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Summary:

ÿ Synod23 – Summary Report of the first Session of the XVI

Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (4-29 October 2023)

We publish below the text of the Summary Report of the first Session of the XVI 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

(4-29 October 2023)

Summary Report

A SYNODAL CHURCH ON A MISSION

28 October 2023

(12.00 pm)

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A SYNODAL CHURCH ON A MISSION

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TO CONTINUE THE PATH

INTRODUCTION

Dear sisters, dear brothers,

"we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor 12:13). It is the experience, full of joy and gratitude, that we had in this First Session of the Synodal Assembly, which was held from 4 to 28 October 2023, on the theme "For a Synodal Church. Communion, participation, mission". Through the common grace of Baptism, we have been able to live together with one heart and one soul, despite the diversity of our origins, languages and cultures. Like a choir we tried to sing in the variety of voices and in the unity of souls. The Holy Spirit has allowed us to experience the harmony that He alone can generate: it is a gift and a testimony in a torn and divided world.

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

involved with their families and their people in these tragic events. We have carried everyone, at all times, in our hearts and in prayer, asking ourselves how our Churches can promote paths of reconciliation, hope, justice and peace.

Our meeting took place in Rome, around the successor of Peter, who confirmed us in the faith and pushed us to be bold in the mission. It was a grace to begin the journey of these days with an ecumenical vigil, in which we saw the leaders and representatives of the other Christian confessions praying together with the Pope at Peter's tomb: unity silently ferments within the Holy Church of God ; we see it with our eyes and full of joy we bear witness to it. «How beautiful and how sweet it is that brothers live together!» (Ps 133.1).

At the will of the Holy Father, the Assembly saw other members of the People of God gather 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. Lay men and women, consecrated men and women, deacons and priests were, with the Bishops, witnesses of a process that intends 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 of the synodal process. In the multiplicity of interventions and the plurality of positions, the experience of a Church that is learning the style of synodality and seeking the most suitable forms to achieve it resonated.

It has been more than two years since we began the journey that led us to this Session. After the opening of the synod process on 9 October 2021, all the Churches, albeit at different paces, engaged in a listening process that saw diocesan, national and continental stages, the results of which were incorporated into the respective documents. This Session opened the phase in which the entire Church receives the fruits of this consultation to discern, in prayer and dialogue, the paths that the Spirit asks us to follow. 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 of the Church. The daily life of believers, the experience of the Churches in every people and culture, the multiple testimonies of holiness, the reflection of theologians were the soil in which it germinated and grew. The 2021-2024 Synod continues to draw on the energy of that seed and develop its potential. The synodal path is in fact implementing what the Council taught about the Church as a Mystery and People of God, called to holiness. It enhances 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, which prolongs its inspiration and relaunches its prophetic force for today's world.

After a month of work, the Lord now calls us to return to our Churches to pass on the fruits of our work to all of you and continue the journey together. Here in Rome there were only a few of us, but the meaning of the synodal path announced by the Holy Father is to involve all the baptized. We fervently want this to happen and want to work hard to make it possible. In this *summary report* we have collected the main elements that emerged in the dialogue, prayer and discussion that characterized these days. Our personal stories will enrich this synthesis with the tone of lived experience, which no page can convey. We will thus be able to testify to you how rich the moments of silence and listening, 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 reply; offer your contribution as a gift for others and not as an absolute certainty. However, the grace of the Lord has led us to

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

We have understood, in fact, 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. Evangelical brotherhood is in fact like a lamp, which must not be placed under a bushel, but on the lampstand so that it sheds light on the whole house (see *Mt 5:15*). The world needs this testimony today more than ever. As disciples of Jesus we cannot avoid the task of showing and transmitting the love and tenderness of God to a wounded humanity.

The work of this Session took place following the path offered by *the Instrumentum laboris*, which invited us to reflect on the characteristic signs of a synodal Church and on the dynamics of communion, mission and participation that inhabit it. The comparison of the proposed questions confirmed the quality of the overall layout of the track. We were able to delve into the merits of the issues, identify the themes in need of in-depth analysis, and put forward an initial nucleus of proposals. In light of the progress made, the *Summary Report* does not take up or reiterate all the contents of *the Instrumentum laboris*, but relaunches those considered to be priorities. It is in no way a final document, but a tool at the service of 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 found synodality. Here the style of synodality appears as a way of acting and operating in the faith that arises from the contemplation of the Trinity and values unity and variety as ecclesial wealth. 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 presents itself mainly as a joint journey of the People of God and as a fruitful dialogue of charisms and ministries at the service of the advent of the Kingdom. The third part is entitled "*Weaving bonds, building communities*". Here synodality appears mainly as a set of processes and a network of organisms that allow exchange between the Churches and dialogue with the world.

In each of the three parts, each chapter collects the *convergences*, the *issues to be addressed* and the *proposals* that emerged from the dialogue. The *convergences* identify the fixed points at which reflection can look: they are like a map that allows us to orient ourselves on the path and not lose the way. The *issues to be addressed* bring together the points on which we have recognized that it is necessary to continue the theological, pastoral and canonical study: they are like crossroads at which it is necessary to pause, to better understand the direction to take. The *proposals* instead indicate possible paths to follow: some are suggested, others recommended, still others requested more forcefully and determination.

In the coming months, the Episcopal Conferences and the Hierarchical Structures of the Eastern Catholic Churches, acting as a link 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 achieved, they are called to focus on the most relevant and urgent questions and proposals, encouraging their theological and pastoral study and indicating the canonical implications.

We carry in our hearts the desire, supported by hope, that the climate of mutual listening and sincere dialogue that we experienced during the days of common work 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 SYNODAL 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. Subsequently they took on particular historical forms in the various Churches and Christian traditions. The Second Vatican Council "updated" them and Pope Francis encourages the Church to renew them again. The 2021-2024 Synod also fits into this process. Through it, the Holy People of God discovered that a synodal way of praying, listening and speaking, rooted in the Word of God and interwoven with moments of encounter in joy, and sometimes also in fatigue, leads to a deeper awareness that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. An invaluable fruit is the increased awareness of our identity as the faithful People of God, within which each one is the bearer of a dignity deriving from Baptism and called to co-responsibility for the common mission of evangelization.
- b) This process has renewed our experience and our desire for a Church that is the home and family of God. It is precisely with this experience and this desire for a Church closer to people, less bureaucratic and more relational that the terms "synodality" and "synodality", offering a first understanding that needs to meet a better clarification. It is the Church that young people had declared they desired already in 2018, on the occasion of the Synod dedicated to them.
- c) The very way in which the Assembly took place, starting from the arrangement of the people sitting in small groups around round tables in the Paul VI Hall, comparable to the biblical image of the wedding banquet (Rev 19.9) , it is emblematic of a synodal Church and image of the Eucharist, source and summit of synodality, with the Word of God at the 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) Among us were present sisters and brothers of peoples who were victims of war, martyrdom, persecution and hunger. The situation of these peoples, for whom it has often been impossible to participate in the synod process, has entered into 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 the restoration of trust among the many gifts that the Spirit has poured out on the Church during this synodal process. The openness to listening and accompanying everyone, including those who have suffered abuse and wounds in the Church, has made visible many who have long felt invisible. We still have a long journey ahead towards reconciliation and justice, which requires addressing the structural conditions that allowed such abuses and making concrete gestures of penance.
- f) We know that "synodality" is a term unknown to many members of the People of God, which arouses confusion and concern in some. Among the fears, there is that the teaching of the Church will be changed, distancing us 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 could become a body of majority deliberation devoid of its ecclesial and spiritual character, putting nature at risk

hierarchy of the Church. Some fear being forced to change; others fear that nothing will change and that there will be too little courage to move to the rhythm of the living Tradition. Some perplexities and opposition also hide the fear of losing power and the privileges that derive from 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 Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA), the fruit of the missionary synodal process of that region.

- h) Synodality can be understood as the journey of Christians with Christ and towards the Kingdom, together with all humanity; mission-oriented, it involves coming together at different levels of ecclesial life, mutual listening, dialogue, community discernment, the creation of consensus as an expression of the presence of Christ alive in the Spirit and the taking of a decision in a differentiated co-responsibility.
- i) Through experience and encounter, we have grown together in this awareness. In summary, from the first days, the Assembly found itself shaped by two beliefs: the first is that the experience we have shared in these years is authentically Christian and must be welcomed in all its richness and depth; the second is that the terms "synodal" and "synodality" require a more careful clarification of their levels of meaning in different cultures. Substantial agreement emerged on the fact that, with the necessary clarifications, the synodal perspective represents the future of the Church.

Issues to address

- j) Starting from the work of reflection already carried out, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of synodality at the different levels, from pastoral to theological and canonical use, avoiding the risk of it sounding too vague or generic, or appearing as a passing fad. Likewise, it is considered necessary to clarify the relationship between synodality and communion, as well as that between synodality and collegiality.
- k) The desire has emerged to enhance the differences in the practice and understanding of synodality between the traditions of the Christian East and the Latin tradition, also in the ongoing synodal process, encouraging the meeting between them.
- l) In particular, the many expressions of synodal life in cultural contexts in which people are used to walking together as a community must be brought out. In this line, it can be stated that the synodal practice is part of the prophetic response of the Church to an individualism that turns in on itself, to a populism that divides and to a globalization that homogenizes and flattens. It does not solve these problems, but provides a hopeful alternative way of being and acting, which integrates a plurality of perspectives and which needs to be further explored and illuminated.

