

## TO CONTINUE THE JOURNEY

### INTRODUCTION

Dear Sisters, Dear Brothers,

"We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor 12:13). This 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." By the common grace of Baptism, we have been able to live together with one heart and one soul, despite the diversity of origins, languages and cultures. As a choir we tried to sing in the variety of voices and in the unity of souls. The Holy Spirit has given us to experience the harmony that he alone knows how to generate: it is a gift and a testimony in a world torn and divided.

This Assembly has taken place at a time when old and new wars are raging in the world, with the absurd tragedy of countless victims. The cry of the poor, of those who are forced to migrate, of those who suffer violence or suffer the devastating consequences of climate change has resounded among us, not only through the media, but also by the voices of many, personally involved with their families and peoples in these tragic events. We have carried everyone, at all times, in our hearts and prayers, asking ourselves how our Churches can foster paths of reconciliation, hope, justice and peace.

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

At the behest of the Holy Father, the Assembly saw other members of the People of God gather together and around the Bishops. The Bishops, united with each other and with the Bishop of Rome, have made manifest the Church as a communion of Churches. Lay men and women, consecrated men and women, deacons and priests were, together 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 in 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 resounded.

It is more than two years since we began the journey that has led us to this Session. After the opening of the synodal process on 9 October 2021, all the Churches, albeit at different paces, engaged in a process of listening that saw diocesan, national and continental stages, the results of which were incorporated into their respective documents. This Session has opened the phase in which the whole Church is taking up the fruits of this consultation in order 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 unfolding 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 many testimonies of holiness, the reflection of theologians have been the soil in which it has sprouted and grown. The Synod 2021-2024 continues to draw on the energy of that seed and to develop its potential. The synodal journey is in fact putting into practice what the Council taught about the Church as a Mystery and People of God, called to holiness. It values the contribution of all the baptized, in the variety of their vocations, to a better understanding and practice of the Gospel. In this sense, it constitutes a true act of further reception of the Council, which prolongs its inspiration and relaunches its prophetic power for today's world.

After a month of work, the Lord is now calling us to return to our Churches to pass on to all of you the fruits of our work and to continue the journey together. Here in Rome there were only a few of us, but the meaning of the synodal path called by the Holy Father is to involve all the baptized. We long for this to happen, and we want to work to make it possible. In this Synthesis Report we have collected the main elements that emerged in the dialogue, prayer and confrontation that characterized these days. Our personal stories will enrich this synthesis with the tone of the lived experience, which no page can restore. In this way we will be able to testify to you how rich were the moments of silence and listening, of sharing and prayer. We will also agree that it is not easy to listen to different ideas, without immediately giving in to the temptation to retort; Offering one's contribution as a gift to others and not as an absolute certainty. The Lord's grace, however, led us to do so, despite our limitations, and this was for us a true experience of synodality. By practicing it, we have understood it better and grasped its value.

We have understood, in fact, that walking together as baptized persons, in the diversity of charisms, vocations, ministries, is important not only for our communities, but also for the world. Evangelical brotherhood is in fact like a lamp, which is not to be placed under a bushel, but on the lampstand so that it may shed light on the whole house (cf. Mt 5:15). Today, more than ever, the world needs this witness. As disciples of Jesus, we cannot shirk the task of showing and transmitting God's love and tenderness to a wounded humanity.

The work of this Session was carried out 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 discussion on the proposed questions confirmed the goodness of the overall layout of the track. We were able to go into the merits of the issues, identify the issues in need of in-depth study, and put forward an initial nucleus of proposals. In the light of the progress made, the Synthesis 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 an instrument 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 ground synodality. Here the style of synodality appears as a way of acting and working in faith that is born of the contemplation of the Trinity and values unity and variety as ecclesial richness. The second part, entitled "All Disciples, All Missionaries," deals with all those involved in the life and mission of the Church and their relationships. In this part, synodality is presented primarily as a joint journey of the People of God and as a fruitful dialogue of charisms and ministries at the service of the coming of the Kingdom. The third part is entitled "Weaving Bonds, Building Communities". Here synodality appears primarily as a set of processes and a network of organisms that allow for 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 to which reflection can look: they are like a map that allows us to orient ourselves on the path and not lose our way. The questions to be addressed bring together the points on which we have recognized that it is necessary to continue the theological, pastoral and canonical deepening: they are like crossroads on which it is necessary to pause, in order to better understand the direction to be taken. On the other hand, the proposals indicate possible paths to follow: some are suggested, others recommended, others requested with more strength 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 reflection. On the basis of the convergences reached, they are called to concentrate on the most relevant and urgent questions and proposals, encouraging their theological and pastoral deepening and indicating the canonical implications.

We carry in our hearts the desire, sustained by hope, that the climate of mutual listening and sincere dialogue that we experienced during the days of 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 is also part of this process. Through it, the Holy People of God have discovered that a synodal way of praying, listening and speaking, rooted in the Word of God and interwoven with moments of encounter in joy, and sometimes even in fatigue, leads to a deeper awareness that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. An inestimable fruit is the increased awareness of our identity as the faithful People of God, within which each one is the bearer of a dignity derived from Baptism and called to co-responsibility for the common mission of evangelization.

b) This process has renewed our experience and our desire for a Church that is God's home and family. It is precisely to this experience and to this desire for a Church that is closer to the people, less bureaucratic and more relational that the terms "synodality" and "synodal" have been associated, offering a first understanding that needs to be better clarified. It is the Church that young people had already declared they desired in 2018, on the occasion of the Synod dedicated to them.

c) The very way in which the Assembly took place, starting with the arrangement of people seated in small groups around round tables in the Paul VI Hall, comparable to the biblical image of the wedding banquet (Rev 19:9), is emblematic of a synodal Church and image of the Eucharist, source and summit of synodality, with the Word of God at the center. Within it, different cultures, languages, rituals, ways of thinking and realities can engage together and fruitfully in a sincere search under the guidance of the Spirit.

d) Present among us were sisters and brothers of peoples who were victims of war, martyrdom, persecution and hunger. The situation of these peoples, for whom it was often impossible to participate in the synodal process, entered into our exchanges and 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 upon the Church during this synodal process. Openness to listening to 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 way to go towards reconciliation and justice, which requires addressing the structural conditions that have 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 causes confusion and concern in some. Among the fears is that the Church's teaching 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 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 deliberation by majority devoid of its ecclesial and spiritual character, putting at risk the hierarchical nature of the Church. Some fear that they will be forced to change; others fear that nothing will change and that there will be too little courage to move to the rhythm of the living Tradition. Some misgivings and oppositions also conceal the fear of losing power and the privileges that come with it. In any case, in all cultural contexts, the terms "synodal" and "synodality" indicate a way of being Church that articulates communion, mission and participation. An example of this is the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA), the fruit of the synodal missionary 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 meeting in assembly at different levels of ecclesial life, listening to one another, dialogue, community discernment, the creation of consensus as an expression of the making present 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 very first days, the Assembly has been shaped by two convictions: the first is that the experience we have shared in recent 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 that, with the necessary clarifications, the synodal perspective represents the future of the Church.

Issues to be addressed

j) Starting from the work of reflection already carried out, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of synodality at different levels, from pastoral use to theological and canonical use, avoiding the risk that it sounds too vague or generic, or that it appears as a passing fad. In the same way, it is considered

necessary to clarify the relationship between synodality and communion, as well as that between synodality and collegiality.

k) There was a desire to value 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, by fostering encounter between them.

l) In particular, the many expressions of synodal life in cultural contexts in which people are accustomed to walking together as a community should be brought to light. Along these lines, it can be said that synodal practice is part of the Church's prophetic response 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 it does provide an alternative way of being and acting that is hopeful, integrates a plurality of perspectives and needs to be further explored and illuminated.

#### Proposals

m) The richness and depth of the lived experience lead us to indicate as a priority the enlargement 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) It is necessary to develop ways for a more active involvement of deacons, priests and bishops in the synodal 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 some of them's resistance to synodality.

o) Finally, the need for synodal culture to become more intergenerational emerged, with spaces that allow young people to speak freely with their families, peers and pastors, including through digital channels.

p) It is proposed to promote, in an appropriate context, the theological work of terminological and conceptual study of the notion and practice of synodality before the Second Session of the Assembly, taking advantage of the rich patrimony 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 canonical implications of the perspective of synodality require a similar clarification. In this regard, it is proposed that a special intercontinental commission of theologians and canonists be set up in view of the Second Session of the Assembly.

a) 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 should therefore be initiated.

