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**◇ Synod23 - Summary Report of the First Session of the Sixteenth  
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29, 2023)**

We publish below the text of the Summary Report of the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops "A Synodal Church in Mission."

**Summary Report**

## **XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

**First Session**

**(October 4-29,  
2023)**

***Summary Report***

**A SYNODAL CHURCH IN MISSION**

**October 28, 2023**

**(12:00 pm )**

**SUMMARY**

**A SYNODAL CHURCH IN MISSION**

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**TO CONTINUE THE JOURNEY**

**INTRODUCTION**

Dear sisters, dear brothers,

"we have all been baptized through one Spirit into one body" (*1 Cor. 12:13*). This is the experience, filled with joy and gratitude, that we had in this First Session of the Synodal Assembly, held October 4-28, 2023, on the theme "For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission." By the common grace of Baptism, we have been able to live together with one heart and one soul, despite the diversity of backgrounds, languages and cultures. Like a choir, we tried to sing in the variety of voices and unity of souls. The Holy Spirit gave us to experience the harmony that He alone can generate: it is a gift and a witness in a torn and divided world.

Our Assembly took place while old and new wars rage in the world, with the absurd drama of countless victims. The cry of the poor, those forced to migrate, those suffering violence or suffering the devastating consequences of climate change resonated among us, not only through the media, but also from the voices of many, personally

involved with their families and peoples in these tragic events. We have all, at all times, carried in our hearts and prayers, wondering how our Churches can foster paths of reconciliation, hope, justice and peace.

Our meeting took place in Rome, around the successor of Peter, who confirmed us in our faith and urged us to be bold in our mission. It was a grace to begin the journey of these days with an ecumenical vigil, in which we saw praying together with the Pope, at the tomb of Peter, the leaders and representatives of the other Christian denominations: unity ferments silently within the Holy Church of God; we see it with our own eyes and full of joy we testify to it. "How good and how sweet it is that brothers live together!" (Ps. 133:1).

At the behest of the Holy Father, the Assembly saw other members of the People of God gathered together and around the bishops. The bishops, united among themselves and with the Bishop of Rome, made manifest the Church as a communion of Churches. Laymen and laywomen, consecrated men and women, deacons and presbyters were, with the bishops, witnesses of a process intended to involve the whole Church and everyone in the Church. They recalled that the Assembly is not an isolated event, but an integral part and necessary step in the synodal process. In the multiplicity of interventions and in the plurality of positions, the experience of a Church that is learning the style of synodality and seeking the most suitable forms to realize it resonated.

It has been more than two years since we began the journey leading up to this Session. After the opening of the synodal process on October 9, 2021, all the Churches, albeit at different paces, have engaged in a listening process that has seen diocesan, national and continental stages, the results of which have flowed into their respective documents. This Session opened the phase in which the whole Church receives the fruits of this consultation in order to discern, in prayer and dialogue, the paths the Spirit is asking us to take. This phase will last until October 2024, when the Second Session of the Assembly will complete its work, offering it to the Holy Father.

The entire journey, rooted in the Tradition of the Church, is taking place in the light of the conciliar magisterium. The Second Vatican Council was, in fact, like a seed sown in the field of the world and the Church. The daily lives of believers, the experience of the Churches in every people and culture, the many testimonies of holiness, and the reflection of theologians were the soil in which it germinated and grew. Synod 2021-2024 continues to draw on the energy of that seed and develop its potential. Indeed, the synodal journey is implementing what the Council taught about the Church as Mystery and People of God, called to holiness. It values the contribution of all the baptized, in the variety of their vocations, to a better understanding and practice of the Gospel. In this sense it constitutes a true act of further reception of the Council, prolonging its inspiration and relaunching for today's world its prophetic force.

After a month of work, now the Lord is calling us to return to our Churches to transmit to all of you the fruits of our work and to continue the journey together. Here in Rome we were only a few, but the meaning of the synodal path called by the Holy Father is to involve all the baptized. We long for this to happen and want to commit ourselves to making it possible. In this *Synthesis Report* we have collected the main elements that emerged in the dialogue, prayer and discussion that characterized these days. Our personal narratives will enrich this synthesis with the tone of lived experience, which no page can restore. We will thus be able to testify how rich the moments of silence and listening, of sharing and prayer, were. We will also share that it is not easy to listen to different ideas without immediately giving in to the temptation to retort; to offer one's contribution as a gift for others and not as an absolute certainty. However, the Lord's grace has led us to

doing it, despite our limitations, and this was a real experience of synodality for us. By practicing it, we understood it better and grasped its value.

Indeed, we understood that walking together as baptized people, in the diversity of charisms, vocations, and ministries, is important not only for our communities but also for the world. Indeed, evangelical fraternity is like a lamp, which should not be placed under a bushel, but on the candelabra so that it may shed light on the whole house (cf. *Mt.* 5:15). The world needs this witness today more than ever. As disciples of Jesus, we cannot shirk the task of showing and transmitting to a wounded humanity the love and tenderness of God.

The work of this Session was carried out following the outline offered by the *Instrumentum laboris*, which invited us to reflect on the characteristic signs of a synodal Church and the dynamics of communion, mission and participation that inhabit it. Discussion on the proposed questions confirmed the goodness of the overall layout of the outline. We were able to enter into the merits of the questions, identify the themes in need of in-depth study, and put forward an initial nucleus of proposals. In light of the progress made, the *Synthesis Report* does not reiterate or reiterate all the contents of the *Instrumentum laboris*, but relaunches those considered priorities. It is in no way a final document, but a tool at the service of the discernment that will still have to continue.

The text is structured in three parts. The first outlines "*The Face of the Synodal Church*," presenting the theological principles that illuminate and ground synodality. Here the style of synodality appears as a way of acting and operating in faith that stems from contemplation of the Trinity and values unity and variety as ecclesial richness. The second part, entitled "*All Disciples, All Missionaries*," deals with all those involved in the life and mission of the Church and their relationships. In this part, synodality is mainly presented as a joint journey of the People of God and as a fruitful dialogue of charisms and ministries at the service of the coming of the Kingdom. The third part bears the title "*Weaving Ties, Building Community*." Here synodality appears mainly as a set of processes and a network of bodies that enable exchange among the Churches and dialogue with the world.

In each of the three parts, each chapter brings together *convergences*, *issues to be addressed*, and *proposals* that emerged from the dialogue. The *convergences* identify the fixed points to which reflection can look: they are like a map that allows us to orient ourselves on the path and not lose our way. The *questions to be addressed* collect the points on which we have recognized that it is necessary to continue theological, pastoral, canonical deepening: they are like crossroads on which we need to pause, to better understand the direction to take. The *proposals*, on the other hand, point to possible paths to take: some are suggested, some recommended, and some demanded with more strength and determination.

In the coming months, the Bishops' Conferences and Hierarchical Structures of the Eastern Catholic Churches, acting as a liaison between the local Churches and the General Secretariat of the Synod, will play an important role in the development of the reflection. Starting from the convergences reached, they are called to focus on the most relevant and urgent issues and proposals, encouraging their theological and pastoral deepening and pointing out their canonical implications.

We carry in our hearts the desire, sustained by hope, that the climate of mutual listening and sincere dialogue that we experienced during the days of working together in Rome will radiate in our communities and throughout the world, at the service of the growth of the good seed of the Kingdom of God.

## **PART I - THE FACE OF THE SYNODICAL CHURCH**

## 1. Synodality: experience and understanding

### Convergences

- a) We have accepted the invitation to recognize with new awareness the synodal dimension of the Church. Synodal practices are attested in the New Testament and in the early Church. Later they took particular historical forms in the different Christian Churches and traditions. The Second Vatican Council "updated" them and Pope Francis encourages the Church to renew them again. The Synod 2021-2024 is also part of this process. Through it, the Holy People of God have discovered that a synodal way of praying, listening and speaking, rooted in the Word of God and woven into moments of encounter in joy, and sometimes even fatigue, leads to a deeper awareness that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. An invaluable fruit is the heightened awareness of our identity as God's faithful People, within whom each is the bearer of a dignity derived from Baptism and called to co-responsibility for the common mission of evangelization.
- b) This process has renewed our experience and desire for a Church that is God's home and family. It is precisely to this experience and desire for a Church that is closer to people, less bureaucratic and more relational that the terms "synodality" and "synodal" have been associated, offering an initial understanding that needs to encounter better clarification. It is the Church that young people had declared they wanted back in 2018, on the occasion of the Synod dedicated to them.
- c) The very manner in which the Assembly was held, beginning with the arrangement of people seated in small groups around round tables in the Paul VI Hall, comparable to the biblical image of the wedding banquet (*Rev. 19:9*), is emblematic of a synodal Church and an image of the Eucharist, the source and summit of synodality, with the Word of God at its center. Within it, different cultures, languages, rites, ways of thinking and realities can engage together and fruitfully in a sincere search under the guidance of the Spirit.
- d) In our midst were sisters and brothers from peoples who were victims of war, martyrdom, persecution and hunger. The plight of these peoples, for whom it was often impossible to participate in the synod process, entered our exchanges and our prayers, nourishing our sense of communion with them and our determination to be peacemakers.
- e) The Assembly frequently spoke of hope, healing, reconciliation and restoration of trust among the many gifts the Spirit has poured out on the Church during this synod process. The openness to listen and accompany everyone, including those who have suffered abuse and hurt in the Church, has made visible many who have long felt invisible. We still have a long way to go toward reconciliation and justice, which requires addressing the structural conditions that enabled such abuse and making concrete gestures of penance.
- f) We know that "synodality" is a term unfamiliar to many members of the People of God, causing some people confusion and concern. Among the fears is that the teaching of the Church will be changed, moving away from the apostolic faith of our fathers and betraying the expectations of those who even today hunger and thirst for God. However, we are convinced that synodality is an expression of the dynamism of the living Tradition.
- g) Without underestimating the value of representative democracy, Pope Francis responds to the concern of some that the Synod may become a body of majority deliberation devoid of its ecclesial and spiritual character, jeopardizing the nature

hierarchy of the Church. Some fear that they will be forced to change; others fear that nothing will change and that there will be too little courage to move in the rhythm of the living Tradition. Some perplexity and opposition also hide the fear of losing power and the privileges that come with it. In any case, in all cultural contexts, the terms "synodal" and "synodality" indicate a way of being Church that articulates communion, mission and participation. An example of this is the Amazon Ecclesial Conference (CEAMA), the result of the missionary synodal process in that region.

- h) Synodality can be understood as the walk of Christians with Christ and toward the Kingdom, together with all humanity; mission-oriented, it involves coming together in assembly at the different levels of ecclesial life, listening to one another, dialogue, communal discernment, consensus-building as an expression of Christ's making himself present alive in the Spirit, and decision-making in differentiated co-responsibility.
- i) Through experience and encounter, we have grown together in this awareness. In summary, from the earliest days, the Assembly found itself shaped by two convictions: the first is that the experience we have shared over these years is authentically Christian and should be embraced in all its richness and depth; the second is that the terms "synodal" and "synodality" require more careful clarification of their levels of meaning in different cultures. Substantial agreement emerged that, with the necessary clarifications, the synodal perspective represents the future of the Church.

### **Issues to be addressed**

- j) Building on the reflective work already done, there is a need to clarify the meaning of synodality at different levels, from pastoral use to theological and canonical use, warding off the risk of it sounding too vague or generic, or appearing as a passing fad. Likewise, it is deemed necessary to clarify the relationship between synodality and communion, as well as that between synodality and collegiality.
- k) A desire emerged to enhance the differences in the practice and understanding of synodality between the traditions of the Christian East and the Latin tradition, including in the ongoing synodical process, by fostering encounters between them.
- l) In particular, the many expressions of synodal life in cultural contexts where people are used to walking together as a community should be brought out. Along these lines, it can be said that synodal practice is part of the Church's prophetic response to an individualism that folds in on itself, a populism that divides, and a globalization that homogenizes and flattens. It does not solve these problems, but it provides an alternative way of being and acting that is full of hope, integrates a plurality of perspectives, and needs to be further explored and illuminated.