Proposals

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

- o) Finally, the need for synodal culture to become more intergenerational has strongly emerged, with spaces that allow young people to speak freely with their families, with their peers and with their pastors, also through digital channels.
- p) It is proposed to promote, in an appropriate forum, the theological work of in-depth terminological and conceptual study of the notion and practice of synodality before the Second Session of the Assembly, taking advantage of the rich heritage of studies subsequent to the Second Vatican Council and, in particular, of 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 canonistic implications of the perspective of synodality require a similar clarification. In this regard, it is proposed to establish a special intercontinental commission of theologians and canonists, in view of the Second Session of the Assembly.
- r) The time seems to have come for a revision of the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. A preliminary study is therefore started.

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 makes us move from the "I" to the "We" and places us at the service of the world. Synodality translates the Trinitarian dynamic with which God comes to meet humanity into spiritual attitudes and ecclesial processes. For this to happen, all the baptized must commit to reciprocally exercising their vocation, their charism, their ministry. Only in this way will the Church be able to truly have a "conversation" within itself and with the world (see *Ecclesiam suam* 67), walking side by side with every human being with the style of Jesus.
- b) From its origins, the synodal path of the Church has been oriented towards the Kingdom, which will be fully fulfilled when God is all in all. The testimony of the ecclesial fraternity and the missionary dedication to the service of the least will never be equal to the Mystery of which they are a sign and instrument. The Church does not reflect on its own synodal configuration to place itself at the center of the announcement, but to best carry out, despite its constitutive incompleteness, the service of the advent of the Kingdom.
- c) The renewal of the Christian community is possible only by recognizing the primacy of grace. If spiritual depth is lacking, synodality remains a superficial renewal. What we are called to do, however, is not only to translate a spiritual experience gained elsewhere into community processes, but more profoundly to experience how fraternal relationships are the place and form of an authentic encounter with God. In this sense the synodal perspective, while drawing to 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 which, despite its limitations, is fruitful for allowing authentic listening and for discerning what the Spirit says to the Churches. Its practice aroused joy, amazement and gratitude and was experienced as a path of renewal that transforms individuals, groups and the Church. The word "conversation"

expresses something more than simple dialogue: it harmoniously intertwines thought and feeling and generates a shared living world. For this reason we can say that conversion is at stake in the conversation. This is an anthropological fact that is found in different peoples and cultures, united by the practice of gathering together in solidarity to discuss and decide vital issues for the community. Grace brings this human experience to completion: conversing "in the Spirit" means living the experience of sharing in the light of faith and in the search for God's will, in an authentically evangelical atmosphere within which the Holy Spirit can make his voice heard unmistakable.

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

Issues to address

- f) To truly listen to the will of the Father, it seems necessary to delve deeper into the criteria of ecclesial discernment from a theological perspective, so that the reference to the freedom and newness of the Spirit is appropriately coordinated with the event of Jesus Christ which occurred "once forever" (Heb 10:10). This requires first of all to specify the relationship between listening to the Word of God attested in Scripture, the acceptance of Tradition and the teaching of the Church and the prophetic reading of the signs of the times.
- g) To this end, it is essential to promote anthropological and spiritual visions capable of integrating and not juxtaposing the intellectual and emotional dimensions of the experience of faith, overcoming any reductionism and any 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 human and social sciences, also in light of other models of ecclesial discernment which are carried out following the sequence of "see, judge, act" or articulating the steps of "recognize, interpret, choose".
- i) The contribution that *lectio divina* and the various spiritual traditions, ancient and recent, can offer to the practice of discernment must be developed. It is in fact appropriate to valorise the plurality of forms and styles, methods and criteria that the Holy Spirit has suggested over the centuries and which are part of the spiritual heritage of the Church.

Proposals

- j) It aims to experiment and adapt the conversation in the Spirit and other forms of discernment in the life of the Churches, valorising the richness of the different spiritual traditions depending on the cultures and contexts. Appropriate forms of accompaniment can facilitate this practice, helping to grasp its logic and overcome any resistance. k) Each local Church equips itself with suitable and prepared people to facilitate and accompany processes of ecclesial discernment.
- l) It is important that the practice of discernment is also implemented in the pastoral sphere, in a manner appropriate to the contexts, to illuminate the concreteness of ecclesial life. It will allow us to better recognize the charisms present in the community, to wisely entrust tasks and

ministries, to plan pastoral paths in the light of the Spirit, going beyond the simple 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 into the Paschal faith and inserts us into Trinitarian and ecclesial communion. This itinerary has a significant variety of forms depending on the age at which it is undertaken and the different emphases of the Eastern and Western traditions. However, listening to the Word and the conversion of life, liturgical celebration and inclusion in the community and its mission are always intertwined. Precisely for this reason the catechumenal path, with the gradualness of its stages and passages, is the paradigm of all ecclesial walking together.
- b) Initiation brings you into contact with a great variety of vocations and ecclesial ministries. In them the maternal face of a Church is expressed that teaches its children to walk by walking with them. He listens to them and, as he answers their doubts and questions, he is enriched by the novelty that each person brings within himself, with his history, his language and his 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" (1Cor 12,13). For this reason, among all the baptized there is an authentic equality of dignity and a common responsibility for the mission, according to each one's vocation. Through 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 in the ability to intuitively grasp what is in conformity with the truth of faith. The synodal processes valorise this gift and allow us to verify the existence of that consensus of the faithful (*consensus fidelium*) which constitutes 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 own specific vocation, rooted in their common baptismal dignity, at the service of the mission. Its importance must be more highlighted and placed in relation to the variety of charisms and ministries that shape the synodal face of the Church.
- e) The celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sundays, is the first and fundamental way in which the Holy People of God gather and meet. Where it is not possible, the community, although 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 his Blood, the Lord makes us one body among ourselves and with Him. Starting from Paul's use of the term *koinonia* (see 1Cor 10,16-17), the Christian tradition he preserved the word "communion" to indicate at the same time full participation in the Eucharist and the nature of relationships between the faithful and between the Churches. While it opens us to the contemplation of divine life, to the unfathomable depths of the Trinitarian mystery, this term refers us to the daily life of our relationships: in the simplest gestures with which we

Let us open to each other and the breath of the Spirit truly circulates. For this reason, the communion celebrated in the Eucharist and which flows from it configures and orients 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 address

- g) The sacrament of Baptism cannot be understood in an isolated way, outside the logic of Christian initiation, nor in an individualistic way. It is therefore necessary to further deepen the contribution to the understanding of synodality that can come from a more unitary vision of Christian initiation.
- h) The maturation of the *sensus fidei* requires not only having received Baptism, but also developing the grace of the sacrament in a life of authentic discipleship, which enables one to discern the action of the Spirit from what is the expression of dominant thought, the fruit of cultural conditioning or in any case not consistent with the Gospel. This is a topic to be explored with adequate theological reflection.
- i) Reflection on synodality can offer ideas for renewal for the understanding of Confirmation, with which the grace of the Spirit articulates the variety of gifts and charisms in the harmony of Pentecost. In light of the different ecclesial experiences, the way to make the preparation and celebration of this sacrament more fruitful must be studied, so as to reawaken in all the faithful the call to build the community, to mission in the world and to bear witness to the faith.
- j) From a pastoral theological point of view, it is important to continue research on the way in which the catechumenal logic can illuminate other pastoral paths, such as that of preparation for marriage, or accompaniment in choices of professional and social commitment, or training for ministry itself orderly, in which the entire ecclesial community must be involved.

Proposals

- k) If the Eucharist gives shape to synodality, the first step to take is to honor its grace with a celebratory style worthy of the gift and with authentic fraternity. The liturgy celebrated with authenticity is the first and fundamental school of discipleship and brotherhood. Before any of our training initiatives, we must let ourselves be formed by her powerful beauty and the noble simplicity of her gestures.
- l) A second step refers to the need, reported by many, to make the liturgical language more accessible to the faithful and more embodied in the diversity of cultures. Without questioning the continuity with tradition and the need for liturgical training, we urge a reflection on this theme and the attribution of greater responsibility to the Episcopal Conferences, along the lines of the *motu proprio Magnum Principium* .
- m) A third step consists in the pastoral commitment to valorise all forms of community prayer, without limiting itself to the celebration of Mass alone. Other expressions of liturgical prayer, as well as the practices of popular piety, which reflect the genius of

local cultures, are elements of great importance to encourage the involvement of all the faithful, to gradually introduce the Christian mystery and to bring those who are less familiar with the Church closer to the encounter with the Lord. Among the forms of popular piety, Marian devotion stands out in particular, for its ability to support and nourish the faith of many.

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

Convergences

- a) The poor ask the Church for love. By love we mean 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 fully take charge of the dignity of the person. Respect and recognition are powerful tools for activating personal abilities, so that everyone is the subject of their own growth path and not the object of the caring action of others.
- b) The preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith: Jesus, poor and humble, made friends with 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 rejected is a theological category before a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. For Saint John Paul II, God grants his mercy to them first. This divine preference has consequences in the lives of all Christians, called to nourish "the same mind as Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5).
- c) There is not just one kind of poverty. Among the many faces of the poor there are those of all those who do not have what is necessary to lead a dignified life. Then there are those of migrants and refugees; indigenous, native and Afro-descendant peoples; those who suffer violence and abuse, especially women; people with addictions; minorities who are systematically denied a voice; abandoned elderly people; victims of racism, exploitation and trafficking, especially minors; exploited workers; economically excluded and others living in the suburbs. The most vulnerable of the vulnerable, for whom constant advocacy is necessary, 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 torment many countries on different continents and condemns the corrupt political and economic systems that are the cause.
- d) Alongside the many forms of material poverty, our world also knows those of spiritual poverty, understood as the lack of meaning in life. Excessive concern for oneself can lead one to see others as a threat and to retreat into individualism.
As has been noted, material poverty and spiritual poverty, when they team up, can find answers to each other's needs. This is a way of walking together that makes concrete the perspective of the synodal Church which will reveal to us the fullest meaning of the evangelical beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt 5.3).
- e) Standing alongside 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 reactions makes the ecological crisis and in particular climate change a threat to the survival of humanity, as underlined by the apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum*, published by Pope Francis in conjunction with the opening of the work of the Synodal Assembly. The Churches of the countries most exposed to the consequences of climate change are keenly aware of the urgency of a change of direction and this represents their contribution to the path 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, companies or societal structures. For this reason, it is essential to listen to their requests and their point of view, in order to lend them a voice, using their words.
- g) Christians have the duty to commit themselves to actively participate in the construction of the common good and the defense of the dignity of life, drawing inspiration from the social doctrine of the Church and operating in different forms (engagement in civil society organisations, trade unions, movements popular, in grassroots associations, in the field of politics, etc.).
The Church expresses profound gratitude for their action. Communities support those who work in these fields in an authentic spirit of charity and service. Their action is part of the Church's mission of announcing the Gospel and collaborating in the advent of the Kingdom of God.
- h) In the poor the Christian community encounters the face and flesh of Christ, who, although he was rich, became poor for us, so that we might become rich through his poverty (see 2 Cor 8:9) . She is called not only to be close to them, but to learn from them. If holding a synod means walking together with Him who is the way, a synodal Church needs to put the poor at the center of all aspects of their lives: through their suffering they have direct knowledge of the suffering Christ (see *Evangelii gaudium*, n . . 198). The similarity of their life with that of the Lord makes the poor heralds of a salvation received as a gift and witnesses of the joy of the Gospel.

