



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. 4

THE REVISION OF THE *RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS INSTITUTIONIS SACERDOTALIS* FROM A SYNODAL MISSIONARY PERSPECTIVE



FINAL REPORT

[Original text: Italian. Working translation]

PREMISE

Composed of nine members from various continents and with different ecclesial experiences,¹ Study Group 4 was mandated to proceed with “an evaluation of formation for the ordained ministry and a revision of the Ratio Fundamentalís from the perspective of the synodal missionary Church, at the service of the Episcopal Conferences”.²

To carry out this task, the Group first examined the 2016 Ratio Fundamentalís, paying particular attention to its synodal and missionary dimensions, and using the guidelines concerning the identity and ministry of priests and their formation in a synodal missionary Church in the Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

Two important considerations emerged from this stage. On the one hand, the Ratio Fundamentalís issued in 2016 presented important insights that favour the realisation of a synodal missionary Church. Furthermore, it is a fairly recent document, still in the process of reception, on the basis of which the Ratio Nationalis are being prepared. On the other hand, the synodal process highlighted the need for further steps.

In light of this, it seemed appropriate not to touch the Ratio as such, but rather to draw up a preliminary document that would clearly outline the relational identity of ordained ministers in a synodal missionary Church and indicate principles and criteria for the implementation of the Ratio Fundamentalís and the Ratio Nationalis in harmony with this ecclesiological and missiological framework. As the process continued, this working hypothesis was increasingly confirmed.

In a second stage, the Group consulted priests and lay men and women from various parts of the world, particularly experts in the field of priestly formation,³ to gather their observations and suggestions. In addition, on 18 October 2024, the Group was able to hear the concerns of a delegation of participants in the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

In a third stage, in addition to listening to the opinions of the Consultors of the Dicastery for the Clergy, the General Secretariat of the Synod consulted the Commissions for the Clergy of the Episcopal Conferences throughout the world to gather their suggestions and, above all, Best Practices already in place. It also took into account voluntary contributions it had received .⁴

¹ *His Eminence José Cardinal Cobo Cano*, Archbishop of Madrid – Coordinator of the Group; *His Eminence Lazzaro Cardinal You Heung-sik*, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy; *His Eminence Jean-Claude Cardinal Hollerich*, Archbishop of Luxembourg, General Rapporteur of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops; *Rev. Mons. Eamonn McLaughlin*, Adjunct Undersecretary of the Dicastery for the Clergy for the Formation Office; *Servidora María Lía Zervino*, Member of the Dicastery for Bishops and Member of the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod; *Rev. Andrew Recepción*, Spiritual Director of the Pontifical Philippine College; *Rev. P. Guy Bognon P.S.S.*, Secretary General of the Pontifical Missionary Society of St. Peter the Apostle; *Rev. Hubertus Blaumeiser*, Consultor of the Dicastery for the Clergy; *Rev. Mario Antonelli*, Rector of the Pontifical Lombard Seminary – Secretary of the Group.

² GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD, *Study Groups on issues that emerged 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. Working outline*, 14 March 2024, p. 7.

³ Cf. the list in Appendix 2 of the Second Report of the Group (15 July 2025).

⁴ We received a total of 59 contributions - responses of the Commissions for the Clergy of the Episcopal Conferences and voluntary contributions - from the following geographical areas: Africa (6), Asia (8), Latin America (11), North America (5), Oceania (4), Europe (25).

*In light of all this, the Group has drafted a proposal for a Guiding Document for the implementation of the Ratio Fundamentalis and the Ratio Nationalis, which is presented below and which will be submitted for the consideration of the Holy Father, the General Secretariat of the Synod, and the Dicasteries responsible for the formation of ordained ministers.*⁵

⁵ “The task of verification and review will be coordinated by the Dicastery for the Clergy with the General Secretariat of the Synod, but it also requires the participation of the Dicasteries for Evangelisation; for the Eastern Churches; for the Laity, Family and Life; for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; for Culture and Education. Considering the importance of the subject, an evaluation and in-depth study of the theme at the inter-dicasterial level is required.” GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD, *Working Outline*, cit., p. 7.

**FORMING PRIESTS
IN A SYNODAL MISSIONARY CHURCH**

Proposal for a Guiding Document
for the implementation of *the Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*
and the *Ratio Nationalis* in a synodal missionary perspective

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INTRODUCTION

“The path of synodality is precisely the path that God expects from the Church of the third millennium”.

During the ongoing synodal process, there is a growing conviction that this path, indicated to the Church by Pope Francis⁶ and taken up by Pope Leo XIV from the very beginning of his Pontificate,⁷ would remain without the fruits of real communion and courageous mission if it did not also have an impact on the methods of formation for the ordained ministry. How, in fact, could a Christian community proceed in its missionary work and in a communion capable of synodality, if it were not accompanied, presided over, and instructed by men who are outstanding in their apostolic zeal and synodal spirit? Hence the request of the *Final Document* of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: “The Assembly calls for a revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in order to incorporate the requests made by the Synod. They should be translated into precise guidelines for a formation to synodality” (FD, no. 148). It should be borne in mind that this is not a matter of making minor adjustments or a simple reorganisation, but of a conversion of the heart, mind, relationships and processes, in line with the fundamental request of the Synod on synodality, a conversion that is first and foremost personal, but which must also be communal and structural.⁸

In addressing this mandate, it should be noted that the current *Ratio Fundamentalis* is relatively recent (2016). Although it predates the Synodal process, it offers important new emphases in the perspective of the missionary and synodal Church: the insistence on discipleship as a fundamental feature of initial and ongoing formation and an indispensable condition for configuration to Christ the Shepherd and Servant; the essentially communitarian dimension of formation; the need for integral formation that gives due importance to the human and affective dimensions, together with the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral dimensions; greater attention to the ecclesial form of discernment of the call.

It should also be remembered that the current *Ratio* is still in the process of being received. Among other things, it is the basis for the various *Ratio Nationalis* which are being prepared. A number of them have already been confirmed by the Dicastery for the Clergy, while others are still being developed or have just begun to be so. It does not seem appropriate, therefore, to consider a reworking of the *Ratio* as such at this time, as Pope Francis indicated in his address on 6 June 2024 to the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for the Clergy: “The *Ratio Fundamentalis* has been made: there is no need to make another one. Let us move forward with this one”.

However, even in relation to formation for priestly ministry, the concerns that emerged from the Synodal process and were collected in the *Final Document* of the Assembly cannot be ignored: to deepen the relational identity of the ordained ministry, in dialogue with other ministries, defining it

⁶ FRANCIS, *Address for the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

⁷ Cf. LEO XIV, *First Blessing*, 8 May 2025; ID., *Address to the College of Cardinals*, 10 May 2025.

⁸ The main interest that emerged in the Synodal Assembly and in the establishment of the Study Group focused on priestly formation. In line with this mandate, the terms “presbyter” and “priest” are used, against the backdrop of a decisive conviction: that the structural relationship between the three degrees of the sacrament of Holy Orders and with other ministries must guide the exercise of the ordained ministry in all its degrees and, as a consequence, the formation for it.

