



SECRETARIA GENERALIS
SYNODI

A short presentation of the *Instrumentum laboris* for the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

In 2021, the Church of God was "convoked in Synod" (cf. *Preparatory Document*, no. 1). Since then, the local Churches in and from which the Catholic Church subsists in its unity and universality have accepted the invitation to reflect on the steps God is asking His Church to take. This is a matter, today as yesterday, of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, the One who saves the world, heals it, and leads it to complete fulfilment. Walking together - that is: 'synodally' - on the path indicated by Jesus is the condition for everyone in the Church, living in communion, to participate in this common mission.

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The *Instrumentum laboris* (IL) is, first and foremost, as its name suggests, a "working instrument" **for the members of the Assembly** due to meet in Rome next October (2-27). The text does not offer pre-prepared answers, nor does it intend to address all matters connected with synodality. Rather, it addresses the questions related to the document's title: "*How to be a synodal missionary Church*". It is an **orientating text, essentially articulated and designed to encourage prayer, dialogue, discernment, and the maturing of a consensus**. It starts from the convergences, which matured during the journey, anticipating the delivery to the Pope of a ***Final Document*** of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

In the coming months, the text can be used in various ecclesial settings to encourage the entire People of God to participate in prayer and the sharing of reflections, and to aid the task entrusted to the members of the Assembly.

Taking stock of the journey so far and, in particular, of the contributions offered by the local Churches in the first few months of 2024, the ***Instrumentum laboris for the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*** offers some orientations and some proposals on how the Church as a whole, the local Churches, and the groupings of Churches can and will be able to grow in being "synodal in mission."

Therefore, the IL must be read **within the context of the entire synodal process initiated in 2021 and in continuity with it. This includes, importantly,** the consultation of the local Churches, the Continental assemblies, the First Session of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, the *Synthesis Report*, the International Meeting of *Parish Priests for the Synod*. It also includes the work of the ten study groups tasked by the Holy Father with the in-depth study of ten key themes. These groups are incorporating some of the indications that emerged in the First Session into their work and are already activating the "implementation phase" of the synodal process provided for in the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*.

After the Introduction, the IL consists of five sections. Following the Introduction, the IL opens with a section dedicated to the **Foundations** of the understanding of synodality, reiterating the matured awareness gained along the way and sanctioned by the *First Session*. **Three closely interwoven Parts** follow, illuminating the missionary synodal life of the Church from different perspectives: (I) **Relations** - with the Lord, between brothers and sisters and between Churches. These relations sustain the vitality of the Church in ways far more radical than the merely structural; (II) **Pathways** which support and nourish in practical ways the dynamism of relationships; (III) **Places** which, against the temptation posed by forms of abstract universalism, speak of the concreteness of the contexts in which relationships are embodied, with their variety, plurality and interconnection, and with their rootedness in the animating foundation of the profession of faith. Each of these Sections will be the subject of prayer, dialogue and discernment in one of the modules that will structure the work of the Second Session.

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The Introduction

The Introduction recalls the road travelled so far and gives thanks to God for the fruits that the synodal process has already borne, which are recognisable in a vibrant Church that is on the move. Among these fruits is the widespread use of the synodal methodology of Conversation in the Spirit. The document begins with a passage from the book of the prophet Isaiah, which describes a banquet prepared by the Lord for all peoples, a symbol of conviviality and communion. This theme is linked to the Church's mission to bring hope and salvation to humanity, especially to those who suffer. The synodal journey is seen as an opportunity to renew the People of God in its mission, rooted in its common baptismal identity and the diversity of ecclesial contexts.

The guiding question at the heart of this reflection is: "How to be a synodal Church in mission?": This question is concerned not only with improving the Church's structures and procedures but also, more fundamentally, with renewing the missionary commitment of all. This requires a deep understanding of synodality and an openness to continuous conversion. Finally, the Introduction recalls that the two Sessions of the XVI Assembly exist in continuity "and above all, they are part of a broader process that as the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* states, will not cease at the end of October 2024".

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Foundations (nos. 1-21).

During the Second Session, the Assembly will discuss the *foundations* that structure the path of conversion and reform that the People of God intends to follow in order to be increasingly synodal in mission. This path enables us to harmonise diversity and difference and live out the reciprocity of men and women more fruitfully in a journey of constant conversion and reform.

This chapter offers the horizon within which to place pastoral and theological reflections and proposals, exploring the foundations of the missionary synodal Church, particularly its identity as the People of God and Sacrament of unity. This vision is rooted in the living tradition of the Church and finds expression in the convergences that have emerged throughout the synodal journey. Synodality is seen as a path of conversion and reform, oriented towards the mission and participation of all the baptised. The Church is called to be a sign of unity and an instrument of reconciliation in a world marked by divisions and conflicts. This requires a renewed understanding of ecclesial communion and a commitment to live synodality in all its dimensions. This chapter

gives space to reflect on the necessary reciprocity between men and women. The contributions received throughout all phases of the process speak of the need to give fuller recognition to the charisms, vocation and role of women in all spheres of the Church's life.