Issues to address

- 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 considering 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 that the Church must do more and more.
- j) The prophetic denunciation of situations of injustice and the action of pressure on political decision-makers, which requires the use of forms of diplomacy, must be kept in dynamic tension so as not to lose clarity and fruitfulness. In particular, it is necessary to ensure that the use of public or private funds by Church structures does not affect the freedom to speak in the name of the needs of the Gospel.
- k) Action in the fields of education, health 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 within itself and in society . Organizations active in this field are invited to consider themselves an expression of the Christian community and to avoid an impersonal style of living charity. They are also encouraged to network and coordinate.
- l) The Church must be honest in examining how it respects the demands of justice towards those who work in the institutions connected to it, to bear witness to its coherence with integrity.
- m) In a synodal Church the sense of solidarity is also played out on the level of the exchange of gifts and the sharing of resources between local Churches of different regions. These are relationships that promote the unity of the Church, creating links between the Christian communities involved. It is necessary to focus on the conditions to be guaranteed so that the presbyters who come to the aid of the Churches poor in clergy are not only a functional remedy, but a resource for the growth of

Church that sends them and the one that receives them. Similarly, we need to work to ensure that economic aid does not degenerate into welfare, but promotes authentic evangelical solidarity and is managed in a transparent and reliable way.

Proposals

- n) The social doctrine of the Church is a resource that is too little known in which to invest again.
The local Churches must commit themselves not only to making its contents better known, but to encouraging their appropriation through practices that put their inspiration into action.
- o) The experience of meeting, sharing life and serving the poor and marginalized becomes an integral part of all the training courses offered by Christian communities: it is a requirement of faith, not an optional extra. This applies in particular to candidates for the ordained ministry and consecrated life.
- p) As part of the rethinking of the diaconal ministry, a more decisive one should be promoted orientation towards service to the poor.
- q) They integrate themselves in a more explicit and attentive way in teaching, liturgy and practices of the Church the biblical and theological foundations of integral ecology.

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

Convergences

- a) Christians live within specific cultures, bringing Christ into them in Word and Sacrament. By committing themselves to the service of charity, they welcome with humility and joy the mystery of Christ who already awaits them in every place and at all times. In this way they become one Church from "every tribe, language, 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 have a direct, and mostly joyful, experience of the plurality of expressions of being Church.
- c) The Churches live in increasingly multicultural and multi-religious contexts, in which commitment to dialogue between religion and culture together with the other groups that make up society is essential. Living the mission of the Church in these contexts requires a style of presence, service and proclamation that seeks to build bridges, cultivate mutual understanding and engage in an evangelization that accompanies, listens and learns. The image of "taking off your shoes" to meet others as equals resonated several times in the Assembly, 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 a direct link with geographically distant Churches. Faced with increasingly hostile attitudes towards 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 between peoples. The

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

- e) The missionaries gave their lives to bring the Good News throughout the world. Their commitment gives an eloquent testimony to the power of the Gospel. However, particular attention and sensitivity are necessary in contexts in which "mission" is a word full of a painful historical legacy, which today hinders communion. In some places the proclamation of the Gospel has been associated with colonization and even genocide. Evangelizing in these contexts requires recognizing the mistakes made, learning a new sensitivity to these issues and accompanying a generation that seeks to forge Christian identities beyond colonialism. Respect and humility are fundamental attitudes to recognize that we complete each other and that the encounter with different cultures can enrich the living and thinking of the faith of Christian communities.
- f) The Church teaches the necessity and encourages the practice of interreligious dialogue as part of building communion among all peoples. In a world of violence and fragmentation, a testimony to the unity of humanity, of its common origin and of its common destiny, in a coordinated and fraternal solidarity towards social justice, peace, reconciliation and care appears increasingly urgent of the common home. The Church is aware that the Spirit can speak through the voices of men and women of every religion, belief and culture.

Issues to address

- g) It is necessary to cultivate sensitivity to the richness of the variety of expressions of being Church. This requires the search for a dynamic balance between the dimension of the Church as a whole and its local roots, between respect for the bond of the unity of the Church and the risk of homogenization which suffocates variety. Meanings and priorities vary between different contexts and this requires identifying and promoting forms of decentralization and intermediate instances.
- h) The Church is also affected by polarization and mistrust in crucial areas, such as liturgical life and moral, social and theological reflection. We must recognize the causes through dialogue and undertake courageous processes of revitalization of communion and reconciliation to overcome them.
- i) In our local Churches, we sometimes experience tensions between different ways of understanding evangelization, which focus on the testimony of life, on the commitment to human promotion, on dialogue with faiths and cultures and on the explicit announcement of Gospel. Likewise, a tension emerges between the explicit announcement of Jesus Christ and the valorization of the characteristics of each culture in search of the evangelical traits (*semina Verbi*) that it already contains.
- j) Among the issues to be explored in greater depth, the possible confusion between the message of the Gospel and the culture of the evangelizer was indicated.
- k) The spread of conflicts, with the trade and use of increasingly powerful weapons, raises the question, raised in various groups, of more careful reflection and training in managing conflicts in a non-violent way. This is a qualified contribution that Christians can offer to today's world, also in dialogue and collaboration with other religions.

Proposals

- l) There needs to be renewed attention to the question of the languages we use to speak to the minds and hearts of people in a great diversity of contexts, in a way that is accessible and beautiful.
- m) In view of experimenting with forms of decentralization, it is necessary to define a shared reference framework for their management and evaluation, identifying all the actors involved and their roles. For reasons of coherence, the processes of discernment regarding decentralization must take place in synodal style, involving the participation and contribution of all the actors involved at the different levels.
- n) New paradigms are needed for pastoral commitment with indigenous populations, in the line of a journey together and not of an action done to them or for them. Their participation in decision-making processes at all levels can contribute to a more vibrant and missional Church.
- o) From the work of the Assembly, emerges the request for a better knowledge of the teachings of Vatican II, of the post-conciliar magisterium and of the social doctrine of the Church. We need to know more about our different traditions 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 welcome them is reducing, and in which the foreigner is viewed with growing suspicion, it is appropriate for the Church to commit itself decisively to education in the culture of dialogue and encounter, combating racism and xenophobia, particularly in pastoral training programmes. It is equally necessary to engage in migrant integration projects.
- q) We recommend a renewed commitment to dialogue and discernment regarding racial justice. We must identify the systems that create or maintain racial injustice within the Church and combat them. May healing and reconciliation processes be initiated to eradicate the sin of racism, with the help of those who suffer its consequences.

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 peculiarity which greatly enriches the entire Church. In particular, their experience of unity in diversity can offer a valuable contribution to the understanding and practice of synodality.
- b) Over the course of history, the level of autonomy guaranteed to these Churches has seen different phases and has also seen behaviors that are now considered outdated, such as Latinisation. In recent decades the process of recognizing the specificity, distinction and autonomy of these Churches has seen notable development.
- c) The substantial migration of faithful from the Catholic East into territories with a Latin majority poses important pastoral questions. If the current flow continues or increases, there may be more members of the Eastern Catholic Churches in diaspora than in the canonical territories. For various reasons, the establishment of Eastern hierarchies in the countries of immigration is not sufficient to solve the problem, but it is necessary that the local Latin Rite Churches, in the name of synodality, help the Eastern faithful who have emigrated to preserve their identity and cultivate their specific heritage, without undergoing assimilation processes.

Issues to address

- d) The contribution that the experience of the Eastern Catholic Churches can make must be further studied offer to the understanding and practice of synodality.
- e) Some difficulties remain regarding the Pope's assent to the Bishops elected by the Synods of the Churches *sui iuris* for their territory and the papal appointment of Bishops outside the canonical territory. The request to extend the jurisdiction of the Patriarchs outside the patriarchal territory is also the subject of discernment in the dialogue with the Holy See.
- f) In regions where there are faithful of different Catholic Churches, it is necessary to find ways that make effective unity in diversity visible and experienceable.
- g) It is necessary to reflect on the contribution that the Eastern Catholic Churches can make to the path towards unity among all Christians and the role they can play in interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

Proposals

- h) First of all, the request to establish a Council of Patriarchs and Major Archbishops emerges Eastern Catholic Churches near the Holy Father.
- i) Some ask to convene a Special Synod dedicated to the Eastern Catholic Churches, their identity and mission, as well as the pastoral and canonical challenges in the context of war and massive migrations.
- j) It is proposed to form a joint commission of Eastern and Latin theologians, historians and canonists to study the issues that require in-depth analysis and make proposals to continue the journey.
- k) In the dicasteries of the Roman Curia there is an adequate representation of members of the Eastern Catholic Churches to enrich the entire Church with the contribution of their perspective, encourage the solution of the problems identified and participate in dialogue at different levels.
- l) To encourage forms of hospitality that respect the heritage of the faithful of the Eastern Churches, it is appropriate to intensify relations between the Eastern clergy in diaspora and the Latin clergy and promote mutual knowledge and recognition of their respective traditions.