“in and from” the People of God; to propose a formation that is increasingly rooted in the experience of the People of God, with its various charisms and ministries, and in contact with the poor; to offer shared moments of formation for lay people, consecrated persons, ordained ministers and seminarians that foster mutual knowledge and collaboration; to activate a broad and real participation of all members of the People of God in the formation of future pastors, with particular attention to the contribution of women and families; to foster the acquisition of skills indispensable for a synodal Church, such as listening, dialogue, co-responsibility and ecclesial discernment; and to educate for a more open correspondence to the missionary mandate of Jesus.

Therefore, in response to the task entrusted to it, the Study Group offers the Holy Father this *Guiding Document* for the implementation of *the Ratio Fundamental* and the *Ratio Nationalis* in harmony with the ongoing synodal missionary conversion. It outlines in a *Preamble* the identity of priests in a missionary and synodal Church; it then proposes *Guidelines* (principles and criteria) for a reception of the *Ratio Fundamental* that integrate the concerns presented by the Synod to the Churches; finally, it reports some *Best Practices* already in place for the common good within the *communio ecclesiarum*.

PART I

ECCLESIOLOGICAL-PASTORAL PREAMBLE

1. CONVERSION OF RELATIONSHIPS

The Church in today's world: sacrament of renewed relationships

“The Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (*Lumen gentium*, no. 1). “The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of today, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are also the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 1). It is within this ecclesiological framework of the Council that we find the call for a more synodal and missionary Church, as presented in the *Final Document* of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*. This document, which calls the whole People of God to conversion, is the mature fruit of a worldwide ecclesial discernment and has been given magisterial value by Pope Francis.

Taking up and relaunching the teachings of the Second Vatican Council,⁹ the 2021-2024 Synod has emphasised the People of God as a “communitarian and historical subject” (FD, no. 17) and has therefore developed *a relational ecclesiology rooted in the life of humanity* that points to synodality as the “ordinary way of living and working” (FD, no. 30; cf. no. 31) to which the Catholic Church feels called in order to be, in today's world, “God's home and family” (FD, no. 28), “the effective leaven in bonds, relationships and the kinship of the human family” (FD, no. 20).¹⁰ Throughout the Synod and across the world, there emerged, in fact, “the call for a Church with a greater capacity to nurture relationships: with the Lord, between men and women, in the family, in the local community, among social groups and religions, with all of creation”. Hence the urgent call for “a genuine relational conversion” (FD, no. 50)¹¹ that will make the Church “more participatory and missionary so that it can walk with every man and woman, radiating the light of Christ” (FD, no. 28). Walking in a synodal missionary way, the *Final Document* observes in a passage of particular theological density, the holy People of God is recognised as a synodal Church “by flourishing interpersonal relationships flowing from the mutual love that constitutes the new commandment left by Jesus to His disciples (cf. *Jn* 13:34-35). The Church as ‘a people made one by the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’ (LG 4), can witness to the power of relationships founded in the Trinity especially where individualism pervades cultures and societies” (FD, no. 34). It is therefore necessary for the communities of the Church to manifest at every level and in a tangible way the newness of the relationships that descend from the life of the Holy Trinity (*Ecclesia de Trinitate*) and in which consists the very content of its mission within humanity.

⁹ See FD, no. 5: “The Second Vatican Council was indeed like a seed thrown onto the field of the world [...]. The Synod 2021-2024 continues to draw upon the energy of that seed and develop its potential [...]. In this sense, the synodal journey constitutes a further act of reception of the Council, thus deepening its inspiration and reinvigorating its prophetic force for today's world”.

¹⁰ Cf. FD, no. 121: “The Church, both at the local level and by virtue of its Catholic unity, aspires to be a network of relationships which prophetically propagates and promotes a culture of encounter, social justice, inclusion of the marginalised, communion among peoples and care for the earth, our common home”.

¹¹ See below: “we must once again learn from the Gospel that attending to relationships is not merely a strategy or a tool for greater organisational effectiveness. Relationships and bonds are the means by which God the Father has revealed Himself in Jesus and the Spirit”.

2. MISSIONARY CONVERSION

All the baptised, men and women, protagonists of a mission that touches all areas of life

It is not by chance that the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* of the Second Vatican Council preceded the presentation of the hierarchical constitution of the Church (chapter III) with an in-depth exploration of the mystery of the Church as participation in the life of the one and triune God (chapter I) and then focused on the way this mystery takes visible form in the People of God journeying through history (chapter II), clarifying that all the baptised enjoy equal dignity and are all involved in the common mission.¹²

All disciples who encounter the Risen One are called to allow themselves to be constantly transformed by the Word of God and thus to manifest those new relationships of mutual love by which the disciples of Jesus are recognised (cf. *Jn* 13:35), identifying themselves ever more deeply with the crucified and risen Lord. And so all are sent by him to bring the Good News: women and men alike.

In this vein, the *Final Document* of the 2021-2024 Synod reiterated: “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 (ITC 53)”.¹³ Implementing this conversion to the common mission means becoming aware that all the faithful are jointly responsible for the impact of the Gospel in today’s world, each with their own experience and apostolic competence; and that, therefore, all the faithful must be involved when it comes to discerning and implementing the steps of reform so that the Church may walk in the “delightful and comforting joy of evangelising” (*Evangelii gaudium*, no. 10).

Such participation by all the faithful gives the Church’s mission a truly universal character and helps to *reach and renew every area of human life and society with the light of the Gospel*: “Each Baptised person responds to missionary needs in the contexts in which they live and work, according to their dispositions and abilities [...] within the family and other states of life; in the workplace and in their professions; engaged civilly, politically, socially or ecologically; in the development of a culture inspired by the Gospel, including the evangelisation of the digital environment” (FD, no. 58).

According to the Synod, this leads to a *conversion in the way of conceiving the life of Christian communities*. “In this way, it will become more evident that the parish is not centred on itself but oriented towards mission. The parish is then called to sustain the commitment of so many people who in so many ways live and bear witness to their faith in their profession, in social, cultural and political activities” (FD, no. 117).¹⁴

A further need for conversion in relationships therefore unequivocally concerns those between *men and women*. “We bear witness to the Gospel when we seek to live in relationships that respect the equal dignity and reciprocity between men and women” (FD, no. 52). The Synodal Assembly

¹² See LG nos. 9 and 32 and the Conciliar Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam actuositatem*.