During the Second Session

Through the practice of Conversation in the Spirit – a practice already experienced during the First Session - and through the deepening of the perspectives identified in this document, the Assembly will be called to verify and manifest the existence of an authentic ecclesial consensus on these fundamental aspects of the life of the People of God.

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THREE PERSPECTIVES

Part I - RELATIONS (nos. 22-50)

The foundations discussed in the first part of the document provide the context for considering the relationships that enable the Church to be synodal in mission. These are, above all, the relationship with God the Father, in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, given sacramental expression in the journey of Christian initiation. This leads us, then, to reflect on the relationships between the members of the People of God, to each of whom the Holy Spirit gives the capacity to act in diverse ways for the good of all (charisms). Amongst this holy People are persons called to perform different services (ministries). Through the sacrament of Holy Orders, some are called to participate in the priesthood of Christ, the shepherd and head, as ordained ministries. Finally, we are led to reflect on the relations between the Churches in the conciliar perspective of the "exchange of gifts", including ecumenical relations with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and dialogue with cultures. We promote this exchange in and for a world that, amidst so many contradictions, always still hunger for justice, peace, and hope; a transcendent hope and justice that reaches beyond the limitations of what is possible in the present moment.

The vitality of the Church transcends its structures and, therefore, invites us to reflect on the cultivation of authentic and deep relationships. Relationships are the basis of the synodal and missionary life of the Church, which is expressed in the communion and participation of all members of the People of God in the one mission. A relational and less bureaucratic Church is the request coming from the reports of the local Churches, and in particular from the voice of young people.

During the Second Session

The Assembly will be called upon to consider matters including: the recognition, discernment and promotion of charisms and ministries rooted in Baptism; the proposal to recognise a ministry of listening and accompaniment as a prophetic sign of a synodal Church; the relationship between ordained ministries (bishop, priest and deacons) in the local church, and their service of the People of God of whom they are a part. It will also be an opportunity to explore the concept of the "exchange of gifts" between the local Churches, which is also increased in possibility and urgency at the local level partly due to the migration of Christians and in the ecumenical sphere and in and through dialogue with other religious traditions and the whole of humanity.

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Part II - PATHS (nos. 51-79)

We will then consider the pathways that enable us to nurture truly Christian relationships that enable us to live out our common mission. First, we consider the **formation paths** that serve this purpose at all levels of the Church's life. The IL recalls that "there is no mission without context, there is no Church without rootedness in a precise place, with its cultural specificities and historical contingencies. This is why preparing formation plans in the abstract is impossible. There is a need to articulate the methods and criteria to enable us to undertake "community discernment", allowing us, in diverse situations, to listen "to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Churches" and consequently to make wise decisions. This discernment should articulate the responsibility and participation of all and indicate the specific task of those who carry out the service of authority. Finally, consideration will be given to the need for procedures that enable persons with ecclesial responsibilities to render **transparent accountability** of their actions for the good of the mission of the Church.

During the Second Session

The Assembly is called upon to suggest concrete ways to respond to these needs concerning formation, community discernment, the composition and practice of decision-making and decision-taking processes, transparency, accountability, and evaluation, considered within the fundamental perspective of the unity of the Catholic Church and recognising the variety of contexts.

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Part III - PLACES (nos. 80-108)

Relationships and paths are shaped and moulded in places. "Place" is not defined merely in geographical or purely spatial terms; rather, to think about places is to recall the specificity of culture, its contextual character and the dynamic nature of the human condition. The IL analyses the concrete contexts in which relations are embodied, recognising the variety and plurality of ecclesial experiences, and invites us to overcome a static vision of places and a pyramidal structure of relations between the diverse ecclesial realities (Parish, Diocese or Eparchy, Ecclesiastical Province, Universal Church). The Church, one and universal, lives 'in places' and is 'from places', living in a dynamic circularity and reciprocity (or 'mutual interiority') of relations. Within this horizon and avoiding both dispersion and particularism, as well as the tendency towards homogenisation and flattening, the document reflects on themes of participation in the local Churches and the interconnections between synodality, collegiality and primacy in groupings of Churches and in the Church as a whole. This includes a special focus on the renewed profile of the Synod of Bishops.

During the Second Session

The Assembly will, therefore, be able to deal with topics such as the promotion of participation in the life of the local Church via the appropriate bodies, the relationships among the Churches and among the bishops (Episcopal Conferences, Eastern hierarchical structures, Particular Councils, the profile and the function of the Synod of Bishops, the service to unity of the Bishop of Rome in a synodal Church, reflection on the "new situation" of the ecumenical path, towards the visible unity of all Christians).

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Conclusion (nos. 109-112)

The document concludes by recalling how reflection on *how* we can live the synodal dimension of the Church more deeply is a service to the possibility of a more effective proclamation of the Gospel. It is a path of conversion that is a source of joy for those who walk it and of reconciliation and healing for individuals and communities. Everything is a call to relationship and a testimony of non-self-sufficiency. Its final lines are an invitation to continue the journey as *pilgrims of hope*.