelines) at the episcopal conference level to sustain digital mission initiatives that serve marginalized communities and promote equitable access to the Gospel in the digital culture.
7. **Encourage Digital Platforms as Synodal & Ecumenical Spaces:** Promote the use of digital platforms as spaces for synodal dialogue, consultation, and ecumenical and interreligious collaboration around shared values.
8. **Pastoral Discernment and Pilot Programs:** Convene working groups to study questions related to ministry across digital territories; support pilot parish-level digital pastoral programs; and host

listening sessions to surface pastoral needs and best practices emerging from those active in digital mission.

### **C. Proposals at the Diocesan level**

1. **Promote Digital Pastoral Work Locally:** Train, accompany, and organize local networks of those engaged in digital mission. Pilot parish-level digital pastoral programs that support community building, catechesis, hospitality, and pastoral care online, ensuring clear links between online ministry and in-person community life.
2. **Training, Formation, and Spiritual Accompaniment:** Offer technical training alongside theological, pastoral, and synodal formation for catechists, pastoral ministers, and lay leaders. Provide ongoing spiritual accompaniment (including access to spiritual directors) for those engaged in digital ministry. Incorporate digital culture and pastoral approaches into initial and ongoing priestly formation.
3. **Communion and Synodality:** Encourage digital ministers to “walk in communion” with the bishop and local Church; strengthen collaboration between evangelizers and pastors so digital ministry is integrated into diocesan life; and adopt synodal listening practices online that remain connected to in-person pastoral structures.
4. **Ethics and Digital Safety:** Implement and disseminate proposed Vatican and episcopal conference guidelines on safe digital environments. Promote Gospel-inspired efforts and ethical leadership to create inclusive, accountable online spaces. Foster a “Samaritan mission” in digital spaces, a compassionate, protective presence toward the wounded, isolated, and marginalized.
5. **Pastoral Discernment, Listening, and Innovation:** Hold diocesan listening sessions with experienced digital missionaries to discern pastoral needs and effective models; support digital inculturation by using the languages and dynamics of digital culture in preaching, catechesis, and evangelization; and iterate locally on successful pilot programs.
6. **Integration with Social Mission and Service:** Act as a bridge between digital platforms and the work of the social mission; use digital ministry to amplify and coordinate solidarity actions for those most vulnerable; ensure digital outreach intentionally connects people to in-person social supports and services.
7. **Funding, Sustainability, and Local Resource Development:** Implement solidarity-driven funding practices at the diocesan level (partnerships, local crowdfunding, diocesan seed funds) to sustain parish and diocesan digital projects. Use diocesan development offices to advise on ethical fundraising for digital mission.
8. **Evaluation & Accountability:** Use or adapt the evaluative tools developed at the national level to assess local digital missionary projects, measuring both pastoral effectiveness and concrete impact on marginalized populations; report results into diocesan and conference processes for learning and resourcing.
9. **Practical Pastoral Tools & Services:** Curate online pastoral care tools (digital chaplaincy, virtual spiritual accompaniment, safe online prayer and formation spaces), and create toolkits for parishes to reproduce effective practices.

## **PART IV CONCLUSION**

In continuity with the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and the Magisterium, we recognize that the Church's presence in the digital environment is essential for it to evangelize contemporary culture and reach out to those in need, wherever they may be. It is often a first announcement of the Gospel in a world unfamiliar with it.

We are called to pay renewed attention to the theological, communicative, and pastoral languages through which the Church seeks to speak today to the minds and hearts of people, so that our proclamation may be meaningful and accessible within the digital culture that shapes our daily lives.

Like any new path, the 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 emerging culture. Concepts such as digital mission, online synodality, digital 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 digital missionaries. 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 digital culture, where relationships, languages, and forms of community take on new and particular configurations. The Church's presence in the digital environment 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.

# APPENDIX I

## METHODOLOGY

Study Group 3 has undertaken its work through a synodal methodology marked by prayerful listening, dialogue, and discernment. Our approach has reflected the vision of a missionary synodal Church that listens to the People of God, walks together with those on the margins, and engages digital culture not merely as a tool but as a lived environment that shapes how people seek meaning, connection, and truth.

### **Group Composition and Approach**

Study Group 3 brings together experts from various sectors of the Church and academia to address the complexities of the Church's mission in the digital environment. The Group includes:

- Dr. Kim Daniels, coordinator (Georgetown University)
- S.E. Paul Tighe (Dicastery for Education and Culture)
- S.E. Rino Fisichella (Dicastery for Evangelization)
- Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ (General Secretariat for the Synod)
- Dr. Paolo Ruffini (Dicastery for Communication)
- Mons. Lucio A. Ruiz (Dicastery for Communication)
- Fr. Antonio Spadaro, SJ (Dicastery for Education and Culture)
- Fr. Joseph Borg (University of Malta)

### **A Phased Synodal Process**

Our process has followed the structure outlined in our work plan, with each phase deepening our collective understanding of the Church's mission in the digital environment:

#### *Review of Synodal Foundations*

We began by reviewing and synthesizing the insights from earlier stages of the global Synod on Synodality. A comprehensive synthesis of national, continental, and final synodal reports provided a critical foundation. These documents highlighted the significance of digital culture as a space for encounter and a frontier for evangelization, setting the stage for our broader discernment.