¹³ FD, no. 4 citing no. 53 of the Document of the INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.* at no. 59: “In a missionary synodal Church, under the leadership of their pastors, communities will be able to send people out in mission and support those they have sent. Communities will, therefore, see themselves as primarily devoted to the service of a mission that the faithful carry out within society, in family and working life. They will, therefore, not remain focused exclusively on the activities that take place within their own communities and upon their own organisational needs”.

therefore called for “full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law with regard to the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain underutilised” (FD, no. 60).¹⁵

3. CONVERSION TO COMMUNION.

Circularity of gifts: charisms and ministries at the service of the mission

Taking up the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on *the charismatic dimension of the Church* (cf. LG, nos. 4 and 12), the *Final Document* of the Synod states: “Christians, each according to their diverse roles [...] walk the paths of the world and proclaim the Gospel where they live, sustained by the gifts of the Spirit” (FD, no. 58). “Everyone can make a particular and indispensable contribution to completing our common task” (FD, no. 42). The common mission of all the baptised is therefore based on a great *variety of gifts that must be welcomed and harmonised*: “By appreciating all charisms and ministries, synodality enables the People of God to proclaim and witness to the Gospel to women and men of every place and time, making itself a ‘visible sacrament’ (LG 9) of the fellowship and unity in Christ willed by God” (FD, no. 32).

In this mission, everyone has their own particular place and task in a *circularity of vocations* and in *the reciprocity of the gifts* that each person has to offer: men and women (cf. FD, nos. 52 and 60); young people and children (cf. FD, nos. 61-62), families (cf. FD, nos. 35 and 64); the sick, the elderly and the disabled (cf. FD, no. 63); consecrated men and women (cf. FD 65); convents and monasteries, associations, movements and new communities (cf. FD, no. 118); Bishops, priests and deacons¹⁶; the various local Churches¹⁷. In the Church, no one person does everything, but different gifts are integrated with one another in the common mission. It is up to pastors to ensure harmony among all and to promote the charisms present in the community in view of the mission.

Based on this vision of the Church that values charisms, the Synod laid emphasis on a *variety of lay ministries*: “Throughout its history, the Church has adopted other ministries apart from those of the ordained in response to the needs of the community and the mission. Charisms take the form of ministries when they are publicly recognised by the community and by those responsible for leading the community. In this way, they are placed at the service of the mission in a stable and consistent way” (FD, no. 75)¹⁸.

By valuing the wealth of charisms and ministries scattered throughout the People of God, ordained ministers will be able to experience the fruitful joy of fraternal charity and will find themselves carrying out their service of communion within living, dynamic and diverse communities that bring the leaven of the Gospel into the various fields of human society.

¹⁵ The text continues: “There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped”.

¹⁶ See FD 68-74, discussed below.

¹⁷ Cf. FD 120-121 on the “exchange of gifts” which, in a broader sense, should also extend to different Churches and ecclesial communities and to other religions (cf. FD 122-123).

¹⁸ Among these ministries, the Synod distinguished between *instituted ministries*, *ministries not instituted ritually but exercised with stability* by mandate of the competent authority, *extraordinary ministries*, and *spontaneous services* (cf. FD 75-76).

4. CONVERSION TO SERVICE

The specific identity of the ministry of priests in a relational and communal perspective

The Second Vatican Council's Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* presents the figure of priests in a decidedly relational and communal key. If the *reference to Christ as Head, Servant and Shepherd* is essential to the identity of priests, the *ecclesial reference* is no less essential:

- united with sincere charity and obedience to the Bishop, who finds in them not only collaborators and counsellors but “friends and brothers”
- priests are united among themselves by a sacramental fraternity that calls them to live in a fraternal spirit and to work in unity with the Bishop and among themselves
- in the service of the lay faithful, recognising and promoting their dignity and their specific role in the mission of the Church, joining with them in their efforts.¹⁹

In light of this essential dual reference, the Synod calls for a strengthening of the ecclesiological dimension of ordained ministry, redefining it “in and from” the People of God. It will therefore be necessary to recalibrate the structure of priestly formation according to this relational identity. If, as *the Introduction to the Ratio Fundamentalis* states, “the disciple-priest comes from the Christian community and returns to it”, the fabric of fraternity with the People of God and with every brother and sister cannot be suspended or remain marginal during the time of initial formation. It must represent the vital place, the good soil from which the identity of the priest sprouts and matures: a brother among brothers and sisters in the Christian community and belonging to a presbyterate which, together with the Bishop and deacons, constitutes the fundamental ministerial subject of the local Church.

In this line, it is necessary to situate the formation itineraries more deeply within the People of God with the richness of its charisms and ministries.

Continuing with the reception of the Council, it is worth developing the importance of the *Ratio Fundamentalis* which, linking the identity of priests to the priesthood of Christ, recalls that “the first characteristic that distinguishes Christ as the true High Priest is his unique closeness, which brings him near to both God and men” (n. 36). Overcoming the temptation to place the priest in isolation and in a sacred aura ‘ahead of’ and ‘above’ the People of God, we must therefore realign the priestly ministry, precisely because of its special sacramental configuration to Christ the Head, Servant and Shepherd, at the feet of the brothers and sisters of the People of God.

In a wholly synodal Church, animated by charisms and ministries for mission, priests therefore occupy *their own specific and unmistakable place*. If, on the one hand, “Baptism is the foundation of Christian life [...] because it introduces everyone to the greatest gift, which is to be children of God”, and “there is nothing higher than this baptismal dignity, equally bestowed upon each person” (FD, no. 21), meaning that priests must therefore be missionary disciples first and foremost, on the other hand “The authority of pastors ‘is a specific gift of the Spirit of Christ the Head for the upbuilding of the entire Body’ (ITC 67). This gift is bound to the Sacrament of Orders, which configures pastors to Christ, Head, Shepherd and Servant, and places them at the service of the holy People of God in order to safeguard the apostolicity of the proclamation and to promote ecclesial communion at all levels”

¹⁹ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* on the Ministry and Life of Priests, nos. 7-9.

(FD, no. 33). Deeply linked to the service of the Word, the presidency of the celebration of the Eucharist also takes on particular importance. It is “the first and fundamental way the holy People of God gather and meet”, and in which “a differentiated co-responsibility of all for mission is fulfilled” and made visible (FD, no. 26). This presidency must also be lived as a service, following the model of the Lord who made himself the servant of all (cf. *Mk* 10:45) and bent down to wash the feet of his disciples (cf. *Jn* 13:1-17).

In a synodal Church, priests are therefore called to live their service “in an attitude of closeness to people, of welcoming and listening to all” and to open themselves to a synodal style (cf. FD, no. 72)²⁰ that brings to full flowering the gifts and charisms present in lively and missionary communities.

While this can sometimes give rise to the fear that the priestly ministry will lose something of its identity and prerogatives, it actually makes it more authentic and more evangelical and gives it *fresh energy and renewed vitality*, avoiding burdening priests with duties that do not concern the essential and specific aspects of their ministry and sparing them unnecessary stress. “A wider distribution of tasks and responsibilities and a more courageous discernment of what properly belongs to the ordained ministry and what can and must be delegated to others will enable each ministry to be exercised in a more spiritually sound and pastorally dynamic manner” (FD, no. 74).

5. CONVERSION TO A SYNODAL STYLE

Differentiated co-responsibility and ecclesial discernment for the mission

The Council had already exhorted priests to “willingly listen to the laity, consider their wants in a fraternal spirit, recognize their experience and competence in the different areas of human activity, so that together with them they will be able to recognize the signs of the times”.²¹

Taking up these and other perspectives of conciliar teaching, Part III of the *Final Document* of the 2021-2024 Synod invites the People of God and their Pastors to a “conversion of processes” in the Church, which, according to the subheadings of that chapter, takes concrete form in three practices in particular.