### **Proposals**

- m) The richness and depth of the lived experience lead one to indicate as a priority the enlargement of the number of people involved in synodal journeys, overcoming the obstacles to participation that have emerged so far, as well as the sense of mistrust and fears that some have.
- n) Ways need to be developed for a more active involvement of deacons, presbyters and bishops in the synod process during the coming year. A synodal Church cannot do without their voices, experiences and contributions. We need to understand the reasons for resistance to synodality on the part of some of them.

- o) Finally, the need for synod culture to become more intergenerational emerged strongly, with spaces for young people to speak freely with their families, peers and pastors, including through digital channels.
- p) It is proposed that the theological work of deepening the terminological and conceptual understanding of the notion and practice of synodality prior to the Second Session of the Assembly be promoted in an appropriate forum, taking advantage of the rich heritage of studies since the Second Vatican Council and, in particular, the documents of the International Theological Commission on *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2018) and *The Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church* (2014).
- q) The canonical implications of the synodality perspective require similar clarification. In this regard, the establishment of a special intercontinental commission of theologians and canonists is proposed in view of the Second Session of the Assembly.
- r) It seems the time has come for a revision of the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. A preliminary study should therefore be initiated.

## 2. Gathered and sent by the Trinity

### Convergences

- a) As the Second Vatican Council recalls, the Church is "a people brought together by virtue of the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (LG 4). The Father, through the sending of the Son and the gift of the Spirit, involves us in a dynamism of communion and mission that moves us from the "I" to the "we" and places us at the service of the world. Synodality translates into spiritual attitudes and ecclesial processes the Trinitarian dynamic by which God comes to meet humanity. For this to happen, it is necessary for all the baptized to commit themselves to the reciprocal exercise of their vocation, charism and ministry. Only in this way can the Church truly become a "conversation" within herself and with the world (cf. *Ecclesiam suam* 67), walking side by side with every human being in the style of Jesus.
- b) From its origins, the Church's synodal journey is oriented toward the Kingdom, which will be fully accomplished when God is all in all. The witness of ecclesial fraternity and missionary dedication to the service of the least will never measure up to the Mystery of which they are also a sign and instrument. The Church does not reflect on its synodal configuration in order to place itself at the center of proclamation, but in order to best fulfill, even in its constitutive incompleteness, its service to the coming of the Kingdom.
- c) The renewal of the Christian community is only possible by recognizing the primacy of grace. If spiritual depth is lacking, synodality remains a cosmetic renewal. What we are called to, however, is not only to translate into community processes a spiritual experience gained elsewhere, but more deeply to experience how fraternal relationships are the place and form of an authentic encounter with God. In this sense, the synodal perspective, while drawing on the rich spiritual heritage of Tradition, contributes to renewing its forms: a prayer open to participation, a discernment lived together, a missionary energy that arises from sharing and radiates as service.
- d) Conversation in the Spirit is a tool that, even with its limitations, is fruitful in enabling authentic listening and discerning what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Its practice has elicited joy, awe, and gratitude and has been experienced as a path of renewal that transforms individuals, groups, and the Church. The word "conversation"

expresses more than just dialogue: it harmoniously interweaves thought and feeling and generates a shared life-world. This is why conversion can be said to be at stake in conversation. It is an anthropological datum found in different peoples and cultures, united by the practice of gathering together in solidarity to deal with and decide issues vital to the community. Grace brings this human experience to fruition: conversing "in the Spirit" means living the experience of sharing in the light of faith and seeking God's will, in an authentically evangelical atmosphere within which the Holy Spirit can make his unmistakable voice heard.

- e) Since synodality is ordered to mission, it is necessary for Christian communities to share fraternity with men and women of other religions, convictions and cultures, avoiding on the one hand the risk of self-referentiality and self-preservation and on the other hand the risk of loss of identity. The logic of dialogue, mutual learning and walking together must characterize the Gospel proclamation and service to the poor, care for the common home and theological research, becoming the pastoral style of the Church.

### Issues to be addressed

- f) In order to realize a true listening to the Father's will, it seems necessary to deepen the criteria of ecclesial discernment from a theological point of view, so that the reference to the freedom and newness of the Spirit is appropriately coordinated with the event of Jesus Christ that happened "once and for all" (*Heb 10:10*). This requires first of all clarifying the relationship between listening to the Word of God attested in Scripture, the reception of Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church, and the prophetic reading of the signs of the times.
- g) To this end, it is crucial to promote anthropological and spiritual visions capable of integrating and not juxtaposing the intellectual and emotional dimensions of faith experience, overcoming all reductionism and dualism between reason and feeling.
- h) It is important to clarify how the conversation in the Spirit can integrate the contributions of theological thought and the humanities and social sciences, even in light of other models of ecclesial discernment that are carried out following the "see, judge, act" scan or articulating the steps of "recognize, interpret, choose."
- i) The contribution that *lectio divina* and different spiritual traditions, ancient and recent, can offer to the practice of discernment should be developed. Indeed, it is appropriate to value the plurality of forms and styles, methods and criteria that the Holy Spirit has suggested over the centuries and that are part of the spiritual heritage of the Church.

### Proposals

- j) It is proposed to experiment with and adapt conversation in the Spirit and other forms of discernment in the life of churches, valuing according to cultures and contexts the richness of different spiritual traditions. Appropriate forms of accompaniment can facilitate this practice, helping to grasp its logic and overcome possible resistance.
- k) Let each local church equip itself with suitable and trained people to facilitate and accompany processes of ecclesial discernment.
- l) It is important that the practice of discernment be implemented in the pastoral setting as well, in a manner appropriate to the contexts, to illuminate the concreteness of ecclesial life. It will make it possible to better recognize the charisms present in the community, to wisely entrust tasks and



ministries, to design pastoral paths in the light of the Spirit, going beyond the mere planning of activities.

### 3. Entering a community of faith: Christian initiation

#### Convergences

- a) Christian initiation is the itinerary through which the Lord, through the ministry of the Church, introduces us to Easter faith and inserts us into Trinitarian and ecclesial communion. This itinerary knows a significant variety of forms depending on the age at which it is undertaken and the different emphases proper to Eastern and Western traditions. However, listening to the Word and life conversion, liturgical celebration and insertion into the community and its mission are always intertwined in it. Precisely for this reason, the catechumenal journey, with the gradualness of its stages and steps, is the paradigm of every ecclesial walk together.
- b) Initiation brings one into contact with a great variety of vocations and ecclesial ministries. In them is expressed the maternal face of a Church that teaches her children to walk by walking with them. She listens to them and, while responding to their doubts and questions, is enriched by the newness that each person brings with his or her history, language and culture. In the practice of this pastoral action the Christian community experiences, often without being fully aware of it, the first form of synodality.
- c) Before any distinction of charisms and ministries, "we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). Therefore, among all the baptized there is a genuine equality of dignity and a common responsibility for mission, according to each person's vocation. By the anointing of the Spirit, who "teaches all things" (1 John 2:27), all believers possess an instinct for the truth of the Gospel, called *sensus fidei*. It consists in a certain connaturality with divine realities and the aptitude to intuitively grasp what conforms to the truth of faith. Synodical processes enhance this gift and allow for the verification of the existence of that consensus of the faithful (*consensus fidelium*) which is a sure criterion for determining whether a particular doctrine or practice belongs to the apostolic faith.
- d) Confirmation somehow makes the grace of Pentecost perennial in the Church. It enriches the faithful with the abundance of the gifts of the Spirit and calls them to develop their specific vocation, rooted in their common baptismal dignity, in the service of mission. Its importance must be more emphasized and placed in relation to the variety of charisms and ministries that draw the synodal face of the Church.
- e) The celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sunday, is the first and fundamental form by which the Holy People of God gather and meet. Where it is not possible, the community, while desiring it, gathers around the celebration of the Word. In the Eucharist we celebrate a mystery of grace of which we are not the creators. By calling us to participate in his Body and Blood, the Lord makes us one body among ourselves and with him. Beginning with Paul's use of the term *koinonia* (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-17), the Christian tradition has treasured the word "communion" to denote at the same time full participation in the Eucharist and the nature of relationships among the faithful and between churches. While it opens us to the contemplation of the divine life, to the unfathomable depths of the Trinitarian mystery, this term refers us to the everydayness of our relationships: in the simplest gestures with which we

we open to one another really circulates the breath of the Spirit. This is why the communion celebrated in and flowing from the Eucharist configures and directs the paths of synodality.

- f) From the Eucharist we learn to articulate unity and diversity: unity of the Church and multiplicity of Christian communities; unity of the sacramental mystery and variety of liturgical traditions; unity of celebration and diversity of vocations, charisms and ministries. Nothing shows more than the Eucharist that the harmony created by the Spirit is not uniformity and that every ecclesial gift is intended for common edification.

### Issues to be addressed

- g) The sacrament of baptism cannot be understood in isolation, outside the logic of Christian initiation, nor can it be understood in an individualistic way. There is therefore a need to further explore the contribution to the understanding of synodality that can come from a more unified vision of Christian initiation.
- h) Maturation of the *sensus fidei* requires not only to have received Baptism, but also to have developed the grace of the sacrament into a life of authentic discipleship, which enables one to discern the action of the Spirit from what is an expression of dominant thinking, the result of cultural conditioning or in any case inconsistent with the Gospel. This is a topic that needs to be deepened with appropriate theological reflection.
- i) Reflection on synodality can offer renewal insights into the understanding of Confirmation, by which the grace of the Spirit articulates in the harmony of Pentecost the variety of gifts and charisms. In light of different ecclesial experiences, ways should be studied to make the preparation and celebration of this sacrament more fruitful, so as to awaken in all the faithful the call to community building, mission in the world and witness to the faith.
- j) From a pastoral theological perspective, it is important to continue research into how catechumenal logic can illuminate other pastoral paths, such as that of marriage preparation, or accompaniment to choices of professional and social commitment, or formation for ordained ministry itself, in which the whole ecclesial community must be involved.

### Proposals

- k) If the Eucharist shapes synodality, the first step is to honor its grace with a celebratory style that lives up to the gift and with authentic fraternity. Liturgy celebrated with authenticity is the first and fundamental school of discipleship and fraternity. Before any of our formation initiatives, we must allow ourselves to be formed by its powerful beauty and the noble simplicity of its gestures.
- l) A second step refers to the widely reported need to make liturgical language more accessible to the faithful and more embodied in the diversity of cultures. Without questioning continuity with tradition and the need for liturgical formation, reflection on this issue and the attribution of greater responsibility to the Bishops' Conferences, along the lines of the *motu proprio Magnum principium*, is urged.
- m) A third step is the pastoral commitment to enhance all forms of communal prayer, without limiting it to the celebration of the Mass alone. Other expressions of liturgical prayer, as well as practices of popular piety, in which the genius of the

local cultures, are elements of great importance in fostering the involvement of all the faithful, in gradually introducing them to the Christian mystery and in bringing those less familiar with the Church closer to an encounter with the Lord. Among the forms of popular piety, Marian devotion stands out in particular because of its ability to sustain and nourish the faith of many.