## 2. Gathered and sent by the Trinity

### Convergences

a) As the Second Vatican Council recalls, the Church is "a people gathered together by 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 pass from the "I" to the "we" and places us at the service of the world. Synodality translates into spiritual attitudes and ecclesial processes the Trinitarian dynamic with which God comes to meet humanity. For this to happen, all the baptized must commit themselves to exercising their vocation, charism and ministry in reciprocity. Only in this way will the Church be able to become a true "conversation" within herself and with the world (cf. *Ecclesiam Suam* 67), walking side by side with every human being in the style of Jesus.

b) From the beginning, the Church's synodal journey has been oriented towards the Kingdom, which will be fully fulfilled when God is all in all. The witness of ecclesial fraternity and missionary dedication to the service of the least will never be equal to the Mystery of which they are also a sign and instrument. The Church does not reflect on her own synodal configuration in order to place herself at the centre of the proclamation, but in order to carry out in the best possible way, even in its constitutive incompleteness, the service of the coming 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 façade of renewal. What we are called to, however, is not only to translate a spiritual experience matured 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 on the rich spiritual patrimony of Tradition, contributes to renewing its forms: a prayer open to participation, a discernment lived together, a missionary energy that is born of sharing and radiates as service.

d) Conversation in the Spirit is an instrument which, despite its limitations, is fruitful for enabling authentic listening and for discerning what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. His practice has aroused

joy, amazement and gratitude and has been experienced as a path of renewal that transforms individuals, groups, and the Church. The word "conversation" expresses something more than just dialogue: it harmoniously intertwines thought and feeling and generates a shared living world. That is why it can be said that conversion is at stake in the conversation. It is an anthropological fact that is found in different peoples and cultures, united by the practice of gathering in solidarity to deal with and decide on vital issues for the community. Grace brings this human experience to fulfilment: to converse "in the Spirit" means to live the experience of sharing in the light of faith and in the search for God's will, in an authentically evangelical atmosphere in which the Holy Spirit can make his unmistakable voice heard.

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

Issues to be addressed

f) In order to truly listen to the Father's will, it seems necessary to deepen the criteria of ecclesial discernment from the theological point of view, so that the reference to the freedom and newness of the Spirit may be appropriately coordinated with the event of Jesus Christ which happened "once for all" (Heb 10:10). This requires first of all to clarify the relationship between listening to the Word of God attested to in Scripture, accepting Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church, and 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 all reductionism and any dualism between reason and feeling.

h) It is important to clarify how conversation in the Spirit can integrate the contributions of theological thought and the human and social sciences, also in the light of other models of ecclesial discernment that are carried out by following the rhythm of "seeing, judging, acting" or articulating the steps of "recognizing, interpreting, choosing".

i) The contribution that lectio divina and the various spiritual traditions, ancient and recent, can offer to the practice of discernment must be developed. In fact, it is appropriate to make the most of the



plurality of forms and styles, methods and criteria which the Holy Spirit has suggested over the centuries and which are part of the Church's spiritual patrimony.

## Proposals

j) It aims to experiment with and adapt conversation in the Spirit and other forms of discernment in the life of the Churches, making the most of the richness of the different spiritual traditions according to cultures and contexts. Appropriate forms of accompaniment can facilitate this practice, helping to grasp its logic and overcome any resistance.

k) Each local Church should equip itself with suitable and prepared persons to facilitate and accompany processes of ecclesial discernment.

l) It is important that the practice of discernment be carried out also in the pastoral sphere, in a way appropriate to the contexts, in order to shed light on the concreteness of ecclesial life. It will make it possible to better recognize the charisms present in the community, to wisely entrust tasks and ministries, to plan pastoral journeys 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 journey through which the Lord, through the ministry of the Church, introduces us to the paschal faith and inserts us into Trinitarian and ecclesial communion. This itinerary takes a significant variety of forms depending on the age in which it is undertaken and the different emphases of Eastern and Western traditions. However, it is always intertwined with listening to the Word and conversion of life, liturgical celebration and insertion into the community and its mission. Precisely for this reason, the catechumenal journey, with the gradualness of its stages and passages, is the paradigm of every ecclesial journey together.

b) Initiation brings people into contact with a great variety of vocations and ecclesial ministries. They express the maternal face of a Church that teaches her children to walk with them. He listens to them and, while answering their doubts and questions, he is enriched by the newness that each person carries

within him, with his or her history, language and culture. In the practice of this pastoral action, the Christian community experiences, often without being fully aware of it, the first form of synodality.

c) Before any distinction of charisms and ministries, "we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor 12:13). For this reason, among all the baptized there is an authentic equality of dignity and a common responsibility for the mission, according to the vocation of each one. Through the anointing of the Spirit, who "teaches all things" (1 Jn 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. Synodal processes make the most of this gift and make it possible 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 makes the grace of Pentecost in some way 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 the common baptismal dignity, at the service of the mission. Its importance must be more emphasized 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 meet and meet. Where this is not possible, the community, while desiring it, gathers around the celebration of the Word. In the Eucharist we celebrate a mystery of grace of which we are not the artisans. By calling us to partake of his Body and Blood, the Lord makes us one body among us and with him. Beginning with Paul's use of the term *koinonia* (cf. 1 Cor 10:16-17), Christian tradition has preserved the word "communion" to indicate at the same time full participation in the Eucharist and the nature of relations between the faithful and between the Churches. While opening 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 open ourselves to one another, 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: the unity of the Church and the 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 more than the Eucharist shows that the harmony created by the Spirit is not uniformity and that every ecclesial gift is destined for common edification.

Issues to be addressed

g) The sacrament of Baptism cannot be understood in isolation, outside the logic of Christian initiation, much less 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 an expression of the dominant thought, the result of cultural conditioning or in any case inconsistent with the Gospel. This is a theme that needs to be explored in depth 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 the light of the different ecclesial experiences, it is necessary to study how to make the preparation and celebration of this sacrament more fruitful, so as to awaken in all the faithful the call to build up the community, to the mission in the world and to the witness of the faith.

j) From the theological and pastoral point of view, it is important to continue research into the way in which catechumenal logic can illuminate other pastoral paths, such as that of marriage preparation, or accompaniment to choices of professional and social commitment, or formation for the ordained ministry, in which the whole ecclesial community must be involved.

## Proposals

k) If the Eucharist gives form to synodality, the first step to be taken is to honour 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 fraternity. Before any of our formation initiatives, we must allow ourselves to be formed by her powerful beauty and the noble simplicity of her gestures.

l) A second step refers to the need, pointed out by many quarters, to make liturgical language more accessible to the faithful and more embodied in the diversity of cultures. Without calling into question the continuity with tradition and the need for liturgical formation, we urge 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 make the most of all forms of community prayer, not limiting itself to the celebration of Mass alone. Other expressions of liturgical prayer, as well as the practices of popular piety, in which the genius of local cultures is reflected, are elements of great importance for encouraging the involvement of all the faithful, for gradually introducing the Christian mystery and for bringing 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, because of its ability to sustain 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 is certainly an important form of assistance, but which does not fully take charge of the dignity of the person. Respect and recognition are powerful tools for activating personal capacities, so that each person is the subject of his or her own growth path and not the object of the assistance of others.

b) The preferential option for the poor is implicit in 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 discarded is a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. For St. John Paul II, God is the first to grant them his mercy. This divine preference has consequences in the lives of all Christians, who are called to have "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 are those of all those who do not have the necessities to lead a dignified life. Then there are those of migrants and refugees; indigenous, originary and Afro-descendant peoples; those who suffer violence and abuse, especially women; people with addictions; minorities who are systematically denied a voice; abandoned elderly; victims of racism, exploitation and trafficking, in particular children; exploited workers; economically excluded and others living in the suburbs. The most vulnerable of the vulnerable, for whom constant advocacy is needed, are the 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 of them.