Ecclesial discernment for mission. Calling on the Spirit’s light, “the People of God, who participate in the prophetic function of Christ (cf. LG 12), ‘works to discern the true signs of God’s presence and purpose in the events, needs and desires which it shares with the rest of modern humanity’ (GS 11)” (FD, no. 81). The Synod specifies that this is not an organisational technique, but a spiritual practice rooted in the *sensus fidei* communicated by the Spirit to all the Baptised. Its starting point and criterion is listening to the Word of God. It requires the continuous care and formation of consciences and the maturation of the *sensus fidei*, so as not to neglect any of the places where God speaks and encounters his people: the living Tradition of the Church, her magisterium, personal and communitarian meditation on the Scriptures and the practices of popular piety, as well as the cry of the poor and the events of human history (cf. FD, nos. 81-83).

Among the steps of ecclesial discernment, the *Final Document* indicates, also on the basis of synodal experience, “some elements that should not be lacking”: a clear presentation of the object of discernment, a convenient time to prepare oneself with prayer, inner freedom from one’s own

²⁰ For the ministry of deacons, cf. FD, no. 73.

²¹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, cit., no. 9.

interests, attentive and respectful listening to each person, the search for the widest possible consensus, which “will emerge when our hearts burn within us (cf. *Lk* 24:32), without hiding conflicts or searching for the lowest common denominator”, the formulation of the consensus reached and its presentation to all participants, so that they may indicate whether or not they recognise themselves in it (cf. FD, no. 84).

Differentiated co-responsibility in decision-making processes. Ecclesial discernment for mission – and the decisions that are made on this basis – is “all the richer when everyone is heard” (cf. FD, no. 82).

It is therefore a question of fostering “as great a participation of all the People of God as possible in decision-making processes” (FD, no. 87), bearing in mind that “the community of disciples convoked and sent by the Lord is neither uniform nor shapeless”. Already the Fathers of the Church, the Synod notes, speak of “a triple ‘nothing without’: ‘nothing without the Bishop’ (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Trallians* 2,2) ‘nothing without your advice [of Presbyters and Deacons] and the consent of the People’ (St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Letter to the Brothers Presbyters and Deacons*, 14,4). When this logic of ‘nothing without’ is disregarded, the identity of the Church is obscured, and its mission is hindered” (FD, no. 88). This gives rise to “the commitment to promote participation based on differentiated co-responsibility” (FD, no. 89),²² with “procedures that make reciprocity between the assembly and the person presiding effective in an atmosphere of openness to the Spirit and mutual trust in search of a consensus that could, possibly, be unanimous” (FD, no. 90).²³

Transparency, accountability and evaluation. “Accountability to the community for one’s ministry belongs to our oldest tradition: to the Apostolic Church itself”, states the Synod with reference to Peter with the community of Jerusalem (*Acts* 11; FD, no. 95). The transparency that this requires is “the rejection of obscurity, hypocrisy and ambiguity, and absence of ulterior motives” (FD, no. 96), “the trust and credibility needed by a synodal Church that is attentive to relationships”, particularly important in the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable persons (FD, no. 97).

Transparency and accountability do not only concern possible abuses, but also “the lifestyle of pastors, pastoral planning, methods of evangelisation”, and the way in which the Church respects human dignity, for example, in regard to the working conditions within its institutions (FD, no. 98). As part of a regular assessment of the responsibilities of ministers, the following should be verified at a minimum: the involvement of the People of God in pastoral and economic planning; an annual financial report as well as a report on the progress of the mission, on *safeguarding* initiatives and on

²² The term already appears in nos. 26 and 28 and then in no. 36 of FD, where it is stated that in the synodal process “a desire emerged to expand possibilities for participation and for the exercise of differentiated co-responsibility by all the Baptised, men and women”.

²³ For a more in-depth examination of this crucial theme for the journey of a synodal and missionary Church, refer to the full text of nos. 87-94 of the *Final Document*, which focus, among other things, on the articulation of decision-making processes that “involve a period of elaboration and preparation ‘through a joint exercise of discernment, consultation and co-operation’ (ITC 69), which informs and underpins the subsequent taking of a decision by the competent authority” and reiterates that “there is no competition or conflict between the two elements of the process” (FD, no. 90). “In a synodal Church”, the *Document* states, “the authority of the Bishop, of the Episcopal College and of the Bishop of Rome in regard to decision-taking is inviolable as it is grounded in the hierarchical structure of the Church established by Christ; it both serves unity and legitimate diversity (cf. LG 13). Such an exercise of authority, however, is not without limits: it may not ignore a direction which emerges through proper discernment within a consultative process, especially if this is done by participatory bodies. It is not appropriate to set the consultative and deliberative elements involved in reaching a decision in opposition to each other: in the Church, the deliberative element is undertaken with the help of all and never without those whose pastoral governance allows them to take a decision by virtue of their office” (FD, no. 92).

the performance of all ministries and tasks (FD, no. 102). Furthermore, “a synodal Church is based upon the existence, efficiency and effective vitality of these participatory bodies, not on the merely nominal existence of them” (FD, no. 104).

6. CONVERSION OF FORMATION

A shared and integral formation to grow as a synodal missionary Church

It is clear that what has been outlined requires not only a conversion of processes (Part III of the FD) and relationships (Part II), but also a conversion to a decisive commitment to the formation of all the members of the People of God and, in particular, a renewal and deepening of the formation of ordained ministers. Guidelines must therefore be drawn up for the reception and implementation of the *Ratio Fundamentalis* and the *Ratio Nationalis* that correspond to the image of a synodal missionary Church that emerges from synodal discernment.

The *Ratio Fundamentalis* already outlines perspectives and steps for the renewal recommended throughout the synodal process. In this sense, the ‘Seminary’, as updated in the post-conciliar period and, more recently, by *the Ratio Fundamentalis*, remains a valid formative model.

At the same time, in light of the requests of the Synodal Assembly and the observations and insights gathered in the work of the Study Group on the *Ratio Fundamentalis*, the formative experience should be more consistent with the life that candidates will subsequently lead: in pastoral ministry, being with Jesus leads to an apostolic journey with and for the People of God. From this perspective, the appropriate updates of the formative community of the Seminary must go ahead. However, it is also opportune to prepare other formative ‘places/times’ necessary for education in mission and synodality. If the conversion also concerns the structural side of the Church’s formative responsibility, it is good to develop pathways to the priesthood in which the ‘Seminary’ is not the sole place for formation.