#### 4. The poor, protagonists of the Church's journey

##### Convergences

- a) From the Church, the poor ask for love. By love is meant respect, acceptance and recognition, without which providing food, money or social services represents a form of assistance that is certainly important, but which does not take full account of the dignity of the person. Respect and recognition are powerful tools for activating personal capacities, so that each person is the subject of his or her own growth path and not the object of the welfare action of others.
- b) The preferential option for the poor is implicit in Christological faith: Jesus, poor and humble, befriended the poor, walked with the poor, shared the table with the poor, and denounced the causes of poverty. For the Church, the option for the poor and the discarded is a theological category before cultural, sociological, political or philosophical. For St. John Paul II, God grants his mercy to them first. This divine preference has consequences in the lives of all Christians, who are called to nurture "the same sentiments as Christ Jesus" (*Phil.* 2:5).
- c) There is not just one kind of poverty. Among the many faces of the poor are those of all those who lack the necessities to lead a dignified life. Then there are those of migrants and refugees; indigenous, original and Afro-descendant peoples; those who suffer violence and abuse, particularly women; people with addictions; minorities who are systematically denied a voice; abandoned elderly; victims of racism, exploitation and trafficking, particularly minors; exploited workers; economically excluded and others living in the peripheries. The most vulnerable of the vulnerable, on whose behalf constant advocacy is needed, are babies in the womb and their mothers. The Assembly is aware of the cry of the "new poor," produced by the wars and terrorism that mar many countries on different continents, and condemns the corrupt political and economic systems that cause them.
- d) Alongside the many forms of material poverty, our world also knows those of spiritual poverty, understood as a lack of meaning in life. Excessive preoccupation with oneself can lead to seeing others as a threat and enclosing oneself in individualism. As has been noted, material poverty and spiritual poverty, when allied, can find answers to each other's needs. This is a way of walking together that makes concrete the perspective of the Synod Church that will reveal to us the fuller meaning of the Gospel beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (*Mt.* 5:3).
- e) Standing with the poor means engaging with them also in the care of our common home: the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are the same cry. The lack of response makes the ecological crisis and climate change in particular a threat to humanity's survival, as the apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum*, published by Pope Francis to coincide with the opening of the work of the Synodal Assembly, points out. The Churches in the countries most exposed to the consequences of climate change are keenly aware of the urgency of changing course, and this represents their contribution to the journey of the other Churches on the planet.

- f) The Church's commitment must get to the causes of poverty and exclusion. This includes action to protect the rights of the poor and excluded, and may require public denunciation of injustices, whether perpetrated by individuals, governments, corporations or societal structures. For this, listening to their demands and point of view is essential, so as to lend them a voice, using their words.
- g) Christians have a duty to commit themselves to actively participate in building the common good and defending the dignity of life, drawing inspiration from the Church's social doctrine and working in various forms (engagement in civil society organizations, trade unions, popular movements, grassroots associations, the field of politics, etc.). The Church expresses deep gratitude for their action. Communities support those who work in these fields in a genuine spirit of charity and service. Their action is part of the Church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel and collaborating in the coming of the Kingdom of God.
- h) In the poor, the Christian community encounters the face and flesh of Christ, who, from being the rich man he was, became poor for us, so that we might become rich through his poverty (cf. *2 Cor.* 8:9). It is called not only to become close to them, but to learn from them. If making synod means walking together with the One who is the way, a synodal Church needs to put the poor at the center of all aspects of its life: through their sufferings they have direct knowledge of the suffering Christ (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 198). The likeness of their lives to that of the Lord makes the poor heralds of a salvation received as a gift and witnesses to the joy of the Gospel.

### **Issues to be addressed**

- i) In some parts of the world, the Church is poor, with the poor and for the poor. There is a constant risk, to be carefully avoided, of viewing the poor in terms of "them" and "us," as "objects" of the Church's charity. Putting the poor at the center and learning from them is something the Church needs to do more and more.
- j) Prophetic denunciation of situations of injustice and lobbying policy makers, which requires recourse to forms of diplomacy, must be kept in dynamic tension so as not to lose lucidity and fruitfulness. In particular, care must be taken to ensure that the use of public or private funds by Church structures does not condition the freedom to speak up for the demands of the Gospel.
- k) Action in the fields of education, health care and social assistance, without any discrimination or exclusion of anyone, is a clear sign of a Church that promotes the integration and participation of the least among its members and in society. Organizations active in this field are urged to see themselves as expressions of the Christian community and to avoid an impersonal style of living charity. They are also urged to network and coordinate.
- l) The church must be honest in examining how it meets the demands of justice to those who work in its related institutions, in order to bear witness to its consistency with integrity.
- m) In a synodal Church, the sense of solidarity also plays out on the level of exchanging gifts and sharing resources between local churches from different regions. These are relationships that foster the unity of the Church by creating bonds between the Christian communities involved. We need to focus on the conditions to be ensured so that presbyters who come to the aid of clergy-poor Churches are not just a functional remedy, but a resource for the growth of the

Church that sends them and the one that receives them. Similarly, it is necessary to work to ensure that economic aid does not degenerate into welfarism, but promotes authentic evangelical solidarity and is managed in a transparent and reliable manner.

## Proposals

- n) The Church's social doctrine is a too little-known resource that needs to be invested in again. Let local churches commit themselves not only to make its contents better known, but to foster its appropriation through practices that put its inspiration into action.
- o) Let the experience of encountering, sharing life and serving the poor and marginalized become an integral part of all formation paths offered by Christian communities: it is a requirement of faith, not an optional extra. This is especially true for candidates for ordained ministry and consecrated life.
- p) As part of the rethinking of diaconal ministry, let it be promoted to be more strongly oriented toward service to the poor.
- q) Let the biblical and theological foundations of integral ecology be more explicitly and carefully integrated into the teaching, liturgy and practices of the Church.

## 5. A Church from "every tribe, tongue, people and nation"

### Convergences

- a) Christians live within specific cultures, bringing Christ within them in Word and Sacrament. By engaging in the service of charity, they welcome with humility and joy the mystery of Christ that already awaits them in every place and time. In this way they become a Church from "every tribe, tongue, people and nation" (*Rev. 5:9*).
- b) The cultural, historical and regional contexts in which the Church is present reveal different spiritual and material needs. This shapes the culture of the local churches, their missionary priorities, the concerns and gifts that each of them brings to the synodal dialogue, and the languages with which they express themselves. During the days of the Assembly we were able to experience directly, and mostly joyfully, the plurality of expressions of being Church.
- c) Churches live in increasingly multicultural and multireligious contexts, where engagement in dialogue between religion and culture together with the other groups that make up society is essential. Living the Church's mission in these contexts requires a style of presence, service and proclamation that seeks to build bridges, cultivate mutual understanding and engage in evangelization that accompanies, listens and learns. Several times in the Assembly the image of "taking off one's shoes" to go to the encounter with the other as equals resonated as a sign of humility and respect for a sacred space.
- d) Migratory movements are a reality that reshapes local churches as intercultural communities. Often migrants and refugees, many of whom bear the wounds of uprooting, war and violence, become a source of renewal and enrichment for the communities that welcome them and an opportunity to establish direct links with geographically distant Churches. In the face of increasingly hostile attitudes toward migrants, we are called to practice an open welcome, to accompany them in the construction of a new life project and to build a true intercultural communion among peoples. The

respect for the liturgical traditions and religious practices of migrants is an integral part of an authentic welcome.

- e) Missionaries have given their lives to bring the Good News to the whole world. Their efforts give eloquent testimony to the power of the Gospel. However, special attention and sensitivity are needed in contexts where "mission" is a word laden with a painful historical legacy that hinders fellowship today. In some places the proclamation of the Gospel has been associated with colonization and even genocide. Evangelizing in these contexts requires acknowledging mistakes made, learning a new sensitivity to these issues, and accompanying a generation seeking to forge Christian identities beyond colonialism. Respect and humility are fundamental attitudes to recognize that we complement each other and that encounters with different cultures can enrich the living and thinking of the faith of Christian communities.
- f) The Church teaches the need for and encourages the practice of interreligious dialogue as part of building communion among all peoples. In a world of violence and fragmentation, a witness to the unity of humanity, its common origin and common destiny, in a coordinated and fraternal solidarity toward social justice, peace, reconciliation and care for the common home seems ever more urgent. The Church is aware that the Spirit can speak through the voices of men and women of every religion, conviction and culture.

### **Issues to be addressed**

- g) It is necessary to cultivate sensitivity to the richness of the variety of expressions of being Church. This requires finding a dynamic balance between the dimension of the Church as a whole and its local rootedness, between respecting the bond of Church unity and the risk of homogenization that stifles variety. Meanings and priorities vary among different contexts, and this requires identifying and promoting forms of decentralization and intermediate instances.
- h) The Church is also affected by polarization and distrust in crucial areas, such as liturgical life and moral, social and theological reflection. We need to recognize their causes through dialogue and undertake courageous processes of communion revitalization and reconciliation to overcome them.
- i) In our local churches, we sometimes experience tensions between different ways of understanding evangelization, which focus on witness of life, commitment to human advancement, dialogue with faiths and cultures, and explicit proclamation of the Gospel. Equally, a tension emerges between the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ and valuing the characteristics of each culture in search of the Gospel traits (*semina Verbi*) it already contains.
- j) Possible confusion between the message of the gospel and the culture of the evangelist was mentioned as one of the issues to be explored.
- k) The spread of conflicts, with the trade and use of increasingly powerful weapons, opens up the question, raised in several groups, of more careful reflection and training in dealing with conflicts in a nonviolent way. This is a qualified contribution that Christians can make to today's world, including in dialogue and collaboration with other religions.

### **Proposals**

- l) Renewed attention is needed to the question of the languages we use to speak to the minds and hearts of people in a wide diversity of contexts in a way that is accessible and beautiful.
- m) In view of experimenting with forms of decentralization, a shared framework for their management and evaluation needs to be defined, identifying all the actors involved and their roles. For the sake of coherence, discernment processes regarding decentralization must take place in a synodal style, providing for the concurrence and contribution of all actors involved at different levels.
- n) New paradigms are needed for pastoral engagement with indigenous peoples, along the lines of a journey together and not an action done to them or for them. Their participation in decision-making processes at all levels can contribute to a more vibrant and missionary Church.
- o) From the work of the Assembly, there is a call for better knowledge of the teachings of Vatican II, the post-conciliar magisterium and the social doctrine of the Church. We need to know our different traditions better in order to be more clearly a Church of Churches in communion, effective in service and dialogue.
- p) In a world in which the number of migrants and refugees is increasing while the willingness to accept them is decreasing, and in which the foreigner is viewed with increasing suspicion, it is appropriate for the Church to engage decisively in education in the culture of dialogue and encounter, combating racism and xenophobia, particularly in pastoral formation programs. It is equally necessary to engage in projects for the integration of migrants.
- q) We recommend a renewed commitment to dialogue and discernment in the area of racial justice. Systems that create or maintain racial injustice within the church must be identified and combated. Healing and reconciliation processes should be initiated to eradicate the sin of racism, with the help of those affected by it.

## **6. Traditions of the Eastern Churches and the Latin Church.**

### **Convergences**

- a) Among the Eastern Churches, those in full communion with the Successor of Peter enjoy a liturgical, theological, ecclesiological and canonical distinctiveness that greatly enriches the whole Church. In particular, their experience of unity in diversity can make a valuable contribution to the understanding and practice of synodality.
- b) Throughout history, the level of autonomy granted to these Churches has gone through different phases and has also recorded behaviors that are now considered outdated, such as Latinization. In recent decades, the path of recognizing the specificity, distinction and autonomy of these Churches has developed considerably.
- c) The substantial migration of faithful from the Catholic East into Latin-majority territories raises important pastoral questions. If the current flow continues or increases, there may be more members of the Eastern Catholic Churches in diaspora than in canonical territories. For several reasons, the establishment of Eastern hierarchies in the countries of immigration is not sufficient to solve the problem, but there is a need for the local Latin-rite Churches, in the name of synodality, to help the Eastern faithful who have emigrated to preserve their identity and cultivate their specific heritage, without undergoing processes of assimilation.

