

## 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. 5 ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE AND LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

[Original text: Italian. Working translation]

The *Final Report* of Group 5 is divided into three parts.

The first part recounts the history of Group 5 of the Synod on Synodality and outlines the historical and methodological steps that were involved in preparing the *Final Report*.

The second part offers a detailed synthesis of the themes that emerged from the synodal reflection. It consists of five sections: *Honoring a Promise; Fundamental Issues, Part I: The Relational Nature of the Human Being; Fundamental Issues, Part II: Potestas; Fundamental Issues, Part III: Ministries; Focal Point: The Charismatic Dimension of the Role of Women in the Church*.

In this brief summary of the *Final Report*, it is appropriate to highlight two themes that were developed in particular in that second part.

The first theme regards the fact that reflection on the participation of women in the Church must include a consideration of the masculine and the feminine together, as partakers of the same mission within an ecclesiological context of communion. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on a reformulation of the areas of competence of the ordained ministry. Indeed, “the configuration of the priest to Christ the head – namely, as the principal source of grace – does not imply an exaltation which would set him above others” (FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 104). Rather, “when the priest is said to be a sign of ‘Christ the head,’ this refers principally to the fact that Christ is the source of all grace: he is the head of the Church because ‘he has the power of pouring out grace upon all the members of the Church’” (FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, par. 87; citing THOMAS AQUINAS, *S. Th.*, III, q, 8, a. 1, *resp.*). For this reason, it is good to recall that, as Pope Saint John Paul II reiterated, “although the Church possesses a ‘hierarchical’ structure, nevertheless this structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ’s members” (Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, par. 27). This principle is of fundamental importance for understanding the nature of the authority held by the ecclesial hierarchy, since “its key and axis is not power understood as domination, but the power to administer the sacrament of the Eucharist; this is the origin of its authority, which is always a service to God’s people” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 104). It is clear that these magisterial statements have concrete consequences for the life of the Church. Redefining these areas of competence could open the way to recognize new spaces of responsibility for women in the

Church. In this context, it also opens the possibility of new ministries—including those for the leadership of communities—to laywomen and laymen, and to female and male religious.

The second theme concerns the rediscovery of the charismatic dimension of the role of women in the Church. Indeed, along with the recognized ministries there are those that are “not instituted by ritual but are exercised with stability” (*Final Document of Synod 2023-2024*, no. 76). Pope Saint John Paul II already recognized this fact when he affirmed that “together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs” (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, par. 46). These non-ritually instituted roles of service respond to a real need of the People of God and do not represent the mere fulfillment of personal desire on the part of the minister. They are enriched by charisms that are sown by the Spirit, who is always the Giver of all the gifts that are needed for the good of the ecclesial body. It should be recalled that wherever there is a need for evangelization, the Spirit has already bestowed a charism upon someone to respond to it. Remaining solely within the framework of formally instituted ministries—when it comes to women’s participation in the leadership of the Church—confines and impoverishes us, for this ministerial path may involve only certain women who possess those characteristics, abilities, and styles that are more closely associated with one form of being and acting. Indeed, ministries are certainly a great good, but they do not resolve the need to promote the possible fruitfulness of all women for the life of the Church. Charisms, in contrast, have a broader, more widespread presence, enabling those who possess them to reach places that the usual structures cannot access. Such charisms are not subjective or marginal realities but objective gifts in the face of so many urgent needs of people that are not exhausted by the structural avenues of the Church.

The third part of the *Final Report* includes several appendices that examine, in greater depth, the theological, pastoral, and canonical issues addressed in the second part. In these appendices, one can also find various proposals and information that were submitted to Group 5. The appendices are as follows:

APPENDIX I

Women in the Old and New Testaments

APPENDIX II

Significant Women in the History of the Church

APPENDIX III

Current Testimonies of Women Participating in the Leadership of the Church

APPENDIX IV

The Marian Principle and the Petrine Principle

APPENDIX V

Ecclesial *Postestas*

APPENDIX VI

The Contribution of Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV on the Role of Women in the Life and Leadership of the Church