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 self-concern can lead to seeing others as a threat and to withdrawing into individualism. As has been noted, material poverty and spiritual poverty, when they

work together, 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 Gospel Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3).

e) Standing at the side of the poor also means committing ourselves with them to the care of our common home: the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are the same cry. The lack of reaction 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 course and this represents their contribution to the journey of the other Churches of the planet.

f) The Church's commitment must address the causes of poverty and exclusion. This includes action to protect the rights of the poor and excluded, and may require public denunciation of injustices, whether perpetrated by individuals, governments, corporations, or structures of society. For this reason, it is essential to listen to their requests and their point of view, in order to lend them your voice, using their words.

g) Christians have the duty to commit themselves to taking an active part in building the common good and defending the dignity of life, drawing inspiration from the Church's social doctrine and working in various forms (involvement in civil society organizations, trade unions, popular movements, grassroots associations, politics, etc.). The Church expresses deep gratitude for their action. Communities should support those who work in these fields in a true spirit of charity and service. Their action is part of the Church's mission of proclaiming the Gospel and collaborating in the coming of the Kingdom of God.

h) In the poor, the Christian community encounters the face and flesh of Christ, who, rich as he was, became poor for our sake, so that we might become rich through his poverty (cf. 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 the One who is the way, a synodal Church needs to put the poor at the centre of all aspects of its lives: through their sufferings they have a direct knowledge of the suffering Christ (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 198). The similarity of their lives to 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 be addressed

i) In some parts of the world the Church is poor, with the poor and for the poor. There is a constant risk, 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 the Church must do more and more.

j) The prophetic denunciation of situations of injustice and the pressure on political decision-makers, which requires recourse to forms of diplomacy, must be kept in dynamic tension so as not to lose lucidity and fruitfulness. In particular, care must be taken to ensure that the use of public or private funds by the Church's structures does not condition the freedom to speak in the name of the demands of the Gospel.

k) Action in the fields of education, health and social welfare, without any discrimination or exclusion of anyone, is a clear sign of a Church that promotes the integration and participation of the least within herself 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 urged to network and coordinate.

l) The Church must be honest in examining how she respects the demands of justice with regard to those who work in the institutions connected with her, in order to bear witness with integrity to her own consistency.

m) In a synodal Church, the sense of solidarity is also played out at the level of the exchange of gifts and the sharing of resources between local Churches in different regions. These are relationships that foster the unity of the Church, creating bonds between the Christian communities involved. It is necessary to focus on the conditions to be guaranteed so that the priests who come to the aid of the Churches poor in clergy are not only a functional remedy, but a resource for the growth of the Church that sends them and that which receives them. In the same way, it is necessary to ensure that economic aid does not degenerate into welfare, but promotes authentic evangelical solidarity and is managed in a transparent and reliable manner.

## Proposals

n) The social doctrine of the Church is too little known a resource in which to return to invest. The local Churches should strive not only to make its contents better known, but to encourage its appropriation through practices that put its inspiration into action.

o) The experience of encounter, of sharing one's life and of service to the poor and marginalized should become an integral part of all the formation courses offered by Christian communities: this is a requirement of faith, not an optional extra. This is especially true for candidates for the ordained ministry and consecrated life.

p) In the context of the rethinking of the diaconal ministry, a more decisive orientation to the service of the poor should be promoted.

q) The biblical and theological foundations of integral ecology should be integrated more explicitly and carefully into the teaching, liturgy and practices of the Church.

## 5. A Church of "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 every time. In this way they become a Church of "every tribe and tongue and 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 synodal dialogue, and the languages in 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 multireligious contexts, in which it is essential to engage in dialogue between religion and culture together with the other groups that make up society. Living the Church's mission in these contexts requires a style of presence, service and proclamation that seeks to build bridges, cultivate mutual understanding and engage in an evangelization that accompanies, listens and learns. The image of "taking off one's shoes" to go to the encounter with the other as equals, as a sign of humility and respect for a sacred space, resounded several times in the Assembly.

d) Migratory movements are a reality that reshapes the local Churches as intercultural communities. Migrants and refugees, many of whom bear the wounds of uprooting, war and violence, often 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. In the face of 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 among peoples. Respect for the liturgical traditions and religious practices of migrants is an integral part of an authentic welcome.

e) Missionaries have given their lives to bring the Good News throughout the world. Their commitment gives eloquent testimony to the power of the Gospel. However, particular attention and sensitivity are needed in contexts where "mission" is a word laden with a painful historical heritage, 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 acknowledging the mistakes that have been 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 for recognizing that we complement 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 witness to the unity of humanity, to its common origin and common destiny, in a coordinated and fraternal solidarity towards social justice, peace, reconciliation and care for our common home, appears ever more urgent. The Church is aware that the Spirit can speak through the voice of men and women of every religion, conviction and culture.

Issues to be addressed

g) It is necessary to cultivate sensitivity to the richness of the variety of expressions of being Church. This requires 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 Church's unity and the risk of homogenization that stifles 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 witness of life, on the commitment to human promotion, on dialogue with faiths and cultures, and on the explicit proclamation of the Gospel. Likewise, there emerges a tension between the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ and the appreciation of the characteristics of each culture in search of the Gospel traits (*semina Verbi*) that it already contains.



j) Among the questions to be explored, 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, opens up the question, raised in various groups, of a more careful reflection and training in managing conflicts in a non-violent way. It is a qualified contribution that Christians can offer to today's world, also in dialogue and collaboration with other religions.

#### Proposals

l) There is a need for renewed attention to the question of the languages we use to speak to people's minds and hearts in a wide variety of contexts, in a way that is accessible and beautiful.

m) In view of the experimentation of forms of decentralisation, it is necessary to define a shared reference framework for their management and evaluation, identifying all the actors involved and their roles. For the sake of coherence, the processes of discernment in the field of decentralization must take place in a synodal style, providing for the collaboration and contribution of all the actors involved at the different levels.

n) New paradigms are needed for pastoral engagement with indigenous peoples, along the lines 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 missionary Church.

o) From the work of the Assembly, there 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 in order to be more clearly a Church of Churches in communion, effective in service and dialogue.

p) In a world in which the number of migrants and refugees is increasing, while the willingness to welcome them is decreasing, and in which the stranger is viewed with growing suspicion, it is appropriate for the Church to commit herself decisively to education in the culture of dialogue and encounter, combating racism and xenophobia, especially in pastoral formation programmes. It is equally necessary to engage in projects for the integration of migrants.

q) We recommend a renewed commitment to dialogue and discernment in matters of racial justice. It is necessary to identify and combat the systems that create or maintain racial injustice within the Church. May processes of healing and reconciliation be initiated to eradicate the sin of racism, with the help of those who suffer the 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 whole Church. In particular, their experience of unity in diversity can offer a valuable contribution to the understanding and practice of synodality.

b) In the course of history, the level of autonomy guaranteed to these Churches has gone through different phases and has also seen behaviors that are now considered outdated, such as Latinization. In recent decades, the process of recognizing the specificity, distinction and autonomy of these Churches has developed considerably.

c) The substantial migration of the faithful from the Catholic East to territories with a Latin majority raises important pastoral questions. If the current flow continues or increases, there may be more members of the Eastern Catholic Churches in diaspora than in canonical territories. For 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 Churches of the Latin rite, in the name of synodality, help the Eastern faithful who have emigrated to preserve their identity and to cultivate their specific patrimony, without undergoing processes of assimilation.

### Issues to be addressed

d) The contribution that the experience of the Eastern Catholic Churches can offer to the understanding and practice of synodality should be further studied.

e) Some difficulties remain with regard to 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 dialogue with the Holy See.

f) In regions where the faithful of different Catholic Churches are present, it is necessary to find ways to make visible and possible an effective unity in diversity.

g) It is necessary to reflect on the contribution that the Eastern Catholic Churches can make to the journey towards unity among all Christians and the role they can play in interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

#### Proposals

h) First of all, there is the request to establish a Council of Patriarchs and Major Archbishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches attached to the Holy Father.

i) Some are calling for the convocation of 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 migration.

j) It is proposed to form a joint commission of Eastern and Latin theologians, historians and canonists to study the questions that require further study and to make proposals for further progress.

k) In the dicasteries of the Roman Curia there should be an adequate representation of members of the Eastern Catholic Churches in order to enrich the whole Church with the contribution of their perspective, to promote the solution of the problems identified and to participate in dialogue at different levels.

l) In order to foster forms of hospitality that respect the patrimony of the faithful of the Eastern Churches, it is appropriate to intensify relations between the Eastern clergy in the diaspora and the Latin clergy, and to promote mutual knowledge and recognition of each other's traditions.