### **Issues to be addressed**

- d) The contribution that the experience of the Eastern Catholic Churches can make to the understanding and practice of synodality should be further studied.
- e) Some difficulties remain regarding the Pope's assent to bishops elected by the Synods of Churches *sui iuris* for their territory and the papal appointment of bishops outside canonical territory. The request to extend the jurisdiction of Patriarchs outside patriarchal territory is also being discerned in dialogue with the Holy See.
- f) In regions where the faithful of different Catholic Churches are present, ways must be found to make visible and experienceable an effective unity in diversity.
- g) We need to reflect on the contribution that the Eastern Catholic Churches can make to the journey toward unity among all Christians and the role they can play in interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

## Proposals

- h) First emerges the request to establish a Council of Patriarchs and Major Archbishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches to the Holy Father.
- i) Some call for convening a Special Synod dedicated to the Eastern Catholic Churches, their identity and mission, and pastoral and canonical challenges in the context of war and massive migration.
- j) It is proposed to form a joint commission of Eastern and Latin theologians, historians and canonists to study the issues that require further study and make proposals for moving forward.
- k) Let there be adequate representation of members of the Eastern Catholic Churches in the dicasteries of the Roman Curia in order to enrich the whole Church with the contribution of their perspective, foster the solution of the problems noted and participate in the dialogue at different levels.
- l) In order to foster forms of reception that respect the heritage of the faithful of the Eastern Churches, relations between Eastern clergy in the diaspora and Latin clergy should be intensified and mutual knowledge and recognition of each other's traditions should be promoted.

## 7. On the road to Christian unity

### Convergences

- a) This session of the Synodal Assembly opened under the sign of ecumenism. The "*Together*" prayer vigil saw the presence alongside Pope Francis of numerous other leaders and representatives of different Christian Communion: a clear and credible sign of the will to walk together in the spirit of unity of faith and exchange of gifts. This highly significant event, too, allowed us to recognize that we are in an ecumenical *kairos* and to reaffirm that what unites us is greater than what divides us. For in common we have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, among all and in all" (*Eph. 4:5-6*).
- b) It is precisely Baptism, which is at the principle of synodality, that also constitutes the foundation of ecumenism. Through it, all Christians participate in the *sensus fidei* and for this reason should be listened to carefully, regardless of their tradition, as the Assembly



synod has made in its discernment process. There can be no synodality without the ecumenical dimension.

- c) Ecumenism is first and foremost a matter of spiritual renewal and also demands processes of repentance and healing of memory. The Assembly resounded with enlightening testimonies of Christians from different church traditions who share friendship, prayer and especially a commitment to the service of the poor. Dedication to the least of these cements bonds and helps focus on what already unites all believers in Christ. Therefore, it is important that ecumenism develops first and foremost in daily life. In theological and institutional dialogue, the patient weaving from mutual understanding continues in an atmosphere of growing trust and openness.
- d) In not a few regions of the world there is above all ecumenism of blood: Christians of different affiliations who together give their lives for faith in Jesus Christ. The testimony of their martyrdom is more eloquent than any words: unity comes from the Cross of the Lord.
- e) Collaboration among all Christians also constitutes a fundamental element in meeting the pastoral challenges of our time: in secularized societies it enables the voice of the Gospel to be given greater force; in contexts of poverty it makes people join forces in the service of justice, peace and the dignity of the least. Always and everywhere it is a key resource for healing the culture of hatred, division and war that pits groups, peoples and nations against each other.
- f) Marriages between Christians who belong to different churches or church communities (mixed marriages) constitute realities in which the wisdom of communion can mature and we can evangelize each other.

### **Issues to be addressed**

- g) Our Assembly was able to perceive the diversity among Christian denominations in the way they understand the synodal configuration of the Church. In the Orthodox Churches, synodality is understood in a narrow sense as an expression of the collegial exercise of the authority proper to the bishops alone (the Holy Synod). In a broad sense, it refers to the active participation of all the faithful in the life and mission of the Church. There was no shortage of references to practices in use in other ecclesial communities, which enriched our discussion. All of this requires further study.
- h) Another theme to be explored concerns the link between synodality and primacy at the various levels (local, regional, universal), in their mutual interdependence. It requires a shared rereading of history to overcome commonplaces and prejudices. The ongoing ecumenical dialogues have provided a better understanding, in light of the practices of the first millennium, that synodality and primacy are related, complementary and inseparable realities. The clarification of this delicate point is reflected in the way of understanding the Petrine ministry in the service of unity, as advocated by St. John Paul II in the Encyclical *Ut unum sint*.
- i) The issue of Eucharistic hospitality (*communicatio in sacris*) should be further examined from the theological, canonical and pastoral perspectives in light of the link between sacramental and ecclesial communion. This issue is particularly felt by interfaith couples. It also points to a broader reflection on mixed marriages.
- j) Reflection was also urged on the phenomenon of "non-denominational" communities and Christian-inspired "revival" movements, which are also joined in large numbers by faithful who were originally Catholic.

## **Proposals**

- k) The year 2025 marks the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (325), where the symbol of the faith that unites all Christians was worked out. A common commemoration of this event will also help us better understand how in the past controversial issues were discussed and resolved together at the Council.
- l) In the same year 2025, providentially, the date of the solemnity of Easter will coincide for all Christian denominations. The Assembly expressed a keen desire to come to a common date for the feast of Easter so that we can celebrate on the same day the resurrection of the Lord, our life and our salvation.
- m) There is also a desire to continue to involve Christians of other denominations in Catholic synod processes at all levels and to invite more fraternal delegates to the next session of the Assembly in 2024.
- n) The proposal to convene an ecumenical synod on common mission in the contemporary world has also been put forward by some.
- o) The proposal to compile an ecumenical martyrology is revived.

## PART II - ALL DISCIPLES, ALL MISSIONARIES

### 8. Church is mission

#### Convergences

- a) Rather than saying that the Church has a mission, we affirm that the Church is mission. "As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (*Jn* 20:21): the Church receives from Christ, the Father's Envoy, its own mission. Sustained and guided by the Holy Spirit, she proclaims and bears witness to the Gospel to those who do not know or accept it, with that preferential option for the poor that is rooted in Jesus' mission. In this way it contributes to the coming of the Kingdom of God, of which it "constitutes the germ and the beginning" (cf. LG 5).
- b) The sacraments of Christian initiation give all disciples of Jesus responsibility for the mission of the Church. Laymen and laywomen, consecrated men and women, and ordained ministers have equal dignity. They have received different charisms and vocations and exercise different roles and functions, all called and nourished by the Holy Spirit to form one body in Christ. All disciples, all missionaries, in the fraternal vitality of local communities that experience the sweet and comforting joy of evangelization. The exercise of co-responsibility is essential for synodality and is necessary at all levels of the Church. Every Christian is a mission in this world.
- c) The family is the backbone of every Christian community. Parents, grandparents and all those who live and share their faith in the family are the first missionaries. The family, as a community of life and love, is a privileged place of education in faith and Christian practice, which needs special accompaniment within communities. Support is especially needed for parents who must reconcile work, including within the church community and in service to its mission, with the demands of family life.
- d) If mission is a grace that engages the whole Church, the lay faithful contribute in a vital way to realizing it in all environments and in the most ordinary everyday situations. It is they above all who make the Church present and proclaim the Gospel in the culture of the digital environment, which has such a strong impact throughout the world, in youth cultures, in the world of work, business and politics, arts and culture, scientific research, education and training, in the care of the common home and, in a special way, in participation in public life. Where they are present, they are called to witness to Jesus Christ in daily life and to explicitly share the faith with others. Young people in particular, with their gifts and frailties, as they grow in friendship with Jesus, become apostles of the Gospel among their peers.
- e) The lay faithful are also increasingly present and active in service within Christian communities. Many of them organize and animate pastoral communities, serve as faith educators, theologians and formators, spiritual animators and catechists, and participate in various parish and diocesan bodies. In many regions, the life of Christian communities and the mission of the Church hinge on the figure of catechists. In addition, lay people serve in *safeguarding* and administration. Their contribution is indispensable for the mission of the Church; therefore, care must be taken to acquire the necessary skills
- f) The charisms of the laity, in their variety, are gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church that must be brought out, recognized and fully valued. In some situations it may happen that the

laity are called to make up for the shortage of priests, with the risk that the properly lay character of their apostolate is diminished. In other contexts, it can happen that presbyters do everything and the charisms and ministries of the laity are ignored or underutilized. There is also the danger, expressed by many at the Assembly, of "clericalizing" the laity, creating a kind of lay *elite* that perpetuates inequalities and divisions in the People of God.

- g) The practice of mission *ad gentes* achieves a mutual enrichment of the Churches, because it involves not only missionaries but the entire community, which is stimulated to prayer, sharing of goods and witness. Even Churches poor in clergy should not give up this commitment, while those in which there is a greater flowering of vocations to ordained ministry can open themselves to pastoral cooperation, in a genuinely evangelical logic. All missionaries - laymen and laywomen, consecrated men and women, deacons and presbyters, especially members of missionary institutes and *fidei donum* missionaries - by virtue of their own vocation, are an important resource for creating bonds of knowledge and exchange of gifts.
- h) The mission of the Church is continually renewed and nurtured by the celebration of the Eucharist, particularly when they bring to the forefront its communal and missionary character.

### Issues to be addressed

- i) It is necessary to continue to deepen the theological understanding of the relationships between charisms and ministries from a missionary perspective.
- j) Vatican II and the subsequent magisterium present the distinctive mission of the laity in terms of the sanctification of temporal or secular realities. However, in the concreteness of pastoral practice, at the parish, diocesan and, recently, even universal levels, lay people are increasingly being entrusted with tasks and ministries within the Church. Theological reflection and canonical provisions must be reconciled with these important developments and strive to avoid dualisms that could compromise the perception of the unity of the Church's mission.
- k) In promoting co-responsibility for the mission of all the baptized, we recognize the apostolic capacities of people with disabilities. We want to value the contribution to evangelization that comes from the immense wealth of humanity they bring with them. We recognize their experiences of suffering, marginalization, discrimination, sometimes suffered even within the Christian community itself.
- l) Pastoral structures need to be reorganized to help communities bring out, recognize and animate lay charisms and ministries, inserting them into the missionary dynamism of the synodal Church. Under the guidance of their pastors, communities will be able to send and support those they have sent. They will thus conceive of themselves as primarily serving the mission that the faithful carry out within society, in family and work life, without focusing exclusively on the activities that take place within them and their organizational needs.
- m) The expression "an all ministerial Church," used in the *Instrumentum laboris*, may lend itself to misunderstanding. Let its meaning be explored further to clarify any ambiguities.

### Proposals

- n) There is a perceived need for more creativity in establishing ministries according to the needs of local churches, with special involvement of young people. One can think of further expanding the tasks to the established ministry of the lector, which are already not limited to the role played during liturgies. In this way, a true ministry of the Word of God could be set up, which in appropriate contexts could also include preaching. The possibility of establishing a ministry to be given to married couples committed to supporting family life and accompanying people preparing for the sacrament of marriage should also be explored.
- o) Local churches are invited to identify forms and occasions in which to give visibility and community recognition to charisms and ministries that enrich the community. This could take place at a liturgical celebration within which the pastoral mandate is entrusted.

## 9. Women in the life and mission of the Church

### Convergences

- a) We were created male and female, in the image and likeness of God. From the beginning, creation articulates unity and difference, endowing women and men with a shared nature, vocation and destiny and two distinct experiences of the human. Sacred Scripture testifies to the complementarity and reciprocity of women and men. In the many forms in which it is realized, the covenant between man and woman is at the heart of God's plan for creation. Jesus considered women his interlocutors: he spoke with them about the Kingdom of God and welcomed them among his disciples, such as Mary of Bethany. These women experienced his power of healing, deliverance and recognition and walked with him on the road from Galilee to Jerusalem (cf. *Lk* 8:1-3). He entrusted a woman, Mary Magdalene, with the task of announcing the resurrection on Easter morning.
- b) In Christ women and men are clothed with the same baptismal dignity and receive equally the variety of gifts of the Spirit (cf. *Gal* 3:28). Men and women are called to a communion characterized by non-competitive co-responsibility, to be embodied at every level of the Church's life. As Pope Francis has told us, together we are "People summoned and called by the power of the Beatitudes."
- c) During the Assembly we experienced the beauty of reciprocity between women and men. Together we revive the call of the previous stages of the synod process, and ask the Church to grow in its commitment to understand and accompany women, pastorally and sacramentally. Women desire to share the spiritual experience of walking toward holiness in the different stages of life: as young people, as mothers, in friendship relationships, in family life at all ages, in the world of work and in consecrated life. They claim justice in societies still deeply marked by sexual violence and economic inequality, and the tendency to treat them as objects. They bear the scars of human trafficking, forced migration and wars. Accompaniment and determined advocacy for women go hand in hand.
- d) Women constitute the majority of those who attend churches and are often the first missionaries of the faith in the family. Consecrated women, in contemplative and apostolic life, constitute a gift, sign and witness of fundamental importance

in our midst. The long history of women missionaries, saints, theologians and mystics is a powerful source of inspiration and nourishment for the women and men of our time.