7. On the way towards 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 Communions: a clear and credible sign of the desire to walk together in the spirit of the unity of faith and the exchange of gifts. This highly significant event also allowed us to recognize that we find ourselves in an ecumenical *kairos* and to reaffirm that what unites us is greater than what divides us. In fact, in common we have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, among all and in all" (Eph 4.5-6) . b) Baptism itself, which is at the beginning of synodality, also constitutes the foundation of ecumenism. Through it all

Christians participate in the *sensus fidei* and for this reason they must be listened to carefully, regardless of their tradition, like the Assembly

synod has done in its process of discernment. There cannot be synodality without the ecumenical dimension.

- c) Ecumenism is first and foremost a question of spiritual renewal and also requires processes of repentance and healing of memory. The Assembly resounded with enlightening testimonies from Christians of different ecclesial traditions who share friendship, prayer and above all commitment to the service of the poor. Dedication for the least cements bonds and helps to focus on what already unites all believers in Christ. It is therefore important that ecumenism develops first and foremost in daily life. In the theological and institutional dialogue, the patient weaving of mutual understanding continues in a climate of growing trust and openness.
- d) In many regions of the world there is above all the 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 between all Christians is also a fundamental element for facing the pastoral challenges of our time: in secularized societies it allows us to give greater strength to the voice of the Gospel, in contexts of poverty it brings together forces in the service of justice, peace and the dignity of the last. Always and everywhere it is a fundamental resource for healing the culture of hatred, division and war that pits groups, peoples and nations against one another.
- f) Marriages between Christians who belong to different Churches or ecclesial communities (mixed marriages) constitute realities in which the wisdom of communion can mature and one can evangelize one another.

Issues to address

- g) Our Assembly was able to perceive the diversity between Christian confessions in the way of understanding the synodal configuration of the Church. In the Orthodox Churches, synodality is understood in the strict 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 debate. All this requires further investigation.
- h) Another theme to be explored in depth concerns the connection between synodality and primacy at the various levels (local, regional, universal), in their mutual interdependence. It requires a shared rereading of history, to overcome clichés and prejudices. The ongoing ecumenical dialogues have made it possible to better understand, 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 at the service of unity, as desired by Saint John Paul II in the Encyclical *Ut unum sint*.
- i) The question of Eucharistic hospitality (*communicatio in sacris*) must be further examined from a theological, canonical and pastoral profile, in light of the connection between sacramental and ecclesial communion. This issue is particularly felt by interfaith couples. It also refers to a broader reflection on mixed marriages.
- j) A reflection was also urged on the phenomenon of "non-denominational" communities and "awakening" movements of Christian inspiration, which are also joined in large numbers by originally Catholic faithful.

Proposals

- k) 2025 marks the anniversary of the Council of Nicea (325), in which the symbol of the faith that unites all Christians was developed. A joint commemoration of this event will also help us to better understand how in the past controversial issues were discussed and resolved together in 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 find a common date for the feast of Easter, so as to be able to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord, our life and our salvation, on the same day.
- m) We also wish 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 mission has also been put forward by some common in the contemporary world.
- o) The proposal to compile an ecumenical martyrology is relaunched.

PART II – ALL DISCIPLES, ALL MISSIONARIES

8. The 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, so I send you" (Jn 20:21): the Church receives its mission from Christ, the Father's Messenger. Supported and guided by the Holy Spirit, it announces and bears witness to the Gospel to those who do not know it or do not welcome it, with that preferential option for the poor which is rooted in the mission of Jesus. In this way it contributes to the advent of the Kingdom of God, of which "it constitutes the seed and the beginning" (see LG 5).
- b) The sacraments of Christian initiation give all disciples of Jesus responsibility for the mission of the Church. Laity men and women, 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 who experience the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing. 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 Christian faith and practice, which requires particular accompaniment within communities. Support is necessary above all for parents who have to reconcile work, even within the ecclesial community and at the service of its mission, with the demands of family life.
- d) If the 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 situations of every day. It is they above all who make the Church present and announce 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, economics and politics, the arts and of culture, scientific research, education and training, in the care of the common home and, in particular, in participation in public life. Wherever they are present, they are called to bear witness to Jesus Christ in daily life and to explicitly share the faith with others. In particular, young people, with their gifts and their fragilities, as they grow in friendship with Jesus, become apostles of the Gospel among their peers.
- e) The lay faithful are increasingly present and active also in service within the Christian communities. Many of them organize and animate pastoral communities, serve as faith educators, theologians and trainers, 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 are centered on the figure of catechists. In addition, lay people serve in *safeguarding* and administration. Their contribution is indispensable for the mission of the Church; for this reason, 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 which must be brought out, recognized and fully valued. In some situations it may happen that i

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

- g) The practice of the mission *ad gentes* achieves a mutual enrichment of the Churches, because it does not only involve the missionaries, but the entire community, which is stimulated to pray, share goods and bear witness. Even Churches with a poor number of clergy must not renounce this commitment, while those in which there is greater flourishing of vocations to the ordained ministry can open up to pastoral cooperation, in a genuinely evangelical logic. All missionaries - lay men and women, consecrated men and women, deacons and priests, in particular 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 nourished by the celebration of the Eucharist, in particular when it highlights its community character and missionary.

Issues to address

- i) It is necessary to continue to deepen the theological understanding of the relationships between charisms and ministries in a missionary perspective.
- j) Vatican II and 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 parish, diocesan and, recently, also universal level, tasks and ministries within the Church are increasingly entrusted to lay people. 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 enhance 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 must be reorganized in order to help communities to 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 therefore be conceived primarily at the service of the mission that the faithful carry out within society, in family and working life, without focusing exclusively on the activities that take place within them and on their organizational needs.
- m) The expression "an entirely ministerial Church", used in *the Instrumentum laboris*, can lend itself to misunderstandings. Let us delve deeper into its meaning to clarify any ambiguities.

Proposals

- n) There is a perceived need for greater creativity in establishing ministries based on the needs of local Churches, with particular involvement of young people. We can think of further expanding the tasks of the established ministry of the lector, which are already not limited to the role played during the liturgies. In this way a real ministry of the Word of God could be configured, 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 the charisms and ministries that enrich the community. This could happen on the occasion of a liturgical celebration in 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, giving women and men 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 occurs, the alliance between man and woman is at the heart of God's plan for creation. Jesus considered the women his interlocutors: he spoke with them about the Kingdom of God and welcomed them among the disciples, such as Mary of Bethany. These women experienced his power of healing, liberation and recognition and walked with him on the road from Galilee to Jerusalem (see *Luke* 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 in equal measure the variety of gifts of the Spirit (see *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 life of the Church. As Pope Francis 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 relaunch the appeal of the previous phases of the synod process, and ask the Church to grow in its commitment to understanding and accompanying women, from a pastoral and sacramental point of view. Women wish to share the spiritual experience of walking towards 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 demand justice in societies still deeply marked by sexual violence and economic inequalities, and by the tendency to treat them as objects. They bear the scars of human trafficking, forced migration and war. Accompaniment and decisive promotion of women go hand in hand.
- d) Women make up the majority of those who attend churches and are often the first missionaries of the faith in the family. Consecrated women, in the contemplative and apostolic life, constitute a gift, a sign and a testimony of fundamental importance

among us. 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, woman of faith and mother of God, remains for everyone an extraordinary source of meaning from a theological, ecclesial and spiritual point of view. Mary reminds us of the universal call to listen carefully to God and to remain open to the Holy Spirit. She has known the joy of giving birth and growing and has endured pain and suffering. She gave birth in precarious conditions, had the experience of being a refugee and lived through the torment of the brutal killing of her son. But he also knew the splendor of the resurrection and the glory of Pentecost.
- f) Many women expressed profound gratitude for the work of priests and bishops, but they also spoke of a Church that hurts. Clericalism, chauvinism and an inappropriate use of authority continue to disfigure the face of the Church and damage communion. A deep spiritual conversion is necessary as the basis for any structural change. Sexual, power and economic abuse continues to cry out for justice, healing and reconciliation. We ask how the Church can become a space capable of protecting everyone.
- g) When dignity and justice in relationships between men and women are undermined in the Church, the credibility of the announcement that we address to the world is weakened. The synod process shows that there is a need for a renewal of relations and structural changes. In this way we will be able to better welcome the participation and contribution of everyone - lay men and women, consecrated men and women, deacons, priests and bishops - as disciples co-responsible for the mission.
- h) The Assembly asks us to avoid repeating the mistake of talking about women as an issue or a problem. Instead, we wish to promote a Church in which men and women dialogue with the aim of better understanding the depth of God's plan, in which they appear together as protagonists, without subordination, exclusion, or competition.

Issues to address

- i) Churches around the world have clearly formulated the request for greater recognition and valorisation of the contribution of women and for an increase in the pastoral responsibilities entrusted to them in all areas of the life and mission of the Church. 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, who is responsible for discernment, at what level and in what way?
- j) Different positions have been expressed regarding the access of women to the diaconal ministry. Some consider that this step would be unacceptable as it is 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 passage 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 the fear that this request is the expression of a dangerous anthropological confusion, by accepting which the Church would align itself with the spirit of the time.
- k) The debate in this regard is also connected to the broader reflection on the theology of the diaconate (see *infra* chapter 11, h - i).

