

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. 7
SOME ASPECTS OF THE PERSON
AND MINISTRY OF THE BISHOP
(CRITERIA FOR SELECTING CANDIDATES
TO EPISCOPACY, JUDICIAL FUNCTION OF THE BISHOPS,
NATURE AND COURSE OF *AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM* VISITS)
FROM A MISSIONARY SYNODAL PERSPECTIVE.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
OF THE 2ND PART ON
***AD LIMINA* VISITS IN A MISSIONARY SYNODAL PERSPECTIVE**

[Original text: Italian. Working translation]

The report of Study Group 7 seeks to provide a framework, from a synodal and missionary perspective, for a renewed understanding and a procedural revision of the *ad limina* visits, in keeping with Pope Francis' Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*.

The *ad limina* visit is an opportunity for the particular Churches to perceive themselves as journeying along a synodal path. Taking into account the 2021–2024 Synodal Process, the Group expresses the conviction that the *ad limina* visit should not concern itself exclusively with matters pertaining to the internal administration of the local Church, but should also support the mission that the Christian community is called to carry out in the world, becoming an instrument at the service of the missionary conversion of ordinary pastoral ministry.

The proposals situate the *ad limina* visit within the framework of the ordinary dialogue between the local Churches and the Apostolic See, and of the accompaniment that the latter offers to the local Churches by virtue of the universal solicitude of the Church of Rome. The visit forms part of a continuous process in which, under the guidance of their Bishops, the local Churches reflect upon their mission, engage with the Churches of their own territory, enter into dialogue with the Apostolic See, and receive from it renewed impetus for their pastoral activity. Consequently, it is necessary to pay attention not only to the celebration of the *ad limina* visit in Rome, but also to its preparation and its implementation within the local Churches.

The response to the call of the Holy Spirit to synodality for mission must be reflected first and foremost in the preparation of the *ad limina* visit, taking as both the starting point and the perspective for evaluation the conversion achieved in diocesan structures, decision-making processes, and the

relationships among the various ecclesial subjects, with a view to the fruitfulness of the mission. To this end, it will be necessary for the Bishop to convoke his People so that they may undertake, in a spirit of shared responsibility, the preparation of the *Relatio Praevia* through a process of ecclesial discernment, nourished by prayer and participation, in accordance with the different charisms, missions, and ministries. The results of the diocesan processes will be presented to the assembly of the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province or of the Episcopal Conference. The Bishops will evaluate collegially the state of their Dioceses, with the aim of strengthening pastoral collaboration and shared planning, so as to prepare together for the *ad limina* visit and to offer the Pope and his Collaborators an overview of the strengths and needs of their territory that is, as far as possible, the fruit of common discernment.

With regard to the stay in Rome, priority is to be given to the spiritual dimension. Furthermore, in order that the dialogue with the Bishop of Rome and the heads of the Curial Institutions may be authentic and fruitful, it is recommended that the Bishops be divided into smaller groups and that the *ad limina* visit take place over a suitably extended period. The dialogue, understood as an "exchange of gifts" and conducted in a collegial style, should be frank, cordial, and not one-directional, capable of bringing to light both the strengths and the needs of the local Churches and of fostering the exchange of good practices. It is also desirable that a diocesan delegation accompany the Bishop during the *ad limina* visit, in whatever manner may seem most appropriate, giving preference to those who collaborated in its local preparation.

Following the visit, the Curial Institutions will ensure that a report on the *ad limina* visit is transmitted to the Episcopal Conferences and the Eastern Hierarchical Structures. Each diocesan Bishop, together with any of the faithful who may have accompanied him to Rome, will in turn ensure that the local Church is informed of the results of the *ad limina* visit. Subsequently, it will fall to the participatory bodies of the local Church and to the competent diocesan offices to discern the steps to be taken in order to follow up on the visit. Where the *ad limina* visit has brought to light questions on which it is necessary to continue the dialogue between the local Churches and the Roman bodies, online meetings or even on-site visits by representatives of the Roman Curia may be organized. Periodically, an independent ecclesiastical commission will be established to evaluate the entire process.