- e) Mary of Nazareth, a woman of faith and mother of God, remains for all an extraordinary source of meaning theologically, ecclesially and spiritually. Mary reminds us of the universal call to listen attentively to God and to remain open to the Holy Spirit. She has known the joy of giving birth and making grow and has endured pain and suffering. She gave birth in precarious conditions, experienced being a refugee, and experienced the heartbreak of the brutal killing of her Son. But she has also known the splendor of the resurrection and the glory of Pentecost.
- f) Many women expressed deep gratitude for the work of priests and bishops, but they also spoke of a Church that wounds. Clericalism, machismo and inappropriate use of authority continue to scar the face of the Church and damage communion. A deep spiritual conversion is needed as the basis for any structural change. Sexual, power and economic abuses continue to demand justice, healing and reconciliation. We ask how the Church can become a space capable of protecting all.
- g) When dignity and justice in relationships between men and women are harmed in the Church, the credibility of the proclamation we address to the world is weakened. The synod process shows that there is a need for a renewal of relationships and structural changes. In this way we will be better able to welcome the participation and contribution of all - lay men and women, consecrated men and women, deacons, priests and bishops - as co-responsible disciples of the mission.
- h) The Assembly asks that we avoid repeating the mistake of talking about women as an issue or problem. Instead, we wish to promote a Church in which men and women dialogue for the purpose of better understanding the depth of God's plan, in which they appear together as protagonists, without subordination, exclusion, or competition.

### **Issues to be addressed**

- i) Churches around the world have clearly formulated the call for greater recognition and enhancement of women's contributions and growth in the pastoral responsibilities entrusted to them in all areas of the Church's life and mission. In order to give better expression to everyone's charisms and better respond to pastoral needs, how can the Church include more women in existing roles and ministries? If new ministries are needed, whose responsibility is it to discern, at what level and in what ways?
- j) Different positions have been expressed regarding women's access to diaconal ministry. Some consider that this step would be unacceptable as it would be in discontinuity with Tradition. For others, however, granting women access to the diaconate would restore a practice of the early Church. Still others discern in this step an appropriate and necessary response to the signs of the times, faithful to Tradition and capable of finding an echo in the hearts of many who seek renewed vitality and energy in the Church. Some express fear that this request is an expression of a dangerous anthropological confusion, embracing which the Church would align itself with the spirit of the times.
- k) The discussion in this regard is also connected to the broader reflection on the theology of the diaconate (see *infra* ch. 11, h - i).

## Proposals

- l) Local churches in particular are encouraged to broaden their service of listening, accompanying and caring for women who are most marginalized in different social contexts.
- m) There is an urgent need to ensure that women can participate in decision-making processes and assume roles of responsibility in pastoral care and ministry. The Holy Father has significantly increased the number of women in positions of responsibility in the Roman Curia. The same should happen at other levels of Church life. Canon law should be adapted accordingly.
- n) Theological and pastoral research on women's access to the diaconate should be continued, taking advantage of the results of the commissions specially established by the Holy Father and the theological, historical and exegetical research already carried out. If possible, the results should be presented at the next Session of the Assembly.
- o) Cases of employment discrimination and unequal remuneration within the Church be addressed and resolved, particularly with regard to consecrated women who are too often considered cheap labor.
- p) There is a need to expand women's access to training programs and theological studies. Let women be included in seminary teaching and training programs to foster better formation for ordained ministry.
- q) Let liturgical texts and Church documents be more attentive not only to the use of language that holds men and women equally, but also to the inclusion of a range of words, images and narratives that draw with greater vitality on women's experience.
- r) We propose that properly trained women can be judges in all canonical trials.

## 10. Consecrated life and lay aggregations: a charismatic sign

### Convergences

- a) Throughout the centuries, the Church has always experienced the gift of charisms through which the Holy Spirit rejuvenates and renews her, from the most extraordinary to the simplest and most widely spread. With joy and gratitude, the Holy People of God recognize in them the providential help with which God himself sustains, directs and enlightens his mission.
- b) The charismatic dimension of the Church has a particular manifestation in consecrated life, with the richness and variety of its forms. Its witness has contributed in every age to renewing the life of the ecclesial community, proving to be an antidote against the recurring temptation of worldliness. Different religious families show the beauty of following the Lord, on the mountain of prayer and on the roads of the world, in forms of community life, in the solitude of the desert and on the frontier of cultural challenges. Consecrated life more than once has been the first to sense the changes in history and grasp the calls of the Spirit: today, too, the Church needs its prophecy. The Christian community also looks with attention and gratitude at the tested practices of synodal life and discernment in common that communities of consecrated life have matured over the centuries. From them, too, we know that we can learn the wisdom of walking together. Many congregations and

Institutes practice conversation in the Spirit or similar forms of discernment in the conduct of provincial and general chapters, in order to renew structures, rethink lifestyles, and activate new forms of service and closeness to the poorest. In other cases, however, we find the persistence of an authoritarian style, which makes no room for fraternal dialogue.

- c) With equal gratitude, the People of God recognize the ferments of renewal present in communities that have a long history and in the flowering of new experiences of ecclesial aggregation. Lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities are valuable signs of the maturing co-responsibility of all the baptized. Their value lies in the promotion of communion among different vocations, the momentum with which they proclaim the Gospel, their proximity to those experiencing economic or social marginality, and their commitment to the promotion of the common good. They are often models of synodal communion and participation with a view to mission.
- d) Cases of abuse of various kinds against consecrated persons and members of lay aggregations, particularly women, signal a problem in the exercise of authority and require decisive and appropriate action.

### **Issues to be addressed**

- e) The Church's magisterium has developed extensive teaching on the importance of hierarchical gifts and charismatic gifts in the life and mission of the Church, which requires better understanding in ecclesial consciousness and in theological reflection itself. It is therefore necessary to question the ecclesiological significance and concrete pastoral implications of this acquisition.
- f) The variety of charismatic expressions within the Church underscores the commitment of the faithful People of God to live the prophecy of closeness to the least and to enlighten culture with a deeper experience of spiritual realities. There is a need to deepen how consecrated life, lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities can put their charisms at the service of communion and mission in the local Churches, contributing to progress toward holiness through a presence that is prophetic.

### **Proposals**

- g) We believe that the time is ripe for a revision of the "guiding criteria on the relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church" proposed in the 1978 document *Mutuae relationes*. We propose that this revision be conducted in synodal style, including all those involved.
- h) To the same end, Episcopal Conferences and Conferences of Superiors and Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life should activate appropriate places and instruments to promote meetings and forms of collaboration in a synodal spirit.
- i) At the level of both individual local Churches and groupings of Churches, the promotion of missionary synodality requires the establishment and more precise configuration of Councils and Councils in which representatives of Lay Associations, Ecclesial Movements and New Communities converge to promote organic relationships between these realities and the life of local Churches.
- j) In theological formation courses at all levels, especially in the formation of ordained ministers, the attention paid to the charismatic dimension of the Church should be checked and, where necessary, reinforced.



## 11. Deacons and presbyters in a synodal church

### Convergences

- a) Presbyters are the main cooperators of the bishop and form with him a single presbyterate (cf. LG 28); deacons, ordained for ministry, serve the People of God in the diakonia of the Word, liturgy, and especially charity (cf. LG 29). Toward them, the Synodal Assembly first of all expresses deep gratitude. Aware that they may experience loneliness and isolation, it recommends Christian communities to support them with prayer, friendship, and collaboration.
- b) Deacons and presbyters are engaged in the most diverse forms of pastoral ministry: service in parishes, evangelization, proximity to the poor and marginalized, engagement in the world of culture and education, mission *ad gentes*, theological research, animation of centers of spirituality, and many others. In a synodal Church, ordained ministers are called to live their service to the People of God in an attitude of closeness to people, welcoming and listening to all, and to cultivate a deep personal spirituality and a life of prayer. Above all, they are called to rethink the exercise of authority on the model of Jesus who, "though he was in the condition of God, [...] emptied himself, assuming a condition of servant" (*Phil. 2:6-7*). The Assembly recognizes that many presbyters and deacons make visible by their dedication the face of Christ the Good Shepherd and Servant.
- c) One obstacle to ministry and mission is clericalism. It stems from a misunderstanding of the divine call, which leads one to conceive of it more as a privilege than as a service, and manifests itself in a worldly style of power that refuses to be accountable. This deformation of the priesthood must be countered from the earliest stages of formation through living contact with the everyday life of the People of God and a concrete experience of service to those most in need. One cannot imagine the ministry of the presbyter today except in relation to the bishop, in the presbytery, in deep communion with other ministries and charisms. Unfortunately, clericalism is an attitude that can manifest itself not only in ministers but also in lay people.
- d) Awareness of one's abilities and limitations is a requirement for engaging in ordained ministry with a style of co-responsibility. For this reason, human formation must ensure a path of realistic self-knowledge, which is integrated with cultural, spiritual and apostolic growth. In this path, the contribution of the family of origin and the Christian community, within which the young man has matured his vocation, and of other families that accompany his growth, should not be underestimated.

### Issues to be addressed

- e) In the perspective of the formation of all the baptized for a synodal Church, that of deacons and priests requires special attention. The request was widely expressed that seminaries or other courses of formation of candidates for ministry be linked to the daily life of communities. There is a need to avoid the risks of formalism and ideology that lead to authoritarian attitudes and prevent true vocational growth. Rethinking formation styles and paths requires extensive revision and discussion.
- f) Different evaluations have been expressed on the celibacy of presbyters. All appreciate its prophecy-laden value and witness of conformation to Christ; some ask whether its

theological convenience with presbyteral ministry must necessarily translate in the Latin Church into a disciplinary obligation, especially where ecclesial and cultural contexts make this more difficult. This is a theme that is not new and needs to be taken up further.

## Proposals

- g) In the Latin Churches, the permanent diaconate has been implemented in different ways in different ecclesial contexts. Some local Churches have not introduced it at all; in others, there is concern that deacons are perceived as a kind of remedy for the shortage of priests. Sometimes their ministeriality is expressed in the liturgy rather than in service to the poor and needy in the community. It is therefore recommended that an assessment be made on the implementation of the diaconal ministry after the Second Vatican Council.
- h) From the theological point of view, there emerges the need to understand the diaconate first and foremost in itself, and not only as a stage of access to the presbyterate. The very linguistic use of qualifying the primary form of diaconate as "permanent" in order to distinguish it from the "transitional" form is an indication of a change of perspective that has not yet been adequately realized.
- i) The uncertainties surrounding the theology of the diaconal ministry are also due to the fact that in the Latin Church it has been restored as a proper and permanent degree of the hierarchy only since the Second Vatican Council. A deeper reflection on this will also illuminate the issue of women's access to the diaconate.
- j) A thorough review of formation for ordained ministry in light of the perspective of the missionary synodal Church is called for. This implies the revision of the *Ratio fundamentalis* that determines its profile. We recommend at the same time to take care of the ongoing formation of presbyters and deacons in a synodal sense.
- k) The dimension of transparency and a culture of accountability is a critically important element in moving forward in building a synodal Church. We call on local churches to identify processes and structures that allow for regular audits of how priests and deacons performing roles of responsibility are exercising their ministry. Existing institutions, such as participatory bodies or pastoral visits, can be the starting point for this work, taking care to involve the community. In any case, such forms will have to be adapted to local contexts and different cultures, so as not to be a hindrance or bureaucratic burden. For this reason, the regional or continental setting may be the most appropriate for their discernment.
- l) Consider, on a case-by-case and context-by-context basis, the appropriateness of including presbyters who have left the ministry in a pastoral service that enhances their training and experience.