Certainly, what must be guaranteed is the necessary time and space to deepen and verify the call to priestly ministry (“come away”) and, for the Latin Church, the charism of celibacy with an intense spiritual life marked by guarded and guided rhythms. At the same time, however, the Seminary should not be a prolonged experience far from the People of God. It seems necessary to provide other formative modules along the way, not alternative but complementary to the ‘place/time’ of the Seminary; these can guarantee candidates a real experience of ordinary human life and stable immersion in the life of the Christian community and ensure solid growth in an integral manner. This will avoid the condition of separation where irresponsibility, dissimulation and clerical infantilism are more easily bred. A modulation of different places and times would also lead to a formation that is more shared with brothers and sisters oriented towards different vocational and ministerial paths, creating dynamics of mutual recognition and appreciation of respective charisms and vocations, dynamics that are important for the consolidation and preservation of the specific identity of the priestly ministry as well as the character of other charisms and ministries.

In this regard, the *Final Document* of the Synod indicates in Part V, dedicated to the formation of a people of missionary disciples, two fundamental points of attention that must be translated into the content and methods of both initial and ongoing priestly formation.²⁴

- The need for *shared synodal formation* as a “horizon within which to understand and practise the specific formation required for individual ministries and vocations”; a requirement, the Synod observes, that “often requires a demanding change of mentality and a renewed approach to both formation contexts and processes” (FD, no. 147).
- *The structuring of the paths* of discernment and formation of candidates for ordained ministry *in a synodal style*; a requirement that requires the provision of, in particular
 - a significant presence of female figures
 - integration into the daily life of communities
 - education on how to collaborate with everyone in the Church
 - training in ecclesial discernment (Conversation in the Spirit and other methods)
 - the presence of the ecumenical dimension in all aspects of the formation programmes
 - passion for the mission *ad gentes* (FD, no. 148)as well as,
 - a wise assessment of the impact of digital culture on formation processes (FD, no. 149)
 - specific and ongoing formation in the culture of safeguarding and adequate prevention, which is indispensable for those who work with minors and vulnerable adults (FD, no. 150).

Inspired by the prospects for conversion referred to in this *Preamble*, the following *Guidelines* are intended to promote the implementation of *the Ratio Fundamentalis* and the *Ratio Nationalis* in a way that integrates the requests made during the Synodal Assembly, thus supporting the commitment of the Churches to “form missionary disciples ‘in love’ with the Master, pastors ‘with the smell of the sheep’, who live among them to serve them and bring them God’s mercy” (*RF* Introduction).

²⁴ Cf. FD 148: “The Assembly calls for a revision of *the Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* that incorporates the requests made during the Synod, translating them into precise guidelines for formation in synodality”.

PART II

GUIDELINES (OPERATIONAL PATHWAYS)

In light of the ecclesiological-pastoral Preamble and in fidelity to the *Final Document* of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, this second part gathers *guidelines for a review and implementation of the Ratio Fundamentalis and the Ratio Nationalis from a synodal and missionary perspective*. These guidelines also arise from listening to experts from various continents and from the needs and Best Practices gathered through consultation with the Commissions for the Clergy of the Episcopal Conferences. In implementing them, it will be necessary to take into account the various ecclesial and cultural contexts, as clearly illustrated by the Best Practices presented as examples in the Appendix to this Document.²⁵

1. Priestly formation shared with all the baptised²⁶

The Synodal Path has called for the formation of future priests to be more deeply immersed in the reality of the People of God with its diverse charisms and ministries, close to the poor and understood and carried out within the horizon of the formation of all the baptised (cf. FD, no. 147). The aim is to ensure a formative experience that is more closely aligned with the life that candidates will subsequently lead. The formation itinerary must not create artificial environments detached from the ordinary life of the faithful²⁷, but should take place in close contact with the daily life of the People of God, so as to truly inhabit the human condition and have a real experience of God and of the circularity of vocations, all involved in the mission, in a mutual exchange of gifts.

For the formation of candidates to the presbyteral ministry, this requires:

- a real experience of the life of faith and commitment in the Christian community *before undertaking specific paths*, as an indispensable prerequisite for an initial vocational discernment;
- experiences and moments of formation shared with lay people, consecrated persons, and ordained ministers *from the propaedeutic stage onwards*, so as to foster self-knowledge in relationship with others and an attitude of fraternal collaboration with all;
- the immersion of formation in the life of the Christian community also during the *subsequent stages* of formation, alternating the traditional module, which entails residence in the Seminary during the early years, *with other modules* that entail residence in parish communities or other ecclesial environments, especially during *the configurative stage*. This should not prolong the formation period.
- attention to *integral formation* which, benefiting from ordinary relationships with all members of the People of God, fosters the growth of responsible and mature personalities, including the area of affectivity and sexuality.

²⁵ Among the numerous *Best Practices* received, it was necessary to make a selection that sought to represent different situations and geographical areas. At the same time, the material gathered also guided the development of these Guidelines.

²⁶ See *Best Practices* [01] - [03] in the Appendix.

²⁷ See XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. FIRST SESSION, *Synthesis Report*, no. 14.

2. Formation of candidates for the priesthood in a participatory and synodal style

On this basis, the *specific formation* of future priests must also take place in a participatory and synodal style (cf. FD, no. 148). The following points deserve particular attention.

2.1 *Communitarian and synodal life and spirituality*²⁸

Future ministerial life and action require seminarians to grow in a *deep and personal relationship with Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life* and in a *strong and concrete experience of fraternity*.

To this end, it is necessary to

- ensure that the formative community is composed of a sufficient number of seminarians and adequately prepared formators to be able to carry out its task effectively;²⁹
- create, within the wider community of the Seminary, *community life groups*, accompanied by a formator, in order to ensure personalised accompaniment of candidates and provide a true experience of fraternal sharing and real, constructive community life;
- deepen and practise a continual personal conversion that nourishes a *communal and synodal spirituality*³⁰, while also valuing the contribution that can come from spiritualities and charisms approved by ecclesiastical authority;
- ensure the participation of candidates, following the example of their formators, in domestic services, so that they experience '*normal life*' and conform themselves to Christ, who came not to be served but to serve (cf. *Mk* 10:45);
- encourage the performance of *tasks together with others*, in the Seminary and in pastoral settings.

2.2 *Essential contents of a theoretical-practical curriculum aimed at missionary synodality*³¹

The formation programme must ensure the theoretical and practical deepening of a *participatory and synodal style*, from the propaedeutic stage and throughout the entire formation process. In particular, it will be necessary

- in the *propaedeutic stage*, to study the *Final Document* of the Synod and lay the foundations for learning the *skills that are indispensable for a missionary synodal Church*, such as listening, dialogue, communal discernment (including Conversation in the Spirit), co-responsibility, etc.;
- during the *discipleship stage*, to acquire and internalise the guiding principles of a *relational and dialogical anthropology*, from a biblical, philosophical and human sciences perspective;

²⁸ See *Best Practices* [04] - [07] in the Appendix.

²⁹ Cf. what is established in this regard by the *Ratio Fundamentalis* in light of the principle that it should never be forgotten that "the Seminary, before being a building, is a formative community" (no. 188). The minimum number of seminarians and resident formators shall be determined by the Episcopal Conference, in dialogue with the competent Dicastery.

³⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II on the spirituality of communion in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, nos. 42-45, and Part One of the FD: *The Heart of Synodality. Called by the Holy Spirit to Conversion*, nos. 13-48, in particular nos. 43-46.

³¹ See *Best Practices* [08] - [10] in the Appendix.

- during *the configurative stage*, to provide for an in-depth study of *ecclesiology from a missionary synodal perspective*³² and of *priestly identity from a relational perspective*, starting from the constitutive relationship with Christ the Shepherd and Servant, and with the whole People of God in dialogue with the other ministries;³³
- during *the pastoral stage* of progressive immersion in pastoral responsibilities, as in each of the previous stages, to delve deeply into the indispensable attitudes of an authentically participatory style, keeping in mind the practices illustrated in Part III of the Final Document of the Synod.³⁴ The requirements for missionary formation listed in point 4, including formation in the safeguarding of persons and the prevention of abuse, should also be kept in mind.

2.3 *The formation team and the synodal leadership of initial formation*³⁵

It is essential that the community that accompanies the formation process draws upon the contribution of all the members of the People of God: priests, consecrated persons, lay people (men and women), and families.

In particular, it is necessary to

- ensure the presence of *full-time, well-prepared formators who are harmoniously united despite their diversity, who are witnesses* of evangelical life and of a communitarian and participatory style;
- provide for ongoing and regulated spaces and processes for *their continual formation*;
- involve *religious men and women and lay people who are competent* in academic and practical teaching;
- *include well-prepared and competent women as co-responsible* at all levels of formation, also within the formation team, in order to benefit from their indispensable contribution to vocational discernment and to the accompaniment of candidates to the priesthood, promoting this development – where not yet underway – through a process involving the educational community, while respecting the various cultural contexts and responding to the renewal required by a synodal and missionary Church.

3. **Differentiated co-responsibility for discernment and formation**³⁶

According to the principle of differentiated co-responsibility (cf. FD, nos. 87-94), responsibility for the formation of future priests cannot remain limited to the Bishop and those directly given the task of formation, but requires the contribution of the entire People of God.

³² See what is outlined briefly in the *Preamble* to nos. 1-3.

³³ Cf. LEO XIV, *A Fidelity that Generates the Future*, Apostolic Letter on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Conciliar Decrees *Optatam Totius* and *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 8 December 2025, nos. 5-13 (Fidelity and Service), nos. 14-19 (Fidelity and Fraternity), nos. 20-22 (Fidelity and Synodality), nos. 23-29 (Fidelity and Mission), and as outlined briefly in the Ecclesiological-Pastoral *Preamble* of this Document, Part I, no. 4.

³⁴ Cf. FD, nos. 79-108, which deal with ecclesial discernment for mission; differentiated co-responsibility; evaluation, transparency and accountability; and working with participatory bodies.

³⁵ See *Best Practices* [11] - [14] in the Appendix.

³⁶ See *Best Practices* [15] - [18] in the Appendix.

It is therefore necessary

- that Bishops promote listening and interaction among people of different vocations in the *drafting of the Ratio Nationalis and the Formation Project* of each Seminary;
- to involve the whole People of God – priests, consecrated persons and lay people – in *the care and discernment of vocations*, also through *vocational centres* that foster effective collaboration between families, schools, parishes, educators and catechists, groups, movements and associations of lay faithful;
- that *periodic evaluations* of the candidates' progress be conducted not only by their formators but also by those who observe their behaviour in the Seminary, in the parish, etc., including fellow seminarians;
- that *the People of God* be truly *listened to in view of the conferral of Holy Orders*, consulting in particular the parish priest of the candidate's parish of origin, those with whom the candidate has carried out pastoral service, as well as the members of the educational community, giving due importance also to the views and assessments of women.

4. Formation for mission³⁷

It is essential that candidates for the priesthood develop an active passion for the mission, to be carried out together with all the baptised: this is the purpose for which they are ordained. To this end, the initial formation programme should

- provide experiences of *service to the poor, caring for our Common Home* and *social pastoral care*;
- devote special attention to *homiletic and catechetical formation* so that it connects the Word of God with the concrete lives of people;
- wisely consider the impact of the *digital culture* on learning processes and on the proclamation of the Gospel message, with special attention also to artificial intelligence (cf. FD, no. 149);
- ensure specific and ongoing training in the culture of *safeguarding* and adequate prevention (cf. FD, no. 150);
- keep the *ecumenical dimension* in mind in all aspects of formation programmes (cf. FD, no. 148) as well as preparation for interreligious dialogue and the exchange of gifts with people of other beliefs (cf. FD, no. 123);
- where possible, encourage a period of formation in other countries or Dioceses where the sense of mission is particularly strong.

³⁷ See *Best Practices* [19] - [23] in the Appendix.

APPENDIX

BEST PRACTICES

In view of drafting the Guidelines, in addition to listening to experts from various continents, attention was paid to Best Practices reported by the Episcopal Conferences, by the General Secretariat of the Synod, and by those involved in these experiences. Examples from various countries and continents are presented here. These are not models, but simply examples, like many others already in progress, which can serve as inspiration for approaches which are suited to the local culture and the situation of each Seminary or centre of formation for the clergy.

1. Priestly formation shared with all the baptised

[01] *In a Diocese in Russia, the propaedeutic year has been reorganised in a more synodal way. Candidates for the priesthood are first invited to a period of vocational discernment. After hearing the opinion of the Bishop, the spiritual director, the parish priest and a psychologist, the candidate is then accepted for the propaedeutic period in a parish, generally far from his city of origin, where his formation is accompanied by a team composed of the parish priest, one or more families, a spiritual director, a psychologist and one or more religious sisters. By working together in this way, a discernment is reached regarding the continuation of the vocational journey.*

[02] *In the propaedeutic stage in eight Dioceses in the United States, particular attention is paid to healing the wounds caused by isolation resulting from the excessive use of technology and the breakdown of families. The focus is on a journey of interiority, in which an eight-day retreat plays a central role. For many, this is their first opportunity to experience silence and daily spiritual direction. Two women are among those who accompany. A small group programme called 'The Augustine Way' offers a path towards freedom in the virtue of chastity. The transition from the Seminary conceived as a place of formation to the Seminary as a network of relationships that help seminarians to live in relationship, as men of communion and to live their identity in Christ, as beloved sons of the Father, has been paradigmatic.*

[03] *In a Diocese in Italy, seminarians live the first year of the configurative stage in groups of three or four in apartments provided by various parishes. They go to the Seminary only for theology classes and other formative moments. Their activities are distributed among several parishes so that each seminarian can individually test himself by taking on a pastoral service. The experience is prepared and accompanied by priests (from the Seminary and the parish) and by a married couple or family identified for this purpose.*

[04] *In Spain, in a context strongly affected by secularisation, a Diocese organises an annual retreat for 50 young people – 25 seminarians and 25 youth ministry leaders, both male and female. Together with the Bishop and a team of educators, they spend a week of formation and vacation. It's an experience which promises to bear significant fruit for the current and future pastoral care of the Diocese.*

[05] *In Taiwan, in order to ensure a real experience of commitment to the community and at the same time to foster greater linguistic comprehension and cultural adaptation in the seminarians, those who have completed their philosophical studies spend a year of internship outside the Seminary*

and outside the country. Leaving their usual environment, they learn to relate to people from other cultures and acquire knowledge of foreign languages, thus developing their potential for future pastoral service. Similar experiences also take place in other countries.