Proposals

- l) Local Churches are encouraged, in particular, to broaden their service of listening, accompaniment and care to women who are more marginalized in different social contexts. m) It is urgent to ensure that women can participate in decision-making processes and take on 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 the life of the Church. It is necessary to adapt the canon law of consequence.
- n) Theological and pastoral research on women's access to the diaconate should continue, benefiting from the results of the commissions specifically 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 unfair remuneration within the Church be addressed and resolved, in particular with regard to consecrated women who are too often considered cheap labour.
- p) There is a need to expand women's access to training programs and theological studies. Women are included in the teaching and training programs of the seminaries to promote better formation for the ordained ministry.
- q) The liturgical texts and documents of the Church are more attentive not only to the use of a language that takes men and women into equal account, but also to the inclusion of a range of words, images and stories that draw with greater vitality on female experience.
- r) We propose that adequately trained women can be judges in all trials canons.

10. Consecrated life and lay groups: a charismatic sign**Convergences**

- a) Over the course of the centuries the Church has always experienced the gift of charisms thanks to which the Holy Spirit rejuvenates and renews it, from the most extraordinary to the simplest and most widespread. With joy and gratitude, the Holy People of God recognizes in them the providential help with which God himself supports, directs and illuminates his mission.
- b) The charismatic dimension of the Church has a particular manifestation in the consecrated life, with the richness and variety of its forms. His testimony has contributed at all times to renewing the life of the ecclesial community, proving to be an antidote to the recurring temptation of worldliness. The different religious families show the beauty of following the Lord, on the mountain of prayer and on the streets of the world, in forms of community life, in the solitude of the desert and on the frontier of cultural challenges. More than once, the consecrated life has been the first to perceive the changes in history and grasp the calls of the Spirit: even today the Church needs its prophecy. The Christian community also looks with attention and gratitude at the proven practices of synodal life and common discernment that communities of consecrated life have developed over the centuries. We also know from them that we can learn the wisdom of walking together. Many Congregations and

Institutes practice conversation in the Spirit or similar forms of discernment in carrying out provincial and general Chapters, to renew structures, rethink lifestyles, 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 recognizes 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 a precious sign of the maturation of the co-responsibility of all the baptized. Their value lies in the promotion of communion between different vocations, in the enthusiasm with which they announce the Gospel, in their proximity to those who experience economic or social marginalization and in their commitment to promoting the common good. They are often models of synodal communion and participation in view of the mission.
- d) Cases of abuse of various kinds to the detriment of consecrated persons and members of lay groups, in particular women, signals a problem in the exercise of authority and requires decisive and appropriate interventions.

Issues to address

- e) The magisterium of the Church has developed a broad teaching on the importance of hierarchical gifts and charismatic gifts in the life and mission of the Church, which requires a better understanding in ecclesial conscience and in theological reflection itself. It is therefore necessary to question the ecclesiological meaning and concrete pastoral implications of this acquisition.
- f) The variety of charismatic expressions within the Church underlines the commitment of the faithful People of God to live the prophecy of closeness to the least and to illuminate the culture with a deeper experience of spiritual realities. It is necessary to delve deeper into 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 towards holiness thanks to a presence that is prophetic.

Proposals

- g) We believe that the time is ripe for a review of the "directive criteria on relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church" proposed in the 1978 document *Mutuae relationes* . We propose that such a review be conducted in synodal style, including all those involved.
- h) To the same end, the Episcopal Conferences and the Conferences of Superiors and Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life activate suitable places and tools 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 institution and a more precise configuration of Consultations 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 the local Churches.
- j) In theological training courses at all levels, especially in the training of ordained ministers, the attention paid to the charismatic dimension of the Church should be verified and, where necessary, strengthened.

11. Deacons and priests in a synodal Church

Convergences

- a) The priests are the main cooperators of the Bishop and form a single presbyterate with him (see LG 28); deacons, ordained for the ministry, serve the People of God in the diakonia of the Word, of the liturgy, but above all of charity (see LG 29). The Synodal Assembly first of all expresses profound gratitude towards them. Aware that they can experience loneliness and isolation, he recommends Christian communities to support them with prayer, friendship and collaboration.
- b) Deacons and priests are engaged in the most diverse forms of pastoral ministry: service in parishes, evangelization, proximity to the poor and marginalized, commitment to the world of culture and education, mission ad gentes, research theology, the animation of spirituality centers 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, of welcoming and listening to everyone and to cultivate a profound personal spirituality and a life of prayer. Above all, they are called to rethink the exercise of authority on the model of Jesus who, "despite being in the condition of God, [...] emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2, 6-7). The Assembly recognizes that many priests and deacons make visible with their dedication the face of Christ the Good Shepherd and Servant.
- c) An obstacle to ministry and mission is clericalism. It arises from the misunderstanding of the divine calling, which leads to conceiving 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 early stages of formation, thanks to live contact with the daily life of the People of God and a concrete experience of service to the most needy. The ministry of the presbyter cannot be imagined today except in relation to the Bishop, in the presbytery, in profound 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 own capabilities and limits is a requirement for engaging in the ordained ministry with a style of co-responsibility. For this reason, human formation must guarantee a path of realistic self-knowledge, which is integrated with cultural, spiritual and apostolic growth. In this journey, the contribution of the family of origin and the Christian community, within which the young person developed his vocation, and of other families who accompany his growth should not be underestimated.

Issues to address

- e) In the perspective of the formation of all the baptized for a synodal Church, that of deacons and priests requires particular attention. The request that seminars or other training courses for candidates for the ministry be linked to the daily life of the communities has been widely expressed. It is necessary to avoid the risks of formalism and ideology which lead to authoritarian attitudes and prevent true vocational growth. Rethinking styles and training paths requires extensive revision and comparison.
- f) Different evaluations have been expressed on the celibacy of priests. Everyone appreciates its value full of prophecy and the testimony of conformity to Christ; some ask if its

theological convenience with the presbyteral ministry must necessarily translate into a disciplinary obligation in the Latin Church, especially where the ecclesial and cultural contexts make it more difficult. This is not a new topic, which requires further consideration.

Proposals

- g) In the Latin Churches the permanent diaconate has been implemented in different ways in various ecclesial contexts. Some local Churches have not introduced it at all; in others, there is fear that deacons will be perceived as a sort of remedy for the shortage of priests. Sometimes their ministeriality is expressed in the liturgy rather than in service to the poor and needy of the community. It is therefore recommended to carry out an evaluation of the implementation of the diaconal ministry after the Second Vatican Council.
- h) From a theological point of view, the need emerges to understand the diaconate first and foremost in itself, and not only as a stage of access to the priesthood. The very linguistic use of qualifying the primary form of the diaconate as "permanent", to distinguish it from the "transitional" one, is the indicator of a change of perspective not yet adequately achieved.
- i) The uncertainties surrounding the theology of the diaconal ministry are also due to the fact that in the Latin Church it was reinstated as a proper and permanent level of the hierarchy only starting from the Second Vatican Council. A more in-depth reflection on this will also shed light on the question of women's access to the diaconate.
- j) An in-depth verification of training for the ordained ministry is required in light of the perspective of the missionary synodal Church. This implies the revision of the *Ratio fundamentalis* which determines its profile. At the same time we recommend taking care of the ongoing formation of priests and deacons in a synodal sense.
- k) The dimension of transparency and the culture of reporting represent an element of crucial importance for proceeding in the construction of a synodal Church. We ask local Churches to identify processes and structures that allow regular verification of the ways in which priests and deacons who carry out roles of responsibility exercise the ministry.
Already existing institutions, such as participatory bodies or pastoral visits, can constitute the starting point for this work, ensuring community involvement. In any case, these forms will have to be adapted to local contexts and different cultures, so as not to be an obstacle or a bureaucratic burden. For this reason, the regional or continental context could be the most appropriate for their discernment.
- l) Consider, evaluating case by case and depending on the contexts, the opportunity to include priests 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, the Bishops, as successors of the Apostles, are placed at the service of the communion that takes place in the local Church, between the Churches and with the Church as a whole. The figure of the Bishop can therefore be adequately understood in the interweaving of relationships with the portion of the People of God entrusted to him, with the presbytery and with the deacons, with the

consecrated people, with the other Bishops and with the Bishop of Rome, in a perspective always oriented towards the mission.

- b) The Bishop is, in his Church, primarily responsible for the proclamation of the Gospel and the liturgy. He guides the Christian community and promotes the care of the poor and the defense of the least. As a visible principle of unity, it has in particular the task of discerning and coordinating the different charisms and ministries aroused by the Spirit for the proclamation of the Gospel and the common good of the community. This ministry is carried out in a synodical way when the government is exercised in the co-responsibility, preaching from listening to the faithful People of God, 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 circularity between "all, some and one". The episcopal ministry (the one) enhances the participation of "all" the faithful, thanks to the contribution of "some" more directly involved in processes of discernment and decision-making (participation and governance bodies). The conviction with which the Bishop assumes the synodal perspective and the style with which he exercises authority decisively influence the participation of priests and deacons, lay men and women, consecrated men and women. For everyone, the Bishop is called to be an example of synodality.
- d) In contexts in which the Church is perceived as the family of God, the Bishop is considered the father of all; in secularized societies, however, a crisis of its authority is experienced. It is important not to lose the reference to the sacramental nature of the episcopate, so as not to assimilate the figure of the Bishop to a civil authority.
- e) Expectations of the Bishop are often very high, and many Bishops complain of an overload of administrative and juridical commitments, which makes it difficult to fully carry out their mission. Even the Bishop has to deal with his own fragility and limits and does not always find human and spiritual support. The painful experience of a certain loneliness is not uncommon. For this reason it is important on the one hand to return to putting the essential aspects of the Bishop's mission at the center of attention, and on the other to cultivate authentic brotherhood between Bishops and with the presbyterate.