## 12. The bishop in ecclesial communion

### Convergences

- a) In the perspective of the Second Vatican Council, bishops, as successors of the Apostles, are placed at the service of the communion that takes place in the local Church, among the Churches and with the whole Church. The figure of the bishop can thus be properly understood in the interweaving of relationships with the portion of the People of God entrusted to him, with the presbyterate and deacons, with the

consecrated persons, with other bishops and with the Bishop of Rome, in a perspective that is always mission-oriented.

- b) The bishop is, in his Church, primarily responsible for the proclamation of the Gospel and the liturgy. He leads the Christian community and promotes the care of the poor and the defense of the least. As a visible principle of unity, he has in particular the task of discerning and coordinating the different charisms and ministries raised by the Spirit for the proclamation of the Gospel and the common good of the community. Such ministry is realized in a synodal way when governance is exercised in co-responsibility, preaching from listening to God's faithful People, sanctification and liturgical celebration from humility and conversion.
- c) The bishop has an irreplaceable role in initiating and animating the synodal process in the local church, promoting the circularity between "all, some and one." The episcopal ministry (the one) enhances the participation of "all" the faithful through the contribution of "some" who are more directly involved in discernment and decision-making processes (participatory and governing bodies). The conviction with which the bishop assumes the synodal perspective and the style in which he exercises authority decisively influence the participation of priests and deacons, lay men and women, consecrated men and women. For all, the bishop is called to be an example of synodality.
- d) In contexts where the Church is perceived as the family of God, the bishop is seen as the father of all; in secularized societies, on the other hand, a crisis of his authority is experienced. It is important not to lose reference to the sacramental nature of the episcopate, lest the figure of the bishop be equated with a civil authority.
- e) Expectations on the bishop are often very high, and many bishops complain of an overload of administrative and legal commitments, which makes it difficult to fully realize their mission. The bishop also has to come to terms with his own frailty and limitations and does not always find human support and spiritual support. The painful experience of loneliness is not uncommon. That is why it is important on the one hand to return to focus on the essential aspects of the Bishop's mission, and on the other hand to cultivate authentic fraternity among Bishops and with the presbyterate.

### **Issues to be addressed**

- f) On the theological level, the significance of the bond of reciprocity between the bishop and the local church should be more deeply explored. He is called to guide it and, at the same time, to recognize and guard the richness of its history, tradition and charisms present in it.
- g) The question of the relationship between the sacrament of Holy Orders and jurisdiction needs to be examined in depth, in light of the conciliar magisterium of *Lumen Gentium* and more recent teachings, such as the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, in order to clarify the theological and canonical criteria underlying the principle of shared responsibility of the bishop and to determine the scope, forms and implications of co-responsibility.
- h) Some bishops express discomfort when they are asked to speak on matters of faith and morals on which there is not full agreement in the episcopate. Further reflection is needed on the relationship between episcopal collegiality and diversity of theological and pastoral views.
- i) A culture of transparency and compliance with the procedures provided for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons are an integral part of a synodal Church. structures dedicated to the prevention of abuse need to be further developed. The sensitive issue of abuse management places many bishops in the difficulty of reconciling the roles of father and

judge. It is asked to consider the appropriateness of entrusting the judicial task to another instance, to be specified canonically.

## Proposals

- j) Let there be activated, in forms legally to be defined, structures and processes for regular verification of the bishop's work, with reference to the style of his authority, the economic administration of the diocese's assets, the functioning of participatory bodies, and protection against all kinds of abuses. A culture of accountability is an integral part of a synodal Church that promotes co-responsibility, as well as a possible safeguard against abuse.
- k) There is a call for making the Episcopal Council (can. 473 §4) and the diocesan or eparchial pastoral council (CIC can. 511, CCEU can. 272) mandatory and for making diocesan bodies of co-responsibility more operational, including at the level of law.
- l) The Assembly calls for a review of the criteria for selecting candidates for the episcopate, balancing the authority of the Apostolic Nuncio with the participation of the Bishops' Conference. It also calls for broadening the consultation of the People of God, listening to a greater number of laymen and women, consecrated men and women, and taking care to avoid inappropriate pressures.
- m) Many bishops express the need to rethink the functioning and strengthen the structure of the Metropolias (ecclesiastical provinces) and Regions, so that they can be concrete expressions of collegiality in a territory and areas where bishops can experience fraternity, mutual support, transparency and wider consultation.

## 13. The Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops.

### Convergences

- a) The synodal dynamic also sheds new light on the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. Indeed, synodality symphonically articulates the communal ("all"), collegial ("some") and personal ("one") dimensions of the Church at the local, regional and universal levels. In such a vision, the Petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome is intrinsic to the synodal dynamic, as are the communal aspect that includes the whole People of God and the collegial dimension of episcopal ministry. Therefore, synodality, collegiality and primacy refer to each other: primacy presupposes the exercise of synodality and collegiality, just as both imply the exercise of primacy.
- b) Promoting the unity of all Christians is an essential aspect of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. The ecumenical journey has deepened understanding of the ministry of the Successor of Peter and must continue to do so in the future. Responses to the invitation made by St. John Paul II in the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, as well as the conclusions of ecumenical dialogues, can help the Catholic understanding of primacy, collegiality, synodality and their mutual relations.
- c) The reform of the Roman Curia is an important aspect of the Catholic Church's synodal journey. The Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate evangelium* insists that "the Roman Curia does not stand between the Pope and the bishops, rather it places itself at the service of both in ways that are proper to the nature of each" (EP I.8). It promotes a reform based

on the "life of communion" (EP I.4) and on a "healthy decentralization" (EG 16, cited in EP II.2). The fact that many members of the Roman Dicasteries are diocesan bishops expresses the catholicity of the Church and should foster the relationship between the Curia and the local Churches. The effective implementation of the *Praedicate evangelium* may foster greater synodality within the Curia, both among the different Dicasteries and within each of them.

### Issues to be addressed

- d) Insight into how a renewed understanding of the episcopate within a synodal Church affects the ministry of the Bishop of Rome and the role of the Roman Curia is called for. This issue has significant implications for the way co-responsibility in Church governance is lived out. At the universal level, the Code of *Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* offer provisions for a more collegial exercise of papal ministry. These could be further developed in practice and strengthened in a future update of both texts.
- e) Synodality can shed light on the ways in which the College of Cardinals collaborate in the Petrine ministry and the forms through which to promote their collegial discernment in ordinary and extraordinary consistories.
- f) It is important for the good of the Church to study the most appropriate ways to foster mutual acquaintance and bonds of communion among the members of the College of Cardinals, taking into account also their diversity of origin and culture.

### Proposals

- g) The Visits *ad limina Apostolorum* are the highest moment of the relations of the Pastors of the local Churches with the Bishop of Rome and with his closest collaborators in the Roman Curia. Let the form in which they are carried out be reviewed so as to make them more and more occasions for an open and mutual exchange that fosters communion and a true exercise of collegiality and synodality.
- h) In light of the synodal configuration of the Church, it is necessary for the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia to enhance the consultation of the bishops, for greater attention to the diversity of situations and a more attentive listening to the voice of the local churches.
- i) It seems appropriate to provide for forms of evaluation of the work of the Pontifical Representatives by the local churches in the countries where they carry out their mission, in order to facilitate and perfect their service.
- j) It is proposed to enhance and strengthen the experience of the Council of Cardinals (C-9) as a synodal council serving the Petrine ministry.
- k) In light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, it should be carefully examined whether it is appropriate to ordain prelates of the Roman Curia as bishops.

## PART III - WEAVING BONDS, BUILDING COMMUNITY

### 14. A synodal approach to formation

#### Convergences

- a) Taking care of one's formation is the response that every baptized person is called to give to the Lord's gifts, to make the talents received bear fruit and put them at the service of all. The Lord's time devoted to disciple-making reveals the importance of this often inconspicuous but decisive ecclesial action for mission. We feel we express a word of thanks and encouragement to all those who are engaged in this area and invite them to grasp the new elements emerging from the Church's synodal journey.
- b) The way Jesus formed the disciples provides the model to which we should refer. He did not merely impart some teaching, but shared life with them. By his prayer, he raised the question, "Teach us to pray"; by feeding the crowds, he taught them not to dismiss the needy; by walking to Jerusalem, he pointed the way to the Cross. From the Gospel we learn that formation is not only nor primarily capacity building: it is conversion to the logic of the Kingdom that can make even defeats and failures fruitful.
- c) The Holy People of God is not only the object, but is first and foremost the co-responsible subject of formation. First formation, in fact, takes place in the family. It is there that we not infrequently receive the first proclamation of the faith, in the language - indeed in the dialect - of our parents and grandparents. The contribution of those in ministry in the Church must therefore be interwoven with the wisdom of the simple in an educational alliance that is indispensable to the community. This is the first sign of an education understood in a synodal sense
- d) In Christian initiation we find the major guidelines for formation paths. Central to formation is the deepening of the *kerygma*, that is, the encounter with Jesus Christ who offers us the gift of new life. Catechumenal logic reminds us that we are all sinners called to holiness. This is why we engage in journeys of conversion that the Sacrament of Reconciliation brings to completion and nurture the desire for holiness, supported by a large number of witnesses.
- e) The areas in which the formation of the People of God takes place are many. In addition to theological formation, training in a number of specific skills has been mentioned: the exercise of co-responsibility, listening, discernment, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, service to the poor and care for the common home, engagement as "digital missionaries," facilitation of discernment processes and conversation in the Spirit, consensus building and conflict resolution. Special attention should be paid to the catechetical formation of children and youth, which should involve the active participation of the community.
- f) Formation for a synodal Church requires to be undertaken in a synodal way: the whole People of God are formed together as they walk together. There is a need to overcome the delegation mentality found in so many areas of pastoral ministry. Formation in a synodal key aims to enable the People of God to live out their baptismal vocation fully, in the family, in the workplace, in the ecclesial, social and intellectual spheres, and to enable each person to participate actively in the Church's mission according to his or her own charisms and vocation.

## Issues to be addressed

- g) We recommend deepening the topic of affective and sexual education to accompany young people on their journey of growth and to support the affective maturation of those called to celibacy and consecrated chastity, Formation in these areas is a necessary aid in all seasons of life.
- h) It is important to deepen the dialogue between the humanities, especially psychology, and theology, for an understanding of human experience that does not merely juxtapose their contributions but integrates them into a more mature synthesis.
- i) The People of God must be amply represented in the formation of ordained ministers, as already called for by previous Synods. A broad review of formation programs is needed, with special attention to how to enhance the contribution of women and the contribution of families.
- j) The bishops' conferences are encouraged to work regionally to create a culture of lifelong learning together, using all available resources, including the development of digital options.

## Proposals

- k) In light of synodality, we propose that, as far as possible, joint formation proposals aimed at the whole People of God (laity, consecrated and ordained ministers) should be favored. It is up to the dioceses to encourage these projects at the local level. We encourage bishops' conferences to work together at the regional level to jointly create a culture of ongoing formation, using all available resources, including the development of digital options.
- l) The different components of the People of God be represented in the pathways of formation for ordained ministry, as already requested by previous Synods. Of particular importance is the involvement of female figures.
- m) Adequate selection processes for candidates for ordained ministry are needed, and requirements for propaedeutic programs are met.
- n) The formation of ordained ministers should be thought of in coherence with a synodal Church, in the different contexts. This requires that candidates for ministry, before embarking on specific paths, have matured a real, albeit initial, experience of Christian community. The formation journey should not create an artificial environment, separate from the common life of the faithful. By safeguarding the requirements of formation for ministry, it will foster an authentic spirit of service to the People of God in preaching, celebration of the sacraments and animation of charity. This may require a revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis* for priests and permanent deacons.
- o) In preparation for the next Session of the Assembly, it is proposed to conduct a consultation of those responsible for the initial and continuing formation of presbyters to assess the reception of the synod process and propose changes needed to promote the exercise of authority in a style appropriate to a synodal Church.