2. Formation of candidates for the priesthood in a participatory and synodal style

2.1 Communitarian and synodal life and spirituality

[06] *A Seminary in the Philippines has developed a formation model inspired by synodality. Formation is conceived as a collaborative process, in which the team of formators works in an integrated and co-responsible way, recognising the interconnection of all the dimensions of formation. Seminarians are involved in leadership roles at different levels of community life, in an atmosphere of fraternity and teamwork that rejects any form of superiority or acquired privilege. Pastoral formation focuses on Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), which increasingly characterise the life of the Church in the Philippines, both through the placement of seminarians in parishes where these communities are present, and through the structuring of life in the Seminary as a “communion of communities”. Missionary outreach is also encouraged, especially among the poor, in contact with indigenous peoples and in geographical and existential peripheries, under the supervision of local Bishops.*

[07] *In a Diocese in Colombia, the Seminary is composed of small houses arranged around a central complex, with a Chapel (as a sign of the living presence of Jesus among all), classrooms, a library and a refectory. Each small household is composed of a priest and a small group of seminarians who share a life of prayer, moments of communion, sports and cleaning activities, and some meals, when they are not all together in the refectory.*

In other Seminaries, large buildings have been adapted so that each small community of seminarians can live with their formator in a separate dwelling but under the same roof and with shared common spaces.

[08] *The Spirituality Centre of one of the Pontifical Universities in Rome offers courses in spiritual exercises based on the Ignatian Exercises and Conversation in the Spirit, for Dioceses, congregations and religious orders. The experience of praying in the context of synodality changes the vision of many priests, seminarians and consecrated persons regarding the synodal journey undertaken by the Catholic Church.*

[09] *As part of their human formation in a large Seminary in Nigeria, seminarians carry out manual labour and maintenance work on the building complex as extracurricular activities. The Seminary does not employ cleaning staff. In this way, seminarians experience the dignity of human labour. Under the guidance of their formators, they learn to work as electricians, plumbers, farmers, carpenters, information and communication technology operators, nurses, barbers, tailors, bookshop and canteen managers, journalists, athletes in various sports, actors in theatre groups, artists, musicians, organists, etc.*

2.2 Essential contents of a theoretical-practical curriculum aimed at missionary synodality

[10] *In Ghana, Africa, several Seminaries which work together organised a week-long workshop on “Synodality and Conversation in the Spirit in the Pastoral Context” prior to ordination to the*

priesthood for their students and for their formators. The seminarians were thus able to undertake a communal discernment in view of their future pastoral and missionary commitment in their Dioceses.

[11] *In Mexico, several Seminaries have supplemented their curriculum with subjects such as “The Ministry of the Pastor in a Synodal Perspective”, “Ecclesiology and Synodality” and “Missiology”, etc.*

In various Latin American Seminaries, a solidarity and community-based economy has been established, governed by a specific statute that ensures accountability and transparency, so that seminarians gain full awareness of how to administer material goods. This is complemented by a course in Parish Administration, helping them to learn how to manage Church property.

Training on the prevention of abuse is also provided, through a special educational programme designed to address and evaluate personal attitudes in this regard, and courses on “safe environments” are offered in response to the need to create communities based on healthy human relationships.

[12] *In Liberia and the sub-region of West Africa, where women and girls have historically suffered marginalisation, discrimination and gender-based violence, the formation programme for priests emphasises cultural reorientation through courses such as Cultural Anthropology and Social Structure (Sociology). This training seeks to foster in future priests a more inclusive attitude towards women, promoting their greater participation in teaching and preaching, as well as the assumption of roles of responsibility and leadership by women in the Church.*

2.3 The formation team and the synodal leadership of initial formation

[13] *In the United States, diocesan priests also study at an institute for the formation of religious. Participants prepare to become directors of formation in their congregations or in diocesan Seminaries. The program consists of a semester in a hybrid format (part in person and part online) that provides formators with the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral knowledge necessary to form candidates for leadership, religious life and ordained ministry.*

[14] *Synodality and the integral formation of priests are topics of the courses offered by CELAM (Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council) for the formation of formators, both in person and online.*

In addition, several Episcopal Conferences in Latin America, such as that of Brazil, through the Organisation of Seminaries and Institutes of Brazil (OSIB), devote particular attention to the formation of Seminary formation teams.

[15] *In their plenary assembly in October 2021, the Bishops of France called for at least one woman to be included on the council of every Seminary and house of formation, with voting rights. Almost all French Seminaries have now implemented this recommendation. For example, in one Seminary, alongside six priests, the formation team includes, as an integral part, a couple who have been married for 39 years and have six children. She is a marriage counsellor and he is now retired. They live in the Seminary, as do the priests and seminarians.*

In other European countries (the United Kingdom, Belgium, etc.) and in other places, such as Panama, Canada, the United States and Australia, there are Seminaries that have been involving women at various levels of the formation process, including in the formation team, for many years now, with good results.

[16] *In the context of ongoing formation, during their annual conference, a Bishop in Korea invited all the priests to gather for Conversation in the Spirit. Many priests were reluctant to accept this proposal and only agreed because they were asked to do so. After experiencing Conversation in the Spirit, the priests expressed their appreciation for this method and said they could not wait to return and continue the practice.*

[17] *In a Diocese in Chile, as in other parts of the world, ongoing formation includes specific accompaniment of young clergy through monthly meetings with the Bishop. Characterised by dialogue, listening, the sharing of experiences, as well as in-depth study of formative topics and moments of fellowship, these meetings foster priestly fraternity and fraternal correction.*

3. Differentiated co-responsibility for discernment and formation

[18] *In a Seminary in Australia, the curriculum requires seminarians, living in small houses on the university campus, to study together with young lay university students how “to be integral servant leaders, centred on Christ and guided by the Spirit”. The Seminary’s formation team includes the rector, two other priests, a deacon, two women – one lay and one religious – and a lay man.*

[19] *In a regional Seminary in the Philippines, the processes of community discernment are supported by weekly sharing sessions and periodic evaluations of the seminarians, with input from their companions and formators. This promotes a sense of mutual responsibility, active listening and empathy. Seminarians are also involved through the Student Council, which encourages co-responsibility and leadership, while pastoral experiences in family, parish and in the peripheries educate them in concrete listening to the people of God. The emphasis on spiritual discernment, also through retreats such as the 30-day Ignatian retreat, makes the formation community a laboratory of synodality, oriented towards communion and mission.*