#### 7. On the Way to Christian Unity

#### Convergences

a) This session of the Synodal Assembly opened under the banner 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 has also enabled us to recognize that we are in an ecumenical kairós and to reaffirm that what unites us is greater than what divides us. In common, in fact, 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, which is at the beginning of synodality, is also the foundation of ecumenism. Through it, all Christians participate in the *sensus fidei* and for this reason they must be listened to attentively, regardless of their tradition, as the Synodal Assembly did in its process of discernment. There can be no synodality without the ecumenical dimension.

c) Ecumenism is first and foremost a matter of spiritual renewal and also requires processes of repentance and healing of memory. The Assembly resounded with enlightening testimonies of Christians of different ecclesial traditions who share friendship, prayer and above all commitment to the service of the poor. Dedication to the least cements bonds and helps to focus on what already unites all believers in Christ. It is important, therefore, that ecumenism develop first and foremost in daily life. In theological and institutional dialogue, the patient weaving of mutual understanding in a climate of growing trust and openness continues.

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 among all Christians is also a fundamental element in 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 least. Always and everywhere it is a fundamental resource for healing the culture of hatred, division and war that pits groups, peoples and nations against each other.

f) Marriages between Christians who belong to different Churches or ecclesial communities (mixed marriages) are realities in which the wisdom of communion can mature and one another can be evangelized.

Issues to be addressed

g) Our Assembly has been able to perceive the diversity among the Christian confessions in the way it understands 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 lack of references to the practices in use in other ecclesial communities, which enriched our debate. All of this requires further investigation.

h) Another theme to be explored concerns the link between synodality and primacy at the various levels (local, regional, universal), in their reciprocal interdependence. It requires a shared re-reading of history, to overcome clichés and prejudices. The ongoing ecumenical dialogues have made it possible to better understand, in the 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 hoped for by St. John Paul II in the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*.

i) The question of Eucharistic hospitality (*communicatio in sacris*) should be further examined from a theological, canonical and pastoral point of view, in the light of the connection between sacramental and ecclesial communion. This theme is particularly felt by interfaith couples. It also refers to a broader reflection on mixed marriages.

j) A reflection was also called upon on the phenomenon of "non-denominational" communities and "revival" movements of Christian inspiration, to which a large number of the faithful who were originally Catholics also adhere.

## Proposals

k) 2025 marks the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (325), in which the symbol of the faith that unites all Christians was elaborated. A common 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 strong desire to find a common date for the feast of Easter, so that we could celebrate on the same day the Resurrection of the Lord, our life and our salvation.

m) It is also desired to continue to involve Christians of other denominations in Catholic synodal processes at all levels and to invite a greater number of fraternal delegates to the next session of the Assembly in 2024.

n) The proposal to convoke an Ecumenical Synod on the common mission in the contemporary world has also been put forward by some.

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, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21): the Church receives her mission from Christ, the Father's Messenger. Sustained and guided by the Holy Spirit, she proclaims and bears witness to the Gospel to those who do not know it or do not accept it, with that preferential option for the poor which is rooted in the mission of Jesus. In this way he contributes to the coming of the Kingdom of God, of which "he is the seed and the beginning" (cf. LG 5).

b) The sacraments of Christian initiation confer on all disciples of Jesus the responsibility for the mission of the Church. Lay 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 that 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 the faith and in Christian practice, which requires special accompaniment within communities. Support is especially necessary for parents who have to reconcile

work, also within the ecclesial community and at the service of its mission, with the demands of family life.

d) If mission is a grace that engages the whole Church, the lay faithful make a vital contribution to carrying it out in all the most ordinary environments and situations of every day. Above all, they are the ones who make the Church present and proclaim the Gospel in the culture of the digital environment, which has such a strong impact all over the world, in youth cultures, in the world of work, economics and politics, in the arts and culture, in scientific research, in education and formation, in the care of our common home and, in the care of our common home, in particular, in participation in public life. Where they are present, they are called to bear witness to Jesus Christ in their daily lives and to share their faith explicitly with others. Young people in particular, with their gifts and their frailties, as they grow in friendship with Jesus, become apostles of the Gospel among their peers.

e) The lay faithful are also increasingly present and active in service within Christian communities. Many of them organize and animate pastoral communities, serve as educators in the faith, theologians and formators, spiritual animators and catechists, and participate in various parish and diocesan bodies. In many regions, the life of Christian communities and the mission of the Church are centred on the figure of catechists. In addition, lay people serve in safeguarding and administration. Their contribution is indispensable for the Church's mission; For this reason, the acquisition of the necessary skills must be taken care of

f) The charisms of the laity, in their variety, are gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church that must be brought out, recognized and fully valued. In some situations it may happen that the laity are called upon to make up for the shortage of priests, with the risk that the properly lay character of their apostolate will be diminished. In other contexts, it can happen that priests do everything and the charisms and ministries of the laity are ignored or underutilized. There is also the danger, expressed by many in 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 brings about a mutual enrichment of the Churches, because it involves not only the missionaries, but the whole community, which is stimulated to prayer, to the sharing of goods and to witness. Even the Churches that are poor in clergy must not renounce this commitment, while those in which there is a greater flourishing of vocations to the ordained ministry can open themselves to pastoral cooperation, in a genuinely evangelical logic. All missionaries – lay men and women, consecrated men and women, deacons and priests, especially members of missionary institutes and fidei donum missionaries – by virtue of their proper vocation, are an important resource for creating bonds of knowledge and exchange of gifts.

h) The Church's mission is continually renewed and nourished by the celebration of the Eucharist, especially when it emphasizes its community and missionary character.

#### Issues to be addressed

i) It is necessary to continue to deepen the theological understanding of the relationship between charisms and ministries from a missionary perspective.

j) Vatican II and the subsequent magisterium present the distinctive mission of the laity in terms of the sanctification of temporal or secular realities. However, in the concreteness of pastoral practice, at the parish, diocesan and, recently, even universal levels, tasks and ministries within the Church are increasingly entrusted to lay people. Theological reflection and canonical dispositions 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 persons with disabilities. We want to value the contribution to evangelization that comes from the immense richness of humanity that 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 such a way as 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 leadership 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 work life, without focusing exclusively on the activities that take place within them and their organizational needs.

m) The expression "an entirely ministerial Church", used in the *Instrumentum laboris*, can lend itself to misunderstanding. Its meaning should be studied in depth in order to clarify any ambiguities.

#### Proposals

n) There is a perceived need for greater creativity in the establishment of ministries according to the needs of the local Churches, with a particular involvement of young people. One can think of further expanding the tasks of the instituted ministry of the lector, which already today are not limited to the



role played during the liturgies. In this way, a true ministry of God's Word could be configured, which in appropriate contexts could also include preaching. Consideration should also be given to instituting a ministry for married couples who are committed to supporting family life and accompanying people preparing for the sacrament of marriage.

o) The local Churches are invited to identify ways 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 human experiences. Sacred Scripture testifies to the complementarity and reciprocity of women and men. In the many forms in which it is realized, the covenant between man and woman is at the heart of God's plan for creation. Jesus considered women to be 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, deliverance, and recognition, and walked with him on the road from Galilee to Jerusalem (cf. Lk 8:1-3). He entrusted a woman, Mary Magdalene, with the task of announcing the resurrection on Easter morning.

b) In Christ, women and men are clothed with the same baptismal dignity and receive in equal measure the variety of the gifts of the Spirit (cf. Gal 3:28). Men and women are called to a communion characterized by non-competitive co-responsibility, to be embodied at every level of the Church's life. As Pope Francis told us, together we are "a 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 synodal process, and we ask the Church to grow in the commitment to understand and accompany women, from the pastoral and sacramental point of view. Women wish to share the spiritual experience of walking towards holiness at different stages of life: as young people, as mothers, in friendships, 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 inequality, and by the tendency to treat them as objects. They bear the scars of human trafficking, forced migration, and war. Accompaniment and the resolute 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, are a gift, a sign and a witness of fundamental importance in our midst. The long history of women missionaries, saints, theologians and mystics is a powerful source of inspiration and nourishment for the women and men of our time.

e) Mary of Nazareth, woman of faith and Mother of God, remains for all an extraordinary source of meaning from the theological, ecclesial and spiritual points of view. Mary reminds us of the universal call to listen attentively to God and to remain open to the Holy Spirit. She knew the joy of giving birth and nurturing, and she endured pain and suffering. She gave birth in precarious conditions, had the experience of being a refugee and lived the agony of the brutal killing of her Son. But he also knew the splendour of the resurrection and the glory of Pentecost.

f) Many women expressed deep gratitude for the work of priests and bishops, but they also spoke of a Church that hurts. Clericalism, machismo and an inappropriate use of authority continue to disfigure the face of the Church and damage communion. A deep spiritual conversion is needed as the basis for any structural change. Sexual, power and economic abuses continue to demand justice, healing and reconciliation. We ask how the Church can become a space capable of protecting everyone.

g) When dignity and justice in relations between men and women are violated in the Church, the credibility of the proclamation we address to the world is weakened. The synodal process shows that there is a need for a renewal of relations and structural changes. In this way we will be better able to welcome the participation and contribution of all – lay men and women, consecrated men and women, deacons, priests and bishops – as disciples co-responsible for the mission.

h) The Assembly calls for a remission of 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 in order to better understand the depth of God's plan, in which they appear together as protagonists, without subordination, exclusion or competition.