## 15. Ecclesial discernment and open questions

### Convergences

- a) The experience of Conversation in the Spirit was enriching for all who took part. In particular, a style of communication that favors freedom in expressing one's views and listening to each other was appreciated. This avoids moving too quickly to a debate based on the reiteration of one's arguments, which does not leave space and time to realize the other's reasons.
- b) This basic attitude creates a favorable context for delving into issues that are controversial even within the church, such as the anthropological effects of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, nonviolence and self-defense, issues related to ministry, issues related to corporeality and sexuality, and others.
- c) To develop authentic ecclesial discernment in these and other areas, it is necessary to integrate, in the light of the Word of God and the Magisterium, a broader information base and a more articulate reflective component. To avoid taking refuge in the comfort of conventional formulas, a comparison with the viewpoint of the human and social sciences, philosophical reflection and theological elaboration must be instructed.
- d) Among the issues on which it is important to continue reflection is that of the relationship between love and truth and the repercussions it has on many controversial issues. Such a relationship, before being a challenge, is actually a grace that inhabits Christological revelation. For Jesus brought to fulfillment the promise found in the Psalms, "Love and truth will meet, justice and peace will kiss. Truth will sprout from the earth and justice will come forth from heaven" (*Ps. 85:11-12*).
- e) The Gospel pages show that Jesus meets people in the uniqueness of their history and situation. He never starts from prejudices or labels, but from an authentic relationship in which he involves himself wholeheartedly, even at the price of exposing himself to misunderstanding and rejection. Jesus always hears the cry for help of those in need, even when it remains unspoken; he makes gestures that convey love and restore confidence; he makes new life possible by his presence: those who meet him emerge transformed. This happens because the truth of which Jesus is the bearer is not an idea, but the very presence of God among us; and the love with which he acts is not just a feeling, but the justice of the Kingdom that changes history.
- f) The difficulty we encounter in translating this limpid Gospel vision into pastoral choices is a sign of our inability to live up to the Gospel and a reminder that we cannot support those in need except through our own conversion, personal and communal. If we use doctrine harshly and with a judgmental attitude, we betray the Gospel; if we practice cheap mercy, we do not convey God's love. The unity of truth and love implies taking on each other's difficulties to the point of making them one's own, as is the case between true brothers and sisters. That is why such unity can only be achieved by patiently following the path of accompaniment.
- g) Some issues, such as those related to gender identity and sexual orientation, the end of life, difficult marital situations, and ethical issues related to artificial intelligence, are controversial not only in society but also in the Church because they raise new questions. Sometimes the anthropological categories we have developed are not sufficient to grasp the complexity of the elements emerging from experience or knowledge in the sciences and require refinement and further study. It is important to take the necessary time for this reflection and invest our best energies in it, without giving in to simplifying judgments that hurt people and the Body of the Church. Many indications are already offered by the magisterium and are waiting to be translated into appropriate pastoral initiatives. Also



where further clarification is needed, Jesus' behavior, assimilated in prayer and conversion of heart, shows us the way forward.

### **Issues to be addressed**

- h) We recognize the need to continue ecclesial reflection on the original interweaving of love and truth witnessed by Jesus, with a view to an ecclesial practice that honors its inspiration.
- i) We encourage experts in different fields of knowledge to mature a spiritual wisdom that enables their specialized expertise to become true ecclesial service. Synodality in this area is expressed as a readiness to think together in the service of mission, in diversity of approaches, but in harmony of purpose.
- j) There is a need to identify the conditions that make possible a theological and cultural research that knows how to start from the daily experience of God's Holy People and put itself at their service.

### **Proposals**

- k) We propose to promote initiatives that allow for shared discernment on doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues that are controversial, in light of the Word of God, Church teaching, theological reflection, and, valuing the synod experience. This can be accomplished through in-depth discussions among experts of different skills and backgrounds in an institutional setting that protects the confidentiality of the debate and promotes the frankness of the discussion, also giving space, when appropriate, to the voices of people directly affected by the controversies mentioned. Such a path should be initiated in view of the upcoming Synod Session.

## **16. For a Church that listens and accompanies**

### **Convergences**

- a) Listening is the term that best expresses the most intense experience that characterized the first two years of the synodal journey and also the work of the Assembly. It does so in the dual meaning of listening given and received, of putting oneself in listening and being listened to. Listening is a deeply human value, a dynamism of reciprocity, in which one offers a contribution to the other's journey and receives one for one's own.
- b) Being invited to speak and be heard in and by the Church was an intense and unexpected experience for many of those who participated in the synod process at the local level, especially among those who suffer forms of marginalization in society and also in the Christian community. Receiving listening is an experience of affirmation and recognition of one's dignity: this is a powerful tool for activating the resources of the person and the community.
- c) Putting Jesus Christ at the center of our lives requires self-denial. In this perspective, giving ear requires a willingness to decentralize to make room for the other. We have experienced this in the dynamic of conversation in the Spirit. It is a demanding ascetical exercise that obliges each person to recognize his or her own limitations and the partiality of his or her point of view. Therefore, it opens a possibility for listening to the voice of God's Spirit that

also speaks beyond the boundaries of church membership and can set in motion a journey of change and conversion.

- d) Listening has a Christological valence: it means taking on Jesus' attitude toward the people he met (cf. *Phil.* 2:6-11); it also has an ecclesial valence, since it is the Church that is listening, through the actions of some baptized people who do not act in their own name, but in the name of the community.
- e) Along the synod process, the Church has encountered many people and groups who ask to be listened to and accompanied. In promo place we mention young people, whose demand for listening and accompaniment resonated strongly in the Synod dedicated to them (2018) and in this Assembly, which confirms the need for a preferential option for young people.
- f) The Church needs to listen with special care and sensitivity to the voices of victims and survivors of sexual, spiritual, economic, institutional, power and conscience abuse by clergy members or persons with church appointments. Authentic listening is a fundamental element of the journey toward healing, repentance, justice and reconciliation.
- g) The Assembly expresses its closeness and support to all those who experience a condition of loneliness as a choice of fidelity to the Church's tradition and magisterium on marriage and sexual ethics, in which they recognize a source of life. Christian communities are invited to be especially close to them, listening to them and accompanying them in their commitment.
- h) In different ways, people who feel marginalized or excluded from the Church because of their marriage situation, identity, and sexuality also ask to be heard and accompanied, and that their dignity be defended. There was a deep sense of love, mercy and compassion felt in the Assembly for people who are or feel hurt or neglected by the Church, who desire a place to come "home" and where they can feel safe, be heard and respected, without fear of feeling judged. Listening is a prerequisite for walking together in search of God's will. The Assembly reaffirms that Christians cannot disrespect the dignity of any person.
- i) People who suffer various forms of poverty, exclusion and marginalization within societies where inequality grows inexorably also turn to the Church in search of listening and accompaniment. Listening to them allows the Church to realize their point of view and to concretely place itself at their side, but above all to allow itself to be evangelized by them. We thank and encourage those who are engaged in the service of listening to and accompanying those who are in prison and particularly need to experience the Lord's merciful love and not feel isolated from the community. On behalf of the Church they carry out the Lord's words "I was in prison and you came to see me" (*Mt* 25:36).
- j) Many people experience a condition of loneliness that is often close to abandonment. Elderly and sick people are often invisible in society. We encourage parishes and Christian communities to be close to them and listen to them. Works of mercy inspired by the Gospel words "I was [...] sick and you visited me" (*Mt* 25:39), have profound significance for the people involved and also for fomenting community bonds.
- k) The Church wants to listen to everyone, not just those who can make their voices heard more easily. In some regions, for cultural and social reasons, members of certain groups, such as youth, women and minorities, may find it more difficult to express themselves freely. The experience of living in oppressive and dictatorial regimes also erodes the confidence needed to

speaking freely. The same can happen when the exercise of authority within the Christian community becomes oppressive rather than liberating.

### **Issues to be addressed**

- l) Listening requires unconditional acceptance. This does not mean abdicating clarity in presenting the Gospel's message of salvation or endorsing any opinion or position. The Lord Jesus opened new horizons to those who listened unconditionally, and we are called to do the same in sharing the Good News with those we meet.
- m) Widespread in many parts of the world, grassroots or small Christian communities foster listening practices of and among the baptized. We are called to enhance their potential, including exploring how they can be adapted to urban contexts.

### **Proposals**

- n) What should we change so that those who feel excluded can experience a more welcoming Church? Listening and accompaniment are not just individual initiatives, but a form of ecclesial action. This is why they must find a place within the ordinary pastoral planning and operational structuring of Christian communities at different levels, also valuing spiritual accompaniment. A synodal Church cannot give up being a listening Church, and this commitment must be translated into concrete actions.
- o) The Church is not starting from scratch, but already has numerous institutions and structures that carry out this valuable task. Think, for example, of the capillary work of listening to and accompanying the poor, marginalized, migrants and refugees carried out by Caritas and many other realities linked to consecrated life or lay associations. It is necessary to work to strengthen their link with community life, preventing them from being perceived as activities delegated to a few.
- p) People who carry out the service of listening and accompanying, in its different forms, need adequate training, also according to the type of people they come into contact with, and to feel supported by the community. For its part, communities need to become fully aware of the value of a service exercised on their behalf and to be able to receive the fruit of this listening. In order to give greater prominence to this service, the establishment of a ministry of listening and accompaniment based on Baptism, adapted to different contexts, is proposed. The modalities of its conferral will promote greater community involvement.
- q) SECAM (Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) is encouraged to promote theological and pastoral discernment on the issue of polygamy and the accompaniment of people in polygamous unions coming to faith.

## **17. Missionaries in the digital environment**

### **Convergences**

- a) Digital culture represents a fundamental change in the way we conceive of reality and relate to ourselves, each other, our surroundings, and even God. The digital environment changes our learning processes, perception of time, space, body, interpersonal relationships and our entire way of thinking. The dualism between real and virtual does not adequately describe the reality and experience of all of us, especially the youngest, the so-called "digital natives."
- b) Digital culture, then, is not so much a distinct area of mission as a crucial dimension of the Church's witness in contemporary culture. This is why it holds special significance in a synodal Church.
- c) Missionaries have always set out with Christ to new frontiers, preceded and propelled by the action of the Spirit. Today it is our turn to reach out to today's culture in all spaces where people seek meaning and love, including their cell phones and tablets.
- d) We cannot evangelize digital culture without first understanding it. Young people, and among them seminarians, young priests, and young consecrated men and women, who often have deep direct experience of it, are best suited to carry out the Church's mission in the digital environment, as well as to accompany the rest of the community, including pastors, to be come more familiar with its dynamics.
- e) Within the synod process, the initiatives of the Digital Synod (Project "The Church Listens to You"), show the potential of the digital environment in a missionary key, the creativity and generosity of those who engage in it, and the importance of offering them training, accompaniment, opportunities for peer-to-peer discussion and collaboration.

### **Issues to be addressed**

- f) The Internet is increasingly present in the lives of children and families. Although it has great potential to enhance our lives, it can also cause harm and injury, such as through bullying, misinformation, sexual exploitation and addiction. There is an urgent need to consider how the Christian community can support families in ensuring that the online space is not only safe but also spiritually life-giving.
- g) There are many valuable and useful Church-related online initiatives that provide excellent catechesis and faith formation. Unfortunately, there are also sites where faith-related issues are addressed in a superficial, polarized and even hate-filled manner. As a church and as individual digital missionaries, we have a duty to ask ourselves how to ensure that our online presence constitutes a growth experience for those with whom we communicate.
- h) Online apostolic initiatives have a reach and scope that extends beyond traditionally understood territorial boundaries. This raises important questions about how they can be regulated and to which ecclesiastical authority is responsible for supervision.
- i) We must also consider the implications of the new digital missionary frontier for the renewal of existing parish and diocesan structures. In an increasingly digital world, how do we avoid becoming prisoners of the logic of conservation and instead release energies for new forms of mission exercise?
- j) The pandemic from COVID-19 has stimulated online pastoral creativity, helping to reduce the effects of the experience of isolation and loneliness experienced particularly by elderly and vulnerable community members. Catholic educational institutions have also effectively used online platforms to continue offering formation and catechesis during the

lockdown. It is good for us to consider what this experience has taught us and what the lasting benefits might be for the mission of the church in the digital environment.