[20] *In a Seminary in India, synodality is also practiced in the processes of developing rules, such as for the use of the Internet in the Seminary. Instead of imposing rules in a top-down manner, formators engage seminarians in an open dialogue, inviting them to share their thoughts on the benefits and challenges of certain rules. This exercise in collective reflection and discernment leads to norms that are not only functional but also internalised, strengthening a sense of co-responsibility. This is complemented by workshops on discernment and listening, which help the seminarians to develop a greater sensitivity to the movements of the Spirit and to mature a collaborative style of ministry that values the wisdom of the People of God.*

[21] *The Vocational Centre of a large Diocese in Mexico has set itself the goal of praying for, encouraging, promoting and discerning, in the light of the Gospel and the Magisterium, the various vocations to holiness among the People of God and, in particular, those who feel called to the ministerial priesthood. The Bishop entrusted this mission to a priest who coordinates a team that reflects the various vocations in the Church: lay people, married couples, priests, religious and consecrated persons. Professionals from various fields, such as psychology, social sciences and communication, also collaborate. The Centre organises programmes for different stages of life, offering personal conversations, retreats, moments of prayer, meetings and missions for adolescents and young people. Similar experiences are increasingly developing in various parts of the world.*

4. Formation for mission

[22] *A Spanish inter-diocesan Seminary has integrated contact with the poor into its formation programme. After two sessions of formation on the spirit and practice of “becoming a neighbour”, the seminarians, divided into groups and accompanied by a formator, prepare food and drinks, pray together, go out to distribute it to the poor and then meet again for dinner and to share their experience. Through this interaction of prayer and closeness to the poor, a spiritual and communal sense of service matures. The primary aim is not simply to provide food, but to share affection and words, listening and empathy, creating bonds of genuine fraternity that open hearts and strengthen vocations.*

[23] *There are various schools of homiletics, such as the Xavier School of Preaching at the Catholic University of Australia, which offers an intensive experience that, through contributions from preachers, practical exercises and teaching workshops focused on developing communication skills, prepares participants to proclaim the Gospel with clarity, conviction and creativity.*

[24] *A Seminary in Chile, in collaboration with the pastoral ministry of vocations, trains seminarians to have a missionary attitude, by sending them to meet young people where they are, and to develop creative ways to offer them retreats and other activities.*

[25] *Formation in Redemptoris Mater Seminaries includes, according to the practice of the Neocatechumenal Way, a two-year missionary experience in different Dioceses. The candidate lives in community with families and lay missionaries and accompanies the parish activity of the priest.*

The Neocatechumenal Way also organises experiences of missio ad gentes. During the two-year missionary period, the candidate is sent to different Dioceses (for example, from Canada to the Ivory Coast) where, working closely with priests, families and lay people, he can deepen the synodal dimension of ministry and learn how to cooperate in pastoral care with a spirit of service.

[26] *For mission in the digital world, CELAM, together with the Dicastery for Communication, has promoted a diploma in the “Challenges of the Digital Mission” for Latin America, which is also attended by seminarians.*

In addition, a religious congregation of Latin American origin has made digital culture (digital media and platforms, creation of digital content, etc.) an integral part of priestly formation, combining theory and practice to prepare seminarians, accompanied by their formators, to proclaim the Gospel in digital environments.

COROLLARY

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING PROCESS

To enable local Churches to begin implementing the synodal proposals outlined in this Guiding Document as soon as possible, the following lines of action are proposed for a three-year period.

1. PHASE 1

Launch of the Guiding Document and start of the process

Under the supervision of the Dicastery for the Clergy,³⁸ *each Episcopal Conference*, through its Episcopal Commission for the Clergy, will establish a *Working Group to accompany the synodal review* of priestly formation.

The Group's remit is as follows:

- to develop a *plan for the dissemination of this Guiding Document* and for reflection on its innovative elements and subsequently supervise the implementation of this plan;
- to ensure that each Bishop *identifies a contact person in the Diocese to promote and support* the concrete pathways for implementing the synodal elements in the respective Seminaries;
- within six months of receiving this Document, to draw up a *report on its dissemination, which includes contributions, circumstances and feedback regarding this first phase*, from priests, Diocesan Councils and Seminaries.

Responsibility for developing and reporting on this dissemination and reflection plan rests with the Commission for the Clergy, who will send the report to the Dicastery for the Clergy,³⁹ to keep it informed about the progress of the process. If the dissemination proves incomplete or insufficient, and if the Dicastery or the Commission considers it appropriate, the dissemination plan may be modified or redrafted.

2. PHASE 2

Implementation in each Seminary and sharing within the Ecclesiastical Province

According to the provisions established by each Bishop, the person responsible for implementing this Document will:

- during the second half of the first year, prepare, in a synodal manner,⁴⁰ an operational plan for the implementation of the perspectives outlined in the *Preamble* of this Document and in the individual *Guidelines*, and subsequently coordinate their implementation;⁴¹

³⁸ Throughout the process, the specificities of the Seminaries that depend on the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, or on the Dicastery for Evangelization - Section for First Evangelization and the New Particular Churches, must be kept in mind and safeguarded.

³⁹ The Eastern Churches will send this report to the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches and a copy to the Dicastery for the Clergy. The new particular Churches will send it to the Dicastery for Evangelization - Section for First Evangelization and the New Particular Churches, and a copy to the Dicastery for the Clergy.

⁴⁰ The synodal manner is carried out under the supervision of the Bishop, with the team of formators from each Seminary and involving pastoral agents who, thanks to their different charisms, roles and skills, can contribute to the common discernment.

⁴¹ In this plan, concrete modalities for implementation, deadlines for review and persons in charge of supervising the implementation of the proposals will be established.

- ensure that this plan is shared with the diocesan participatory bodies and is harmonized with the overall life of the Diocese.

If in a Diocese, formation to the priesthood is coordinated or carried out together with other entities (inter-diocesan Seminaries or because of the presence of several Seminaries in the same Diocese), this operational plan must be prepared and implemented jointly.

Once drafted, the plan will be shared with *the other Dioceses of the same Ecclesiastical Province*, in order to harmonize the implementation efforts, journey together and help one another.

The second and third years will be dedicated to the actual implementation of this plan in the various Seminaries.

During this phase, the Working Group of the Episcopal Commission for the Clergy will exercise a monitoring role and, at the end of the second year, will send an interim report to the Dicastery for the Clergy.⁴²

3. PHASE 3

Evaluation and reporting

At the end of the third year, *the Commission for the Clergy of each Episcopal Conference will produce a report on the three-year period* gathering contributions from all those involved in the preparation and implementation of the process.

To this end, the Working Group of the Episcopal Commission for the Clergy will:

- prepare, in a timely fashion, a resource for reflection on the results achieved and the difficulties encountered and send it to the diocesan coordinators who will share it with the individual Seminaries;
- collect the responses to this evaluation;
- based on the findings, prepare a comprehensive *report that summarizes results achieved, main difficulties, feedback and experiences gathered*.

These reports will be sent by the Commission for the Clergy of each Episcopal Conference to the Dicastery for the Clergy,⁴³ which will prepare a summary report to be presented to the Holy Father.

Based on what emerges from this review at all levels, *further operational indications* can be provided for a second three-year period.

⁴² See note 47.

⁴³ See note 47.