Issues to address

- f) On the theological level, the meaning of the bond of reciprocity between the Bishop and the local Church needs to be explored further. He is called to guide it and, at the same time, to recognize and safeguard the richness of its history, its tradition and the charisms present in it.
- g) The question of the relationship between the sacrament of Orders and jurisdiction must be explored in depth, in the light of the conciliar magisterium of *Lumen gentium* and the most recent teachings, such as the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, to specify the theological and canonical criteria that are the basis of the principle of sharing the Bishop's responsibilities and determining the scope, forms and implications of co-responsibility.
- h) Some Bishops express discomfort when they are asked to intervene on questions of faith and morals on which there is not full agreement within the episcopate. It is necessary to reflect further on the relationship between episcopal collegiality and diversity of theological and pastoral views.
- i) A culture of transparency and respect for the procedures established for the protection of minors and vulnerable people are an integral part of a synodal Church. It is necessary to further develop structures dedicated to the prevention of abuse. The delicate issue of managing abuse places many Bishops in difficulty in reconciling the role of father and that of

judge. We ask you to evaluate the opportunity to entrust the judicial task to another instance, to be specified canonically.

Proposals

- j) Structures and processes for regular verification of the Bishop's work are activated, in legally to be defined forms, with reference to the style of his authority, the economic administration of the assets of the diocese, the functioning of the participation bodies and the protection in against any type of abuse. The culture of reporting is an integral part of a synodal Church that promotes co-responsibility, as well as a possible safeguard against abuse.
- k) It is requested to make the Episcopal Council (can. 473 §4) and the diocesan or eparchial pastoral council (CIC can. 511, CCEU can. 272) obligatory and to make the diocesan bodies more operational, also at the level of law of co-responsibility.
- l) The Assembly asks to initiate a verification of the selection criteria for candidates for the episcopate, balancing the authority of the Apostolic Nuncio with the participation of the Episcopal Conference. It is also required to broaden the consultation of the People of God, listening to a greater number of lay men and women, consecrated men and women and taking care to avoid inappropriate pressure.
- m) Many Bishops express the need to rethink the functioning and strengthen the structure of the Metropolies (ecclesiastical provinces) and the Regions, so that they are a concrete expression of collegiality in a territory and areas in which the Bishops can experience fraternity, mutual support, transparency and wider consultation.

13. The Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops

Convergences

- a) The synodal dynamics also sheds new light on the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. Synodality, in fact, symphonically articulates the community ("all"), collegial ("some") and personal ("one") dimensions of the Church at a local, regional and universal level. In this vision, the Petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome is intrinsic to the synodal dynamics, as are the community aspect which includes all the People of God and the collegial dimension of the episcopal ministry. For this reason, 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) The promotion of the unity of all Christians is an essential aspect of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. The ecumenical journey has allowed us to deepen our understanding of the ministry of the Successor of Peter and must continue to do so in the future. The responses to the invitation made by S. John Paul II in the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, as well as the conclusions of the ecumenical dialogues, can help the Catholic understanding of primacy, collegiality, synodality and their mutual relationships.
- c) The reform of the Roman Curia is an important aspect of the synodal path of the Catholic Church. The Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate evangelium* insists on the fact that «the Roman Curia does not place itself between the Pope and the Bishops, rather it places itself at the service of both according to the modalities that are specific to the nature of each one» (PE I.8). Promotes reform based

on the "life of communion" (PE I.4) and on a "healthy decentralization" (EG 16, cited in PE II.2).

The fact that many members of the Roman Dicasteries are diocesan Bishops expresses the catholicity of the Church and should favor the relationship between the Curia and the local Churches. The actual

implementation of the *Praedicate evangelium* will be able to encourage greater synodality within the Curia, both between the different Dicasteries and within each of them.

Issues to address

- d) An in-depth analysis is requested on the way in which a renewed understanding of the episcopate within a synodal Church impacts the ministry of the Bishop of Rome and the role of the Roman Curia. This issue has significant repercussions on the way of living co-responsibility in the governance of the Church. On a universal level, the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* offer provisions for a more collegial exercise of the 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 methods of collaboration of the college of Cardinals in the Petrine ministry and on the ways in 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 promote mutual knowledge and bonds of communion between the members of the College of Cardinals, also taking into account their diversity of origin and culture.

Proposals

- g) The *ad limina Apostolorum* Visits 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. The form in which they are carried out should be reviewed so as to make them increasingly opportunities for an open and reciprocal exchange that favors communion and a true exercise of collegiality and synodality.
- h) In light of the synodal configuration of the Church, it is necessary that the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia 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 forms of evaluation of the work of the Papal Representatives by the local Churches of 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 synodal council at the service of the Petrine ministry.
- k) In light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, it is necessary to carefully examine whether it is appropriate to ordain the prelates of the Roman Curia as Bishops.

PART III – MAKING TIES, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

14. A synodal approach to training

Convergences

- a) Taking care of one's own education is the response that every baptized person is called to give to the gifts of the Lord, to make the talents received bear fruit and put them at the service of all. The time that the Lord dedicated to the formation of his disciples reveals the importance of this ecclesial action, often inconspicuous but decisive for the mission. We would like to express a word of thanks and encouragement to all those who are involved in this area and we invite them to grasp the new elements that emerge from the synodal path of the Church.
- b) The way in which Jesus trained the disciples constitutes the model to which we refer. He did not limit himself to imparting some teachings, but shared his life with them. With his prayer he raised the question: "Teach us to pray"; by feeding the crowds he taught not to dismiss the needy; walking towards Jerusalem, he indicated the way of the Cross. From the Gospel we learn that training is not only or primarily an enhancement of one's abilities: it is conversion to the logic of the Kingdom which can make even defeats and failures fruitful.
- c) The Holy People of God is not only an object, but is first and foremost a subject co-responsible for formation. The first formation, in fact, takes place in the family. It is there that we often receive the first announcement of the faith, in the language - or rather in the dialect - of our parents and grandparents. The contribution of those who carry out a ministry in the Church must therefore be intertwined with the wisdom of the simple in an educational alliance that is indispensable to the community. This is the first sign of a formation understood in a synodal sense
- d) In Christian initiation we find the main guidelines for training courses. At the center of the training is the deepening of the *kerygma*, that is, the encounter with Jesus Christ who offers us the gift of a new life. The catechumenal logic reminds us that we are all sinners called to holiness. For this reason we commit ourselves to paths of conversion that the sacrament of Reconciliation brings to completion and we nourish the desire for holiness, supported by a large number of witnesses.
- e) There are many areas in which the formation of the People of God takes place. In addition to theological training, that relating to a series of specific skills was mentioned: exercise of co-responsibility, listening, discernment, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, service to the poor and care of the common home, commitment as "digital missionaries", facilitation of processes of discernment and conversation in the Spirit, consensus building and conflict resolution. Particular attention should be paid to the catechetical training of children and young people, which should involve the extensive participation of the community.
- f) Formation for a synodal Church requires to be undertaken in a synodal way: all the People of God are formed together as they walk together. We need to overcome the delegation mentality that is found in many areas of pastoral care. A synodal formation has the aim of allowing the People of God to fully live their baptismal vocation, in the family, in the workplace, in the ecclesial, social and intellectual sphere, and to make each one capable of actively participating in the mission of the Church according to one's own charisms and one's vocation.

Issues to address

- g) We recommend examining the topic of emotional and sexual education in depth, to accompany young people on their path of growth and to support the emotional maturation of those who are called to celibacy and consecrated chastity. Training in these areas is a necessary help in all seasons of life.
- h) It is important to deepen the dialogue between the human sciences, especially psychology, and theology, for an understanding of human experience that is not limited to juxtaposing their contributions, but integrates them in a more mature synthesis.
- ne) The People of God must be widely represented in the training of ordained ministers, as already requested by previous Synods. A broad review of training programs is needed, with particular attention to how to enhance the contribution of women and the contribution of families.
- j) Episcopal Conferences are encouraged to work at a regional level to jointly create a culture of ongoing learning, using all available resources, including the development of digital options.

Proposals

- k) In light of the synodality, we propose to favor, as far as possible, joint training proposals aimed at all the People of God (lay people, consecrated persons and ordained ministers). It is up to the dioceses to encourage these projects at a local level. We encourage Episcopal Conferences to work together at the regional level to jointly create a culture of ongoing learning, using all available resources, including the development of digital options.
- l) The different components of the People of God are represented in the training courses for the ordained ministry, as already required by previous Synods. Of particular importance is the involvement of female figures.
- m) Adequate selection processes for candidates for ordained ministry are needed and the requirements relating to preparatory programs are respected.
- n) The training of ordained ministers must be thought of in coherence with a synodal Church, in different contexts. This requires that candidates for ministry, before undertaking specific journeys, have gained a real, albeit initial, experience of Christian community. The formation process must not create an artificial environment, separated from the common life of the faithful. Safeguarding the needs of ministry training, it will foster an authentic spirit of service to the People of God in preaching, in the celebration of the sacraments and in the promotion of charity. This may require a revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis* for permanent priests and deacons.
- o) In view of the next Session of the Assembly, it is proposed to carry out a consultation of those responsible for the initial and ongoing formation of priests to evaluate the reception of the synodal process and propose the changes necessary to promote the exercise of authority in an appropriate style to a synodal Church.