- k) Many young people, who also seek beauty, have abandoned the physical spaces of the Church where we try to invite them in favor of online spaces. This implies finding new ways to engage them and offer them formation and catechesis. This is an issue to reflect on pastorally.

## Proposals

- l) We propose that churches offer recognition, training and accompaniment to digital missionaries already working, while also facilitating meetings among them.
- m) It is important to create collaborative networks of influencers that include people of other religions or who profess no faith, but collaborate on common causes to promote the dignity of the human person, justice and care for the common home.

## 18. Participating bodies

### Convergences

- a) As members of the faithful People of God, all the baptized are co-responsible for the mission, each according to his or her vocation, experience and competence; therefore, all contribute to imagining and deciding steps for the reform of Christian communities and the whole Church, so that it lives "the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing." Synodality, in the composition and functioning of the bodies in which it takes shape, has mission as its purpose. Co-responsibility is for mission: this attests that one is truly gathered in the name of Jesus, this frees the bodies of participation from bureaucratic involutions and worldly logics of power, this makes gathering fruitful.
- b) In the light of the recent magisterium (especially *Lumen Gentium* and *Evangelii Gaudium*), this co-responsibility of all in mission must be the criterion underlying the structuring of Christian communities and the entire local Church with all its services, in all its institutions, in each of its communion bodies (cf. *1 Cor.* 12:4-31). The proper recognition of the responsibility of the laity for mission in the world cannot become a pretext for assigning the care of the Christian community to bishops and priests alone.
- c) The authority par excellence is that of the Word of God, which must inspire every meeting of participatory bodies, every consultation and every decision-making process. For this to happen, it is necessary that, at every level, the gathering draws meaning and strength from the Eucharist and takes place in the light of the Word heard and shared in prayer.
- d) The composition of the various councils for the discernment and decision-making of a synodal missionary community must provide for the presence of men and women who boast an apostolic profile; who are distinguished first and foremost not by assiduous frequentation of ecclesial spaces, but by a genuine evangelical witness in the most ordinary realities of life. The People of God are all the more missionary, the more capable they are of making the voices of those who already live the mission by inhabiting the world and its peripheries resonate within themselves, even in the bodies of participation.

### Issues to be addressed

- e) In light of what we have shared, we feel it is important to reflect on how to promote participation in the various councils, especially when practitioners feel they are not up to the task. Synodality grows in the involvement of each member in processes of discernment and decision-making for the mission of the Church: in this sense we are edified and encouraged by many small Christian communities in emerging Churches, which live a daily fraternal "body to body" around the Word and the Eucharist,
- f) In the composition of participation bodies, we cannot further procrastinate on the task entrusted by Pope Francis in *Amoris laetitia*. The participation of men and women who live complex affective and conjugal vicissitudes "can be expressed in different ecclesial services: it is therefore necessary to discern which of the various forms of exclusion currently practiced in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional spheres can be overcome" (No. 299). The discernment in question also concerns the exclusion from parish and diocesan community participation bodies practiced in not a few local churches.
- g) In the perspective from the evangelical originality of ecclesial communion: how do we interweave the consultative and deliberative aspects of synodality? Based on the charismatic and ministerial configuration of the People of God: how do we integrate in the various participatory bodies the tasks of advising, discerning, and deciding?

## Proposals

- h) Based on the understanding of the People of God as an active subject of the mission of evangelization, let the mandatory nature of Pastoral Councils in Christian communities and local churches be codified. Together, let participatory bodies be strengthened, with an adequate presence of laymen and laywomen, with the attribution of discernment functions in view of truly apostolic decisions.
- i) Participatory bodies represent the first area in which to experience the dynamic of accountability of those who exercise responsibility. While we encourage them in their efforts, we invite them to practice the culture of accountability to the community of which they are an expression.

## 19. Church groupings in the communion of the whole church

### Convergences

- a) We are persuaded that each Church, within the communion of Churches, has much to offer, because the Holy Spirit abundantly distributes His gifts for the common benefit. If we look at the Church as the Body of Christ, we understand more easily that the various members are interdependent and share the same life: "if one member suffers, all the members suffer together; and if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with him" (1 Cor. 12:26). Therefore, we want to develop the spiritual attitudes that arise from this outlook: humility and generosity, respect and sharing. Also important are the willingness to grow in mutual knowledge and to set up the necessary structures so that the exchange of spiritual riches, missionary disciples and material goods can become a concrete reality
- b) The issue of local church groupings has proven to be crucial to a full exercise

of synodality in the Church. In responding to the question of how to configure instances of synodality and collegiality involving groupings of local churches, the Assembly agreed on the importance of ecclesial discernment carried out by the Bishops' Conferences and Continental Assemblies for the proper conduct of the first phase of the synodal process.

- c) The synod process has shown how the bodies provided for in the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches* deploy their function more effectively when they are understood from the local Churches. The fact that the Church (*Ecclesia tota*) is a communion of Churches requires each bishop to perceive and live out solicitude for all Churches (*sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum*) as a constitutive aspect of his ministry as pastor of a Church.
- d) The first phase of the synodal process highlighted the decisive role of the Bishops' Conferences and brought out the need for an instance of synodality and collegiality at the continental level. Bodies operating at these levels contribute to the exercise of synodality while respecting local realities and processes of inculturation. The Assembly expressed confidence that the risk of uniformity and centralism in Church governance could be avoided in this way.

### Issues to be addressed

- e) Before creating new structures, we feel the need to strengthen and revitalize existing ones. There is also a need to study, on an ecclesiological and canonical level, the implications of reforming structures related to groupings of churches so that they take on a more fully synodal character.
- f) Looking at the synodical practices of the Church of the first millennium, it is proposed to study how ancient institutions can be recovered in the current canonical order, harmonizing them with newly created ones, such as Episcopal Conferences.
- g) We consider it necessary to further explore the doctrinal and juridical nature of the Bishops' Conferences, recognizing the possibility of collegial action even with respect to questions of doctrine arising in the local sphere, thus reopening the reflection on the *motu proprio Apostolos suos*.
- h) Let the canons referring to particular councils (plenary and provincial) be revised, in order to realize through them a greater participation of the People of God, following the example of the dispensation obtained in the case of the recent plenary council of Australia.

### Proposals

- i) Among the structures already provided for in the Code, we propose to strengthen the ecclesiastical province or metropolia as a place of communion of the local churches in a territory.
- j) Based on the requested insights about the configuration of church groupings, implement the exercise of synodality at regional, national and continental levels.
- k) Where necessary we suggest the creation of international ecclesiastical provinces, for the benefit of bishops who do not belong to any bishops' conference and to promote communion among churches across national borders.
- l) In Latin-rite countries in which there is also a hierarchy of Eastern Catholic Churches, include the Eastern bishops in the national bishops' conferences, keeping intact their

governmental autonomy established by its own Code.

- m) A canonical configuration of the Continental Assemblies should be worked out that, while respecting the particularity of each continent, takes due account of the participation of the Bishops' Conferences and that of the Churches, with their own delegates who make present the variety of the faithful People of God.

## 20. Synod of Bishops and Church Assembly

### Convergences

- a) Even as it experienced the fatigue of "walking together," the Assembly sensed the evangelical joy of being People of God. The novelties proposed for this moment of the synodal journey were generally welcomed. The most obvious ones are: the transition of the celebration of the Synod from an event to a process (as indicated by the apostolic constitution *Episcopalis communio*); the presence of other members, women and men, alongside the bishops; the active presence of fraternal delegates; the spiritual retreat in preparation for the Assembly; the celebrations of the Eucharist in St. Peter's; the atmosphere of prayer and the method of conversation in the Spirit; and the very arrangement of the Assembly in the Paul VI Hall.
- b) The Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, while preserving its eminently episcopal character, manifested well on this occasion the intrinsic link between the synodal dimension of the life of the Church (the participation of all), the collegial dimension (the solicitude of the bishops for the whole Church), and the primatial dimension (the service of the Bishop of Rome, guarantor of communion).
- c) The synodal process has been and is a time of grace that has encouraged us. God is offering us the opportunity to experience a new culture of synodality, capable of guiding the life and mission of the Church. It was reminded, however, that it is not enough to create structures of co-responsibility if personal conversion to a missionary synodality is lacking. Synodal instances, at every level, do not reduce the personal responsibility of those who are called to take part in it, by virtue of their ministry and charisms, but rather further solicit it.

### Issues to be addressed

- d) The presence of other members besides the bishops as witnesses to the synodal journey was appreciated. However, the question remains open about the impact of their presence as full members on the episcopal character of the Assembly. Some see the risk that the specific task of the bishops is not adequately understood. It will also need to be clarified under what criteria non-Bishop members can be called to be part of the Assembly.
- e) Experiences such as the First Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Organisms of the People of God in Brazil, and the Australian Plenary Council were reported. It remains to identify and deepen how to articulate synodality and collegiality in the future, distinguishing (without undue separation) the contribution of all members of the People of God to the elaboration of decisions and the specific task of the bishops. The articulation of synodality, collegiality, and primacy should not be interpreted in a static or linear form, but according to a dynamic circularity, in a differentiated co-responsibility.



- f) While at the regional level it is possible to think of successive steps (an ecclesial assembly followed by an episcopal assembly), it is considered appropriate to clarify how this could be proposed with reference to the Catholic Church as a whole. Some believe that the formula adopted in this Assembly responds to this need, others propose that an ecclesial assembly be followed by an episcopal assembly to conclude the discernment, and still others prefer to reserve the role of members of the synodal assembly to the bishops.
- g) How experts from different disciplines, particularly theologians and canonists, can contribute to the work of the synodal assembly and the processes of a synodical church will also need to be explored and clarified.
- h) It will also be necessary to reflect on how the Internet and media communication act on synod processes.

### **Proposals**

- i) Ensure an evaluation of synod processes at all levels of the Church.
- j) Let the fruits of the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops be evaluated.

## TO CONTINUE THE JOURNEY

*"To what can we compare the kingdom of God,  
or with what parable can we describe it?" (Mark 4:30)*

The Word of the Lord comes before every word of the Church. The words of the disciples, even those of a synod, are only an echo of what He Himself says.

To proclaim the Kingdom, Jesus chose to speak in parables. He found in the fundamental experiences of human life - in the signs of nature, in the gestures of work, in the facts of everyday life - the images to reveal the mystery of God. Thus he told us that the Kingdom transcends us but is not foreign to us. Either we see it in the things of the world or we will never see it.

In a seed falling into the earth Jesus saw his destiny represented. Seemingly a nothingness destined to rot, yet inhabited by an unstoppable, unpredictable, Paschal dynamism of life. A dynamism destined to give life, to become bread for many. Destined to become Eucharist.

Today, in a culture of striving for supremacy and obsession with visibility, the Church is called to repeat Jesus' words, to revive them in all their power.

"To what can we compare the kingdom of God, or with what parable can we describe it?" This question of the Lord illuminates the work now ahead of us. It is not a matter of scattering on many fronts, chasing after an efficientistic and procedural logic. Rather, it is a matter of grasping, among the many words and proposals in this *Report*, what presents itself as a small but future-laden seed, and imagining how to deliver it to the soil that will make it mature for the lives of many.

"How will this take place?" asked Mary in Nazareth (*Lk. 1:34*) after hearing the Word. There is only one answer: to stand in the shadow of the Spirit and be enveloped by its power.

As we turn our gaze to the time that separates us from the Second Session, we thank the Lord for the journey thus far and for the graces with which He has blessed it. We entrust the next phase to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a sign of sure hope and consolation in the journey of God's faithful People, and of the Holy Apostles Simon and Jude, whose feast day we celebrate today.

*Adsumus Sancte Spiritus!*

Rome, Oct. 28, 2023, Feast of Sts. Simon and Jude, Apostles

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