#### Issues to be addressed

i) The Churches throughout the world have clearly formulated the request for greater recognition and appreciation of the contribution of women and for an increase in the pastoral responsibilities entrusted to them in all areas of the Church's life and mission. In order to give better expression to the charisms of all 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 women's access 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 an expression of a dangerous anthropological confusion, in accepting which the Church would align itself with the spirit of the times.

k) The debate in this regard is also connected to the broader reflection on the theology of the diaconate (cf. chap. 11, h - i).

#### Proposals

l) The local Churches are encouraged, in particular, to extend their service of listening, accompaniment and care to women who are most marginalized in the various social contexts.

m) There is an urgent need to ensure that women can participate in decision-making processes and assume roles of responsibility in pastoral care and ministry. The Holy Father has significantly increased the number of women in positions of responsibility in the Roman Curia. The same should happen at other levels of the Church's life. Canon law must be adapted accordingly.

n) Theological and pastoral research on women's access to the diaconate should continue, taking advantage of the results of the commissions specifically instituted by the Holy Father and of 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 should be addressed and resolved, particularly with regard to consecrated women who are too often considered cheap labour.

p) There is a need to broaden women's access to formation programs and theological studies. Women are to be included in the teaching and training programs of seminaries in order to foster better formation for the ordained ministry.

q) The liturgical texts and documents of the Church should be more attentive not only to the use of 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 the experience of women.

a) We propose that suitably trained women may be judges in all canonical processes.

## 10. Consecrated Life and Lay Associations: A Charismatic Sign

### Convergences

a) Down the centuries, the Church has always experienced the gift of charisms by which the Holy Spirit rejuvenates and renews her, 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 sustains, directs and enlightens 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 witness has contributed in every age to renewing the life of the ecclesial community, proving to be an antidote to the recurring temptation of worldliness. The various religious families show the beauty of following the Lord, on the mountain of prayer and on the roads of the world, in the forms of community life, in the solitude of the desert and on the frontier of cultural challenges. More than once, consecrated life has been the first to perceive the changes in history and to respond to the calls of the Spirit: even today the Church needs his prophecy. The Christian community also looks with attention and gratitude to the tried and tested practices of synodal life and discernment in common that the communities of consecrated life have developed over the centuries. From them too we know that we can learn the wisdom of walking together. Many Congregations and Institutes practice conversation in the Spirit or similar forms of discernment in the conduct of Provincial and General Chapters, in order to renew structures, rethink lifestyles, activate new forms of service and closeness to the poorest. In other cases, however, there is a persistence of an authoritarian style, which does not make room for fraternal dialogue.

c) With equal gratitude, the People of God recognizes the ferment of renewal present in communities with 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 the different vocations, in the enthusiasm with which they proclaim the Gospel, in their closeness to those who live on economic or social marginality and in their commitment to the promotion of the common good. They are often models of synodal communion and participation in view of the mission.

d) Cases of abuse of various kinds against consecrated persons and members of lay groups, especially women, indicate a problem in the exercise of authority and require decisive and appropriate interventions.

#### Issues to be addressed

e) The Magisterium of the Church has developed extensive teaching on the importance of hierarchical gifts and charismatic gifts in the life and mission of the Church, which requires a better understanding in the ecclesial conscience and in theological reflection itself. It is therefore necessary to ask ourselves about the ecclesiological significance and the concrete pastoral implications of this acquisition.

f) The variety of charismatic expressions within the Church emphasizes the commitment of the faithful People of God to live the prophecy of closeness to the least and to enlighten culture with a deeper experience of spiritual realities. It is necessary to deepen how consecrated life, lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities can put their charisms at the service of communion and mission in the local Churches, helping to advance towards holiness thanks to a presence that is prophetic.

#### Proposals

g) We believe that the time is ripe for a revision 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 a synodal style, including all those involved.

h) To the same end, Episcopal Conferences and Conferences of Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life should set up appropriate places and instruments to promote meetings and forms of collaboration in a synodal spirit.

i) At the level of both the individual local Churches and the groupings of Churches, the promotion of missionary synodality requires the establishment and a more precise configuration of Councils and Councils in which representatives of lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities converge in order to promote organic relations between these realities and the life of the local Churches.

j) In theological formation at all levels, especially in the formation of ordained ministers, attention should be paid to the charismatic dimension of the Church and, where necessary, it should be strengthened.

## 11. Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church

### Convergences

a) Priests are the Bishop's principal cooperators and form a single presbyterate with him (cf. 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 (cf. LG 29). First of all, the Synodal Assembly expresses its deep gratitude to them. Aware that they may experience loneliness and isolation, he recommends that Christian communities 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, closeness to the poor and marginalized, commitment to the world of culture and education, mission ad gentes, theological research, the animation of centers of spirituality and many others. In a synodal Church, ordained ministers are called to live their service to the People of God in an attitude of closeness to people, of welcoming and listening to all, and to cultivate a deep personal spirituality and a life of prayer. Above all, they are called to rethink the exercise of authority on the model of Jesus who, "although he is in the condition of God, ... he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2:6-7). The Assembly recognizes that many priests and deacons make visible by their dedication the face of Christ the Good Shepherd and Servant.

c) Clericalism is an obstacle to ministry and mission. It arises from a misunderstanding of the divine call, which leads to conceiving it more as a privilege than as a service, and manifests itself in a style of worldly power that refuses to be accountable. This distortion of the priesthood must be countered from the earliest stages of formation, through a living contact with the daily life of the People of God and a concrete experience of service to the most needy. The ministry of the priest today can only be imagined in relation to the Bishop, in the presbyterate, in deep communion with the other ministries and charisms. Unfortunately, clericalism is an attitude that can manifest itself not only in ministers, but also in the laity.

d) Awareness of one's own abilities and limitations 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 process, the contribution of the family of origin and of the Christian community, within which the young person has matured his vocation, and of other families that accompany his growth, should not be underestimated.

## Issues to be addressed

e) In the perspective of the formation of all the baptized for a synodal Church, that of deacons and priests requires special attention. There was a broad demand that seminaries or other training courses for candidates for ministry be linked to the daily life of the communities. It is necessary to avoid the risks of formalism and ideology that lead to authoritarian attitudes and impede true vocational growth. The rethinking of styles and training paths requires an extensive review 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 whether its theological convenience with the priestly ministry must necessarily be translated into a disciplinary obligation in the Latin Church, especially where ecclesial and cultural contexts make it more difficult. This is not a new issue, and it needs to be taken up again.