15. Ecclesial discernment and open questions

Convergences

- a) The experience of the conversation in the Spirit was enriching for all those who took part in it. In particular, a communication style that favors freedom in the expression of one's points of view and mutual listening was appreciated. This avoids moving too quickly to a debate based on the reiteration of one's own arguments, which leaves no space and time to realize the other's reasons.
- b) This basic attitude creates a favorable context for examining issues that are controversial even within the Church, such as the anthropological effects of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, non-violence and self-defence, problems relating to ministry, themes connected with corporeity and sexuality and others
Still.
- 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 articulated reflective component. To avoid taking refuge in the comfort of conventional formulas, a comparison must be made with the point of view of the human and social sciences, of philosophical reflection and theological elaboration.
- d) Among the issues on which it is important to continue reflection, there is that of the relationship between love and truth and the repercussions that it has on many controversial issues. This relationship, before being a challenge, is actually a grace that inhabits Christological revelation. In fact, Jesus fulfilled the promise that we read in the psalms: «Love and truth will meet, justice and peace will kiss. Truth will sprout from the earth and justice will appear from heaven" (Ps 85, 11-12).
- e) The pages of the Gospel 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 with all of himself, even at the price of exposing himself to misunderstanding and rejection. Jesus always listens to the cry for help of those in need, even when it remains unexpressed; performs gestures that convey love and restore trust; he makes a new life possible with his presence: whoever meets him comes away transformed. This happens because the truth that Jesus brings 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 clear evangelical vision into pastoral choices is a sign of our inability to live up to the Gospel and reminds us that we cannot support those who need help except through our personal and community conversion. If we use doctrine harshly and with a judgmental attitude, we betray the Gospel; if we practice cheap mercy, we do not transmit God's love.
The unity of truth and love implies taking on the difficulties of others to the point of making them one's own, as happens between true brothers and sisters. For this reason, this unity can only be achieved by patiently following the path of accompaniment.
- g) Some issues, such as those relating to gender identity and sexual orientation, the end of life, difficult marital situations, ethical problems connected to artificial intelligence, are controversial not only in society, but also in the Church, because they ask new questions. Sometimes the anthropological categories that we have developed are not sufficient to capture the complexity of the elements that emerge from experience or scientific knowledge and require refinement and further study. It is important to take the time necessary for this reflection and invest the 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 await to be translated into appropriate pastoral initiatives. Also

where further clarifications are necessary, the behavior of Jesus, assimilated in prayer and conversion of heart, shows us the path to follow.

Issues to address

- 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 his inspiration.
- i) We encourage experts in the various fields of knowledge to develop a spiritual wisdom that allows their specialized expertise to become a true ecclesial service. Synodality in this area is expressed as a willingness to think together in the service of the mission, in the diversity of approaches, but in the harmony of intentions.
- j) It is necessary to identify the conditions that make theological and cultural research possible that can start from the daily experience of the Holy People of God and place itself at their service.

Proposals

- k) We propose to promote initiatives that allow shared discernment on doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues that are controversial, in the light of the Word of God, the teaching of the Church, theological reflection and, valorising the synodal experience. This can be achieved through in-depth discussions between experts of different skills and backgrounds in an institutional context that protects the confidentiality of the debate and promotes frank discussion, giving space, when appropriate, also to the voice of the people directly affected by the controversies mentioned. This process must be started in view of the next Synodal 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 synod process and also the work of the Assembly. It does so in the double meaning of listening given and received, of listening and being listened to. Listening is a profoundly human value, a dynamism of reciprocity, in which one offers a contribution to the path of others and receives one for one's own.
- b) Being invited to speak and be listened to in the Church and by the Church was an intense and unexpected experience for many of those who participated in the synod process at a local level, especially among those who suffer forms of marginalization in society and also in Christian community. Being listened to 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) Placing Jesus Christ at the center of our life requires a certain self-sacrifice. From this perspective, listening requires the willingness to decentralize to make room for the other. We experienced it in the dynamics of conversation in the Spirit. It is a demanding ascetic exercise, which forces everyone to recognize their own limits and the partiality of their own point of view. For this reason it opens a possibility to listen to the voice of the Spirit of God who

it also speaks beyond the boundaries of ecclesial membership and can set in motion a path of change and conversion.

- d) Listening has a Christological value: it means adopting the attitude of Jesus towards the people he met (see *Phil 2, 6-11*); it also has an ecclesial value, since it is the Church that listens, through the work of some baptized people who do not act in their own name, but of the community.
- e) Along the synod process, the Church has encountered many people and many groups who ask to be listened to and accompanied. First of all, 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 must listen with particular attention and sensitivity to the voices of victims and survivors of sexual, spiritual, economic, institutional, power and conscience abuse by members of the clergy or people with ecclesial positions. Authentic listening is a fundamental element of the path to healing, repentance, justice and reconciliation.
- g) The Assembly expresses its closeness and support to all those who experience a condition of solitude as a choice of fidelity to the tradition and magisterium of the Church in matters of marriage and sexual ethics, in which they recognize a source of life. Christian communities are invited to be particularly 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, due to their marital situation, identity and sexuality, also ask to be listened to and accompanied, and that their dignity is defended. In the Assembly there was a profound sense of love, mercy and compassion for people who are or feel hurt or neglected by the Church, who want a place to return "home" and where they feel safe, to be listened to 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 lack respect for the dignity of any person.
- i) People who suffer various forms of poverty, exclusion and marginalization within societies in which inequality is growing 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 and accompanying those who are in prison and who particularly need to experience the merciful love of the Lord and not feel isolated from the community. On behalf of the Church they carry out the words of the Lord "I was in prison and you came to visit 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. The works of mercy inspired by the evangelical words "I was [...] sick and you visited me" (Mt 25.39) have a profound meaning for the people involved and also for fomenting community bonds.
- k) The Church wants to listen to everyone, not just those who know how to make their voices heard more easily. In some regions, for cultural and social reasons, members of certain groups, such as young people, women and minorities. they may find it more difficult to express themselves freely. The experience of living in oppressive and dictatorial regimes also erodes the trust needed for

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

Issues to address

- l) Listening requires unconditional acceptance. This does not mean abdicating clarity in presenting the Gospel message of salvation, nor endorsing any opinion or position.
The Lord Jesus opened new horizons to those he listened to without conditions and we are called to do the same to share the Good News with those we meet.
- m) Widespread in many parts of the world, basic communities or small Christian communities encourage practices of listening to and among the baptized. We are called to enhance their potential, also exploring how it is possible to adapt them 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. For this reason they must find a place within the ordinary pastoral planning and operational structuring of Christian communities at different levels, also enhancing spiritual accompaniment. A synodal Church cannot give up being a Church that listens and this commitment must be translated into actions concrete.
- o) The Church does not start from scratch, but already has numerous institutions and structures that carry out this precious task. Let's think for example of the widespread work of listening and accompanying the poor, marginalized, migrants and refugees carried out by Caritas and by many other entities linked to consecrated life or lay associations. We need to work to strengthen their connection with community life, preventing them from being perceived as activities delegated to some.
- p) The people who carry out the service of listening and accompaniment, in its various forms, need adequate training, also based on the type of people they come into contact with, and to feel supported by the community. For their part, communities need to become fully aware of the value of a service performed on their behalf and to be able to receive the fruit of this listening. In order to give greater visibility to this service, we propose the establishment of a ministry of listening and accompaniment based on Baptism, adapted to different contexts. The methods of its provision 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 topic of polygamy and on the accompaniment of people in polygamous unions who are approaching the faith.

17. Missionaries in the digital environment

Convergences

- a) Digital culture represents a fundamental change in the way we conceive reality and relate to ourselves, to each other, to the environment around us and even to God. The digital environment modifies our learning processes, the perception of time, space, the 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 younger ones, the so-called "digital natives".
- b) Digital culture, therefore, is not so much a distinct area of mission, but a crucial dimension of the Church's testimony in contemporary culture. For this reason it has a particular meaning in a synodal Church.
- c) Missionaries have always set out with Christ towards new frontiers, preceded and driven by the action of the Spirit. Today it's our turn to reach current culture in all the spaces where people search for 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 profound direct experience of it, are the most suitable to carry forward the mission of the Church in the digital environment, as well as to accompany the rest of the community, including pastors, to a greater familiarity with its dynamics.
- e) Within the synodal 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 are committed to it and the importance to offer them training, support, the possibility of discussion between peers and collaboration.

Issues to address

- f) The Internet is increasingly present in the lives of children and families. While it has great potential to improve our lives, it can also cause harm and hurt, for example through bullying, misinformation, sexual exploitation and addiction. There is an urgent need to reflect on 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 online Church-related initiatives of great value and usefulness, providing excellent catechesis and faith formation. Unfortunately there are also sites where issues related to faith are addressed in a superficial, polarized and even hateful way. As a Church and as individual digital missionaries we have a duty to ask ourselves how to ensure that our online presence is a growth experience for those with whom we communicate.
- h) Online apostolic initiatives have a scope and range of action that extends beyond traditionally understood territorial boundaries. This raises important questions about how they can be regulated and 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 can we avoid remaining prisoners of the logic of conservation and instead free energy for new forms of exercising the mission?
- j) The COVID-19 pandemic has stimulated pastoral creativity online, helping to reduce the effects of the experience of isolation and loneliness experienced in particular by the elderly and vulnerable members of communities. Catholic educational institutions have also effectively used online platforms to continue offering training and catechesis during the

lockdown. It is good that we evaluate what this experience has taught us and what the lasting benefits may 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 involves finding new ways to involve them and offer them training and catechesis. This is a topic to reflect on pastorally.

Proposals

- l) We propose that the Churches offer recognition, training and accompaniment to digital missionaries already operating, also facilitating meetings between them.
- m) It is important to create collaborative networks of influencers that include people of other religions or who do not profess any faith, but collaborate on common causes for the promotion of the dignity of the human person, justice and care of the common home.