#### *Listening and Global Consultation*

In line with the synodal method, we engaged in wide-ranging consultation to reflect the diversity of the People of God. These efforts included many contributions which covered a variety of disciplines, cultural contexts, and expertise, including:

- Episcopal Conference Communicators

With coordination from the Dicastery for Communication, we received feedback from 84 episcopal conference communication offices around the world in response to the Study Group's five key questions.

- “The Church Listens to You” initiative

This grassroots initiative surfaced experiences and wisdom from leaders active in synodal digital accompaniment, particularly among young people and those on the margins. In total, this listening effort received responses from a total of 1,618 digital missionaries from 67 countries who reflected on the five key questions.

- Individual and Group Submissions

Numerous contributions from theologians, scholars, pastoral leaders, digital creators, university students, and communications professionals enriched our reflection with perspectives grounded in real-world pastoral and digital realities.

- “Towards Full Presence” initiative

Individuals and groups engaged in the development and dissemination of the Dicastery’s pastoral reflection, *Towards Full Presence*, offered valuable insights into the Church’s digital presence and mission. This initiative served as a significant touchpoint in our consultations, shaping perspectives on formation, evangelization, and communion in the digital environment.

- Report from the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

The Commission’s essential report emphasized the Church’s ethical responsibilities and safeguarding concerns in digital spaces, a critical theme woven throughout our work.

These consultations were shaped by the five substantive questions outlined in our mandate and helped surface emerging themes that guided our deeper discernment.

## **Formation of Thematic Working Groups**

To carry out a deeper and more focused discernment, we established three working groups reflecting diverse experiences, disciplines, and global perspectives who focused on responding to the substantive questions in a more sustained manner, particularly as they related to key themes such as integrating digital mission strategies into Church structures and addressing the legal and ethical challenges posed by digital jurisdiction, as outlined in the work plan:

- *Scholars and Pastoral Experts Working Group*

This group included 33 members from Africa, Asia, Europe, Central America, North America, and South America. Their work and expertise explored theological, canonical, and structural questions related to the Church’s digital presence and engagement.

- *The Church Listens to You Working Group*

This working group brought together 12 leaders from the global Church Listens to You initiative. Their reflections were rooted in the concrete experience of synodal listening and outreach in the digital environment.

- *Faith Communication in the Digital World Alumni Working Group*

This group included 11 participants aged 25-35 from Portugal, the United States, Lebanon, Mexico, the Philippines, South Korea, Zimbabwe, Canada, and Croatia. It represents a dynamic network of Catholic communicators and young leaders deeply engaged in digital evangelization and intercultural dialogue.

## **In-Person Synodal Meeting in March 2025**

In March 2025, members of Study Group 3 gathered for an in-person synodal meeting to reflect on the wide range of contributions and discern the emerging directions of the Group's final recommendations. This gathering was a time of prayer, shared listening, and theological reflection, which helped clarify areas of convergence, articulate outstanding questions, and strengthen the Group's collective sense of mission.

## **Summer 2025 Listening Session**

Following the extension of the timeline of the Study Groups in April 2025, we convened an additional synodal listening session in August 2025, bringing together coordinators and select members from the three working groups. This virtual meeting provided participants the opportunity to reflect on the draft of the final report, offer feedback on its themes and recommendations, and consider how these elements resonated with the evolving ecclesial context, including the Synod's implementation guidelines and early messages from Pope Leo XIV reaffirming synodality and engagement with digital culture. The session was structured to facilitate open discussion, with the working draft and agenda provided in advance to ensure informed contributions from all participants.

## **Interdisciplinary Insight and Cultural Diversity**

The makeup of Study Group 3's consultations has allowed for interdisciplinary reflection across theology, canon law, digital culture, pastoral ministry, education, evangelization, and communications. This diversity has been essential to engaging the full complexity of the Church's presence in digital environments and has affirmed the importance of culturally sensitive and contextually grounded reflection.

## **Synodality as a Way Forward**

This process has demonstrated the value of working synodally, particularly when navigating the complexity and dynamism of digital culture. Our work has been strengthened by interdisciplinary perspectives and by voices from every continent. Together, they have helped us to understand more deeply the opportunities and challenges of the Church's mission in the digital environment.

We have seen that synodality is not only a method but a necessary path for the Church's digital presence. Listening, dialogue, and shared discernment have enabled us to encounter digital culture not simply as a space for communication, but as a space for communion, accompaniment, and witness.