## Proposals

g) In the Latin Churches, the permanent diaconate has been carried out in different ways in different ecclesial contexts. Some local Churches have not introduced it at all; in others, there are fears that deacons will be perceived as some sort of remedy for the shortage of priests. Sometimes their ministry 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 the theological point of view, there is a need to understand the diaconate first of all in itself, and not only as a stage of access to the priesthood. The very linguistic use of qualifying the primary form of diaconate as "permanent", in order to distinguish it from the "transitory" one, is the indicator of a change of perspective that has not yet been adequately realized.

i) The uncertainties surrounding the theology of the diaconal ministry are also due to the fact that in the Latin Church it was restored as a proper and permanent level of the hierarchy only since the Second Vatican Council. A more in-depth reflection on this matter will also shed light on the question of women's access to the diaconate.

j) An in-depth assessment of formation for the ordained ministry is required in the 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 that care be taken for the ongoing formation of priests and deacons in a synodal sense.

k) The dimension of transparency and the culture of accountability represent an element of crucial importance for proceeding in the construction of a synodal Church. We ask the local Churches to identify processes and structures that allow for regular verification of the manner in which the ministry of priests and deacons who carry out positions of responsibility is exercised. Existing institutes, such as participatory bodies or pastoral visits, can be the starting point for this work, taking care of the involvement of the community. 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) Consideration should be given, on a case-by-case basis and according to the context, of including priests who have left the ministry in a pastoral service that values their formation 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 whole Church. 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 presbyterate and with deacons, with consecrated persons, with other Bishops and with the Bishop of Rome, in a perspective that is always oriented to mission.

b) The Bishop is, in his Church, primarily responsible for the proclamation of the Gospel and the liturgy. He leads the Christian community and promotes the care of the poor and the defense of the least. As a visible principle of unity, it has in particular the task of discerning and coordinating the different charisms and ministries inspired by the Spirit for the proclamation of the Gospel and the common good of the community. This ministry is carried out in a synodal way when governance is exercised in co-responsibility, preaching by listening to the faithful People of God, sanctification and liturgical celebration by 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) values the participation of "all" the faithful, thanks to the contribution of "some" more directly involved in processes of discernment and decision-making (participatory and governing bodies). The conviction with which the Bishop assumes the synodal perspective and the style with which he exercises authority have



a decisive influence on the participation of priests and deacons, lay men and women, consecrated men and women. For all, the Bishop is called to be an example of synodality.

d) In contexts in which the Church is perceived as the family of God, the Bishop is considered as the father of all; In secularized societies, on the other hand, there is a crisis of its authority. It is important not to lose sight of 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 carry out their mission to the full. The Bishop also has to come to terms with his own fragility and limitations, and he does not always find human and spiritual support. It is not uncommon to experience a certain loneliness. For this reason, it is important on the one hand to return to the centre of attention on the essential aspects of the Bishop's mission, and on the other to cultivate authentic fraternity among Bishops and with the presbyterate.

Issues to be addressed

f) On the theological level, the significance of the bond of reciprocity between the Bishop and the local Church needs to be further explored. He is called to guide it and, at the same time, to recognize and preserve the richness of its history, its tradition and the charisms present in it.

g) The question of the relationship between the sacrament of Holy Orders and jurisdiction should be deepened, in the light of the conciliar magisterium of Lumen Gentium and more recent teachings, such as the Apostolic Constitution Praedicate Evangelium, in order to specify the theological and canonical criteria that underlie the principle of sharing the Bishop's responsibilities and to determine the areas, 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 in 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 laid down for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons are an integral part of a synodal Church. There is a need to further develop structures dedicated to the prevention of abuse. The delicate issue of the management of abuse places many Bishops in the difficulty of reconciling the role of father and that of judge. It is requested to evaluate the advisability of entrusting the judicial task to another instance, to be canonically specified.

## Proposals

j) Structures and processes for the regular verification of the work of the Bishop are to be set up, in forms to be legally defined, with reference to the style of his authority, the economic administration of the goods of the diocese, the functioning of the bodies of participation and the protection against every type of abuse. The culture of accountability 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 diocesan bodies of co-responsibility more operational, also at the level of law.

l) The Assembly asks for a review of the criteria for selecting candidates for the episcopate, balancing the authority of the Apostolic Nuncio with the participation of the Episcopal Conference. It is also requested 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 Metropolis (ecclesiastical provinces) and the Regions, so that they may be 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 dynamic also sheds new light on the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. Synodality, in fact, articulates in a symphonic way the community ("all"), collegial ("some") and personal ("one") dimensions of the Church at the local, regional and universal levels. In this vision, the Petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome is intrinsic to the synodal dynamic, as are the community aspect that includes the whole People of God and the collegial dimension of the episcopal ministry. For this reason, synodality, collegiality and primacy recall 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 made it possible 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 addressed by St. 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 reciprocal relations.

c) The reform of the Roman Curia is an important aspect of the synodal process of the Catholic Church. The Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* insists that "the Roman Curia does not place itself between the Pope and the Bishops, but rather places itself at the service of both according to the modalities proper to the nature of each" (PE I.8). It promotes a 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 foster the relationship between the Curia and the local Churches. The effective implementation of *Praedicate Evangelium* will foster greater synodality within the Curia, both between the different Dicasteries and in each of them.

#### Issues to be addressed

d) An in-depth study is requested on the way in which a renewed understanding of the episcopate within a synodal Church affects the ministry of the Bishop of Rome and the role of the Roman Curia. This question 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 ways in which the College of Cardinals collaborates with 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 foster mutual knowledge and bonds of communion among the members of the College of Cardinals, taking into account their diversity of origin and culture.

#### Proposals

g) The Visitations *ad limina Apostolorum* are the highest point in 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 in such a way as to make them more and more opportunities for an open and reciprocal exchange that fosters communion and a true exercise of collegiality and synodality.

h) In the light of the synodal configuration of the Church, it is necessary that the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia value 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 opportune to provide for forms of evaluation of the work of the Pontifical 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 a synodal council at the service of the Petrine ministry.

k) In the light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, it is necessary to examine carefully whether it is appropriate to ordain the prelates of the Roman Curia as bishops.

### PART III – WEAVING BONDS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

#### 14. A Synodal Approach to Formation

##### Convergences

a) Taking care of one's own formation is the response that every baptized person is called to give to the gifts of the Lord, in order 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 disciples reveals the importance of this ecclesial action, which is often inconspicuous but decisive for the mission. We would like to express a word of thanks and encouragement to all those who are engaged in this area and invite them to grasp the new elements that emerge from the synodal journey of the Church.

b) The way in which Jesus formed the disciples is the model to refer to. He did not limit himself to imparting some teaching, but shared his life with them. With his prayer he raised the question: "Teach us to pray"; by feeding the crowds, he taught us not to dismiss the needy; On his way to Jerusalem, he

pointed out the way of the Cross. From the Gospel we learn that formation is not only or primarily a strengthening of one's own 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 proclamation 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 broad guidelines for formation courses. At the heart of formation is the deepening of the kerygma, that is, the encounter with Jesus Christ who offers us the gift of new life. Catechumenal logic reminds us that we are all sinners called to holiness. For this reason, we commit ourselves to the paths of conversion that the Sacrament of Reconciliation brings to completion, and we nourish the desire for holiness, sustained by a great number of witnesses.

e) There are many areas in which the formation of the People of God takes place. In addition to theological formation, mention was made of a series of specific skills: the exercise of co-responsibility, listening, discernment, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, service to the poor and care for our 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 formation of children and young people, which should involve the active participation of the community.

f) Formation for a synodal Church needs to be undertaken in a synodal way: the whole People of God is formed together as they journey together. It is necessary to overcome the mentality of delegation that is found in so many areas of pastoral care. A synodal formation aims to enable the People of God to live their baptismal vocation to the full, in the family, in the workplace, in the ecclesial, social and intellectual spheres, and to enable each person to participate actively in the mission of the Church according to his or her own charisms and vocation.

Issues to be addressed

g) We recommend that the theme of affective and sexual education be deepened, in order to accompany young people on their path of growth and to support the affective maturation of those who are called to celibacy and consecrated chastity. Formation 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 does not limit itself to juxtaposing their contributions, but integrates them into a more mature synthesis.

i) The People of God must be widely represented in the formation of ordained ministers, as already requested by previous Synods. A broad review of training programmes is needed, with particular attention to how to enhance the contribution of women and the contribution of families.

j) Bishops' Conferences are encouraged to work at the regional level to create together a culture of lifelong learning, using all available resources, including the development of digital options.

#### Proposals

k) In the light of synodality, we propose to privilege, as far as possible, joint formation proposals addressed to the whole People of God (laity, consecrated persons and ordained ministers). It is up to the dioceses to encourage these projects at the local level. We encourage the Bishops' Conferences to work together at the regional level to create together a culture of lifelong learning, using all available resources, including the development of digital options.

l) The various components of the People of God are to be represented in the formation courses for the ordained ministry, as already requested by previous Synods. Of particular importance is the involvement of female figures.

m) Adequate processes for the selection of candidates for the ordained ministry are necessary and the requirements relating to preparatory programmes are respected.

n) The formation of ordained ministers must be thought of in coherence with a synodal Church, in different contexts. This requires that candidates for the ministry, before embarking on specific paths, have matured a real, albeit initial, experience of a Christian community. The formation process must not create an artificial environment, separated from the common life of the faithful. Safeguarding the demands of formation for the ministry, it will foster an authentic spirit of service to the People of God in preaching, in the celebration of the sacraments and in the animation of charity. This may require a revision of the Ratio Fundamentalís for priests and permanent 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 in order to evaluate the reception of the synodal process and to propose the changes necessary to promote the exercise of authority in a style appropriate to a synodal Church.