18. Participatory bodies

Convergences

- a) As members of the faithful People of God, all the baptized are co-responsible for the mission, each according to his vocation, with his experience and competence; therefore, everyone contributes to imagining and deciding steps to reform the Christian communities and the Church as a whole, so that it experiences "the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing". Synodality, in the composition and functioning of the organisms in which it takes shape, has the mission as its purpose. Co-responsibility is for the mission: this certifies that we are truly gathered in the name of Jesus, this frees the participation bodies from bureaucratic involutions and worldly logics of power, this makes the gathering fruitful.
- b) In the light of recent magisterium (in particular *Lumen gentium* and *Evangelii gaudium*), this co-responsibility of all in the mission must be the criterion underlying the structuring of Christian communities and of the entire local Church with all its services, in all its institutions, in each of its bodies of communion (see *1Cor* 12,4-31). The correct recognition of the responsibility of lay people for the mission in the world cannot become the pretext for attributing 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 participation 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 discerning and deciding on a synodal missionary community must provide for the presence of men and women who boast an apostolic profile; who distinguish themselves first of all not for assiduous attendance of ecclesial spaces, but for a genuine evangelical testimony in the most ordinary realities of life. The People of God is all the more missionary the more capable it is of making the voices of those who already live the mission by inhabiting the world and its peripheries resonate within themselves, even in participatory bodies.

Issues to address

- e) In light of what we have shared, we believe it is important to reflect on how to promote participation in the various Councils, especially when practitioners believe they are not up to the task. Synodality grows in the involvement of each member in processes of discernment and decision for the mission of the Church: in this sense we are edified and encouraged by many small Christian communities in the emerging Churches, which live a daily fraternal "body to body" around the Word and 'Eucharist,
- f) In the composition of the participation bodies we cannot further postpone the task entrusted by Pope Francis in *Amoris laetitia*. The participation of men and women experiencing complex emotional and marital affairs "can be expressed in various ecclesial services: it is therefore necessary to discern which of the different forms of exclusion currently practiced in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional spheres can be overcome" (n. 299). The discernment in question also concerns the exclusion from participation bodies of the parish and diocesan community, practiced in quite a few local Churches.
- g) From the perspective of the evangelical originality of ecclesial communion: how can we intertwine the consultative and deliberative aspects of synodality? Based on the charismatic and ministerial configuration of the People of God: how do we integrate the tasks of advising, discerning and deciding into the various participation bodies?

Proposals

- h) Based on the understanding of the People of God as an active subject of the mission of evangelization, the obligatory nature of Pastoral Councils in Christian communities and local Churches should be codified. Together, let the participation bodies be strengthened, with an adequate presence of lay men and women, with the attribution of discernment functions in view of truly apostolic decisions.
- i) Participatory bodies represent the first area in which to experience the dynamics of accountability of those who carry out responsible tasks. While we encourage them in their commitment, we invite them to practice the culture of accountability towards the community of which they are an expression.

19. Groupings of Churches in the communion of the whole Church

Convergences

- a) We are convinced that each Church, within the communion of Churches, has much to offer, because the Holy Spirit abundantly distributes his gifts for the common good. 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" (1Cor 12,26). We therefore want to develop the spiritual attitudes that arise from this gaze: humility and generosity, respect and sharing. Also important are the willingness to grow in mutual knowledge and to prepare the necessary structures so that the exchange of spiritual riches, missionary disciples and material goods can become a concrete reality.
- b) The theme of the groupings of local Churches proved to be fundamental for a full exercise

of synodality in the Church. In answering the question of how to configure the instances of synodality and collegiality involving groups of local Churches, the Assembly agreed on the importance of ecclesial discernment carried out by the Episcopal Conferences and continental Assemblies for a correct development of the first phase of the synodal process.

- c) The synodal process has shown how the bodies foreseen by the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches* deploy their function more effectively when they are understood by the local Churches. The belief that the Church (*Ecclesia tota*) is a communion of Churches requires that each Bishop perceives and lives concern for all Churches (*sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum*) as a consequent aspect of his ministry as pastor of a Church.
- d) The first phase of the synodal process highlighted the decisive role of the Episcopal Conferences and highlighted the need for an instance of synodality and collegiality at a continental level. The bodies that operate at these levels contribute to the exercise of synodality with respect to local realities and inculturation processes. The Assembly expressed confidence in the possibility of avoiding in this way the risk of uniformity and centralism in the government of the Church.

Issues to address

- e) Before creating new structures, we feel the need to strengthen and revitalize existing ones. It is also necessary to study, on an ecclesiological and canonical level, the implications of a reform of the structures relating to groupings of Churches so that they take on a more fully synodal character.
- f) Looking at the synodal practices of the Church of the first millennium, it is proposed to study how old institutions can be recovered in the current canonical order, harmonizing them with newly created ones, such as the Episcopal Conferences.
- g) We consider it necessary to further study the ordinary and juridical nature of the Episcopal Conferences, recognizing the possibility of collegial action also with respect to ordinary issues that emerge in the local context, thus reopening the reflection on the *motu proprio Apostolos suos*.
- h) The canons referring to particular councils (plenary and provincial) should be reviewed to achieve greater participation of the People of God through them, following the example of the dispensation obtained in the case of the recent plenary council of Australia.

Proposals

- i) Among the structures already foreseen by the Code, we propose to strengthen the ecclesiastical province metropolia, as a place of communion of the local Churches of a territory.
- j) On the basis of the in-depth information requested regarding the configuration of the groupings of Churches, the exercise of synodality at regional, national and continental levels should be implemented.
- k) Where necessary we suggest the creation of international ecclesiastical provinces, for the benefit of Bishops who do not belong to any episcopal conference and to promote communion between Churches beyond national borders.
- l) In the Latin rite countries in which there is also a hierarchy of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Eastern Bishops are included in the national Episcopal Conferences, maintaining their integrity

governmental autonomy established by its own Code.

- m) A canonical configuration of the continental Assemblies should be developed which, in respect of the peculiarities of each continent, takes into due account the participation of the Episcopal Conferences and that of the Churches, with their own delegations which make present the variety of the faithful People of God.

20. Synod of Bishops and Ecclesial Assembly

Convergences

- a) Even when it experienced the difficulty of "walking together", the Assembly perceived the evangelical joy of being the People of God. The innovations proposed for this moment of the synodal journey were generally welcomed. The most obvious are: the passage 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 climate of prayer and the method of conversation in the Spirit; the very disposition of the Assembly in the Paul VI Hall.
- b) The Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, maintaining its eminently episcopal character, demonstrated 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 concern of the Bishops for the entire Church), the primatial dimension (the service of the Bishop of Rome, guarantor of communion).
- c) The synod process was and is a time of grace that encouraged us. God is offering us the opportunity to experience a new culture of synodality, capable of directing the life and mission of the Church. However, it was remembered that it is not enough to create structures of co-responsibility if personal conversion to a missionary synodality is lacking. The synodal instances, at every level, do not reduce the personal responsibility of those who are called to take part, by virtue of their ministry and their charisms, but encourage it further.

Issues to address

- d) The presence of other members, in addition to the Bishops, as witnesses of the synodal journey was appreciated. However, the question remains open regarding 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 be clarified on the basis of which 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 Organizations of the People of God in Brazil, the Australian Plenary Council were reported. It remains to be identified and explored in greater depth 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 making 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) If at a regional level it is possible to think of subsequent steps (an ecclesial assembly followed by an episcopal assembly), it is considered appropriate to clarify how this can be proposed in reference to the Catholic Church as a whole. Some believe that the formula adopted in this Assembly responds to this need, others propose to follow an ecclesial assembly with an episcopal assembly to conclude the discernment, still others prefer to reserve the role of members of the synodal assembly for the Bishops.
- g) The way in which experts from different disciplines, in particular theologians and canonists, can give their contribution to the work of the synodal assembly and the processes of a synodal Church will also need to be explored and clarified.
- h) It will also be necessary to reflect on the way in which the Internet and media communication act on synodal processes.

Proposals

- no) Ensure an evaluation of the synodal processes at all levels of the Church.
- j) The fruits of the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of the Bishops.

TO CONTINUE THE PATH

«To what can we compare the kingdom of God,
or with what parable can we describe it?» (Mk 4.30)

The Word of the Lord comes before every word of the Church. The words of the disciples, too those of a Synod are only an echo of what He himself says.

To announce the Kingdom, Jesus chose to speak in parables. He found in the fundamental experiences of man's life - in the signs of nature, in the gestures of work, in the faxes 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 that falls into the ground, Jesus saw his destiny represented. Apparently a nothing destined to rot, yet inhabited by an unstoppable, unpredictable, Easter-like dynamism of life. A dynamism destined to give life, to become bread for many. Destined to become Eucharist.

Today, in a culture of loWa for supremacy and obsession with visibility, the Church is called to repeat the words of Jesus, to make them relive their strength in all their power.

«To what can we compare the kingdom of God, or with what parable can we describe it?». This question from the Lord illuminates the work that now awaits us. It's not about dispersing yourself over many fronts, chasing an efficient and procedural logic. It is more about grasping, among the many words and proposals of this *Report*, what presents itself as a small seed, but full of future, and imagining how to deliver it to the earth that will make it mature for the life of many.

«How will this happen?», Mary asked herself in Nazareth (*Lk 1,34*) after listening to the Word. The answer is only one: stay in the shadow of the Spirit and let yourself be enveloped by his power.

As we turn our gaze to the time that separates us from the Second Session, we thank the Lord for the journey undertaken thus far and for the graces with which he has blessed us. We entrust the following phase to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a sign of certain hope and consolation in the journey of the faithful People of God, and of the Holy 8 Apostles Simon and Judas, whose feast day occurs today.

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus!

Rome, 28 October 2023, Feast of SS. Simon and Judas, Apostles

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