## 15. Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions

### Convergences

a) The experience of conversation in the Spirit was enriching for all who participated. In particular, a style of communication that favors freedom in the expression of one's points of view and listening to each other was appreciated. This avoids moving too quickly to a debate based on the reiteration of one's arguments, which does not leave the space and time to realize the reasons of the other.

b) This basic attitude creates a favorable context for deepening issues that are controversial even within the Church, such as the anthropological effects of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, non-violence and legitimate defense, problems related to ministry, issues related to corporeality and sexuality, and others.

c) In order 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. In order to avoid taking refuge in the comfort of conventional formulas, a comparison with the point of view of the human and social sciences, of philosophical reflection and of theological elaboration must be instructed.

d) Among the questions on which it is important to continue reflection is that of the relationship between love and truth and the repercussions that it has on many controversial questions. This relationship, before being a challenge, is in reality a grace that dwells in Christological revelation. In fact, Jesus fulfilled the promise we read in the Psalms: "Love and truth shall meet, justice and peace shall kiss. Truth will spring up from the earth, and righteousness will look down from heaven" (Ps 85:11-12).

e) The pages of the Gospel show that Jesus encounters 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 hears the cry for help of those in need, even when it remains unspoken; makes gestures that convey love and restore trust; He makes a new life possible with his presence: those who encounter him come out transformed. This happens because the truth of which Jesus is the bearer is not

an idea, but the very presence of God in our midst; 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 Gospel vision into pastoral choices is a sign of our inability to live up to the Gospel and reminds us that we cannot support those in need of 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 the other 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 issues related to artificial intelligence, are controversial not only in society, but also in the Church, because they pose new questions. Sometimes the anthropological categories that we have elaborated are not sufficient to grasp the complexity of the elements that emerge from the experience or knowledge of the sciences 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 are waiting to be translated into appropriate pastoral initiatives. Even where further clarification is needed, Jesus' behavior, assimilated in prayer and conversion of heart, shows us the path to follow.

Issues to be addressed

h) We recognize the need to continue the Church's reflection on the original interweaving of love and truth witnessed to by Jesus, with a view to an ecclesial praxis that honors its inspiration.

i) We encourage experts in the various fields of knowledge to develop a spiritual wisdom that will enable their specialized competence 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 harmony of intentions.

j) It is necessary to identify the conditions that make possible theological and cultural research that is able to start from the daily experience of the Holy People of God and place itself at its service.

Proposals



k) We propose to promote initiatives that allow for 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, valuing 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 the frankness of the discussion, giving space, when appropriate, also to the voice of the people directly affected by the controversies mentioned. This process will have to be initiated 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 synodal journey and also the work of the Assembly. It does so in the twofold sense of listening given and received, of listening and being listened to. Listening is a profoundly human value, a dynamism of reciprocity, in which it offers a contribution to the journey of the other and receives one for one's own.

b) Being invited to speak and be heard in the Church and by the Church was an intense and unexpected experience for many of those who participated in the synodal process at the local level, especially among those who suffer forms of marginalization in society and also in the Christian community. Receiving a listening ear is an experience of affirmation and recognition of one's own dignity: this is a powerful tool for activating the resources of the person and the community.

c) Putting Jesus Christ at the centre of our lives requires a certain self-denial. In this perspective, listening requires a willingness to decentralize in order to make room for the other. We have experienced this in the dynamic of conversation in the Spirit. It is a demanding ascetic exercise, which obliges everyone to recognize their own limitations and the partiality of their own point of view. For this reason, it opens up a possibility to listen to the voice of the Spirit of God who speaks even beyond the boundaries of ecclesial affiliation and can set in motion a path of change and conversion.

d) Listening has a Christological value: it means assuming Jesus' attitude towards the people he met (cf. 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 in the name of the community.

e) Throughout the synodal process, the Church has met with many people and groups who ask to be heard and accompanied. In this place, we mention young people, whose demand for listening and accompaniment resounded 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 voice of victims and survivors of sexual, spiritual, economic, institutional, power and conscience abuse by members of the clergy or persons in ecclesial office. 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 live in a condition of loneliness 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, because of their marital situation, identity and sexuality, also ask to be listened to and accompanied, and for their dignity to be defended. There was a deep sense of love, mercy and compassion in the Assembly for people who are or feel hurt or neglected by the Church, who want a place to return "home" and feel safe, heard and respected, without fear of being 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 inexorably growing also turn to the Church in search of listening and accompaniment. Listening to them allows the Church to become aware of their point of view and to place herself concretely at their side, but above all to allow herself to be evangelized by them. We thank and encourage those who are committed to the service of listening to and accompanying those who are in prison and who particularly need to experience the Lord's merciful love and not to feel isolated from the community. In the name of the Church, they carry out the Lord's words: "I was in prison, and you came to me" (Mt 25:36).

j) Many people live in a condition of loneliness that is often close to abandonment. The elderly and sick 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 words of the Gospel: "I was ... and you have visited me" (Mt 25:39), have a deep meaning for the people involved and also for fostering 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 confidence to speak freely. The same can happen when the exercise of authority within the Christian community becomes oppressive rather than liberating.

#### Issues to be addressed

l) Listening requires an unconditional welcome. This does not mean abdicating clarity in presenting the gospel's message of salvation, nor does it mean endorsing any opinion or position. The Lord Jesus opened new horizons to those He listened unconditionally, 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 foster the practices of listening to and among the baptized. We are called upon 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 only 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 valuing spiritual accompaniment. A synodal Church cannot renounce being a Church that listens, and this commitment must be translated into concrete actions.

o) The Church is not starting from scratch, but already has many institutions and structures that carry out this valuable task. Let us think, for example, of the widespread work of listening to and accompanying the poor, marginalized, migrants and refugees carried out by Caritas and many other realities linked to consecrated life or lay associations. It is necessary to work to strengthen their link with the life of the community, preventing them from being perceived as activities delegated to a few.

p) People who carry out the service of listening and accompaniment, in its various forms, need adequate formation, also on the basis of the type of people with whom they come into contact, and to feel supported by the community. For their part, communities need to become fully aware of the value of a service exercised in their name and to be able to receive the fruit of this listening. In order to give greater prominence to this service, it is proposed to establish a ministry of listening and accompaniment based on Baptism, adapted to different contexts. The manner in which it is conferred will promote greater community involvement.

q) SECAM (Symposium of the Bishops' Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) is encouraged to promote theological and pastoral discernment on the theme of polygamy and on the accompaniment of persons in polygamous unions that approach 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 also to God. The digital environment changes our learning processes, our perception of time, space, body, interpersonal relationships, and our entire way of thinking. The dualism between real and virtual does not adequately describe the reality and experience of all of us, especially the youngest, the so-called "digital natives".

b) Digital culture, therefore, is not so much a distinct area of mission as a crucial dimension of the Church's witness in contemporary culture. For this reason it has a particular significance in a synodal Church.

c) Missionaries have always set out with Christ towards new frontiers, preceded and impelled by the action of the Spirit. Today, it's up to us to reach out to the current culture in all the spaces where people are looking for meaning and love, including their mobile 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 a profound direct experience of it, are best suited to carry out the Church's mission in the digital environment, as well as to accompany the rest of the community, including pastors, to a greater familiarity with its dynamics.

e) Within the synodal process, the initiatives of the Digital Synod ("The Church listens to you" project) show the potential of the digital environment in a missionary key, the creativity and generosity of those who engage in it and the importance of offering them formation, accompaniment, the possibility of peer discussion and collaboration.

### Issues to be addressed

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 injury, 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 initiatives related to the Church of great value and usefulness, which provide excellent catechesis and formation in the faith. 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 growing experience for those with whom we communicate.

h) Online apostolic initiatives have a reach and reach that extends beyond the territorial boundaries traditionally understood. This raises important questions about how they can be regulated and which ecclesiastical authority is responsible for oversight.

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 up energy for new forms of mission exercise?

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 formation and catechesis during lockdowns. It is good that we consider what this experience has taught us and what the lasting benefits can be for the Church's mission in the digital environment.

k) Many young people, who are also looking for beauty, have abandoned the physical spaces of the Church to which we try to invite them in favor of online spaces. This implies finding new ways to involve them and offer them formation and catechesis. This is a theme on which to reflect pastorally.

## Proposals

l) We propose that the Churches offer recognition, formation and accompaniment to digital missionaries who are already working, also facilitating the encounter 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 in common causes for the promotion of the dignity of the human person, justice and care for our 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 or her vocation, experience and competence; therefore, everyone contributes to imagining and deciding on steps for the reform of Christian communities and of the whole Church, so that she may live "the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing". Synodality, in the composition and functioning of the organisms in which it takes shape, has mission as its goal. Co-responsibility is for the mission: this testifies that we are truly gathered in the name of Jesus, this frees the organisms of participation from bureaucratic involutions and worldly logics of power, this makes coming together fruitful.

b) In the light of the recent Magisterium (in particular *Lumen Gentium* and *Evangelii Gaudium*), this co-responsibility of all in mission must be the criterion at the basis of the structuring of Christian communities and of the entire local Church with all its services, in all its institutions, in all its organisms of communion (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-31). Proper recognition of the responsibility of the laity for the mission in the world cannot become a 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 participatory bodies, every consultation and every decision-making process. For this to happen, it is necessary that, at every level, the gathering draw meaning and strength from the Eucharist and take place in the light of the Word heard and shared in prayer.

d) The composition of the various Councils for discernment and decision of a synodal missionary community must provide for the presence of men and women who have an apostolic profile; that they are distinguished above all not by assiduous attendance at ecclesial spaces, but by a genuine evangelical witness in the most ordinary realities of life. The People of God is all the more missionary, inasmuch as it is more capable of making the voices of those who already live the mission by inhabiting the world and its peripheries resound within themselves, even in participatory organizations.

### Issues to be addressed

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 feel that they are not up to the task. Synodality grows in the involvement of each member in processes of discernment and decision-making for the mission of the Church: in this sense, we are edified and encouraged by many small Christian communities in the emerging Churches, which live a daily fraternal "hand-to-hand" around the Word and the Eucharist.

f) In the composition of participatory bodies, we cannot further postpone the task entrusted by Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia*. The participation of men and women who live through complex emotional and conjugal events "can be expressed in various ecclesial services: it is therefore necessary to discern which of the various forms of exclusion currently practiced in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional spheres can be overcome" (n. 299). The discernment in question also concerns the exclusion of the parish and diocesan community from participatory bodies, which is practiced in many local Churches.

g) In the perspective of the evangelical originality of ecclesial communion: how can we intertwine the consultative and deliberative aspects of synodality? On the basis of the charismatic and ministerial configuration of the People of God: how do we integrate the tasks of advising, discerning and deciding in the various participatory bodies?

## Proposals

h) On the basis of the understanding of the People of God as active subjects of the mission of evangelization, the obligatory nature of Pastoral Councils in Christian communities and in the local Churches should be codified. At the same time, participatory bodies should be strengthened, with an adequate presence of lay men and women, with the attribution of functions of discernment with a view to truly apostolic decisions.

i) Participatory bodies represent the first context in which to experience the dynamics of the accountability of those who exercise tasks of responsibility. As we encourage them in their efforts, we encourage them to practice a culture of accountability to 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 distributes his gifts abundantly 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 honoured, all the members rejoice with him" (1 Cor 12:26). We therefore want to develop the spiritual attitudes that arise from this gaze: humility and generosity, respect and sharing. Also important is 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 groupings of local Churches has 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 groupings of local Churches, the Assembly agreed on the importance of the ecclesial discernment carried out by the Episcopal Conferences and the Continental Assemblies for the proper conduct of the first phase of the synodal process.

c) The synodal process has shown how the bodies provided for by the Code of Canon Law and the Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches carry out their function more effectively when they are understood from the local Churches. The fact that the Church (Ecclesia tota) is a communion of Churches requires that every Bishop perceive and live solicitude for all the Churches (sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum) as a constitutive aspect of his ministry as pastor of a Church.

d) The first phase of the synodal process highlighted the decisive role of the Episcopal Conferences and brought out the need for synodality and collegiality at the continental level. The organisms that operate at these levels contribute to the exercise of synodality with respect for local realities and processes of inculturation. The Assembly expressed confidence in the possibility of avoiding in this way the risk of uniformity and centralism in the governance of the Church.

## Issues to be addressed

e) Before creating new structures, we feel the need to strengthen and revitalize existing ones. It is also necessary to study, on the ecclesiological and canonical level, the implications of a reform of the structures relating to the groupings of Churches so that they take on a more fully synodal character.



f) Looking at the synodal practices of the Church in the first millennium, it is proposed to study how ancient institutions can be recovered in the present canonical order, harmonizing them with those of new creation, such as the Episcopal Conferences.

g) We consider it necessary to deepen further study the doctrinal and juridical nature of the Episcopal Conferences, recognizing the possibility of collegial action also with regard to questions of doctrine that emerge at the local level, thus reopening reflection on the *motu proprio Apostolos suos*.

h) The canons referring to particular councils (plenary and provincial) should be revised, in order to achieve through them a greater participation of the People of God, following the example of the dispensation obtained in the case of the recent plenary council of Australia.

#### Proposals

i) Among the structures already provided for in the Code, we propose to strengthen the ecclesiastical or metropolitan province as a place of communion for the local Churches of a territory.

j) On the basis of the in-depth studies requested regarding the configuration of groupings of Churches, the exercise of synodality should be implemented at the regional, national and continental levels.

k) Where necessary, we suggest the creation of international ecclesiastical provinces, for the benefit of Bishops who do not belong to any episcopal conference and to promote communion between Churches beyond national borders.

l) In countries of the Latin rite in which there is also a hierarchy of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Eastern Bishops are to be included in the national Episcopal Conferences, their governmental autonomy established by their own Code remaining intact.

m) A canonical configuration of continental assemblies should be drawn up which, while respecting the particular nature of each continent, should take due account of the participation of the Episcopal Conferences and that of the Churches, with their own delegates who make present the variety of the faithful People of God.

#### 20. Synod of Bishops and Ecclesial Assembly

## Convergences

a) Even when it experienced the fatigue of "walking together", the Assembly perceived the Gospel 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 atmosphere 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, while preserving its eminently episcopal character, has clearly demonstrated on this occasion the intrinsic link between the synodal dimension of the Church's life (the participation of all), the collegial dimension (the Bishops' concern for the whole Church), and the primatial dimension (the service of the Bishop of Rome, guarantor of communion).

c) The synodal 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 guiding the life and mission of the Church. It was recalled, however, that it is not enough to create structures of co-responsibility if there is a lack of personal conversion to a missionary synodality. Synodal bodies, at every level, do not reduce the personal responsibility of those who are called to take part in them, by virtue of their ministry and charisms, but they further urge it.

## Issues to be addressed

d) The presence of other members, in addition to the Bishops, as witnesses of the synodal journey was appreciated. However, the question remains as to the impact of their presence as full members on the episcopal character of the Assembly. Some see the risk that the specific task of Bishops will not be adequately understood. It will also be necessary to clarify on the basis of which criteria non-Bishop members may be called to be part of the Assembly.

e) Experiences such as the First Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Organisms of the People of God in Brazil, and the Australian Plenary Council were highlighted. It remains to be identified and explored how to articulate synodality and collegiality in the future, distinguishing (without undue separation) the contribution of all the members of the People of God to the elaboration of decisions and the specific task of the Bishops. The articulation of synodality, collegiality, 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 the regional level it is possible to think of successive steps (an ecclesial assembly followed by an episcopal assembly), it is considered appropriate to clarify how this can be proposed with reference to the Catholic Church as a whole. Some believe that the formula adopted in this Assembly responds to this need, others envisage having an ecclesial assembly followed by an episcopal assembly to conclude discernment, and still others prefer to reserve the role of members of the synodal assembly to the Bishops.

g) The way in which experts from different disciplines, in particular theologians and canonists, can make their contribution to the work of the synodal assembly and to the processes of a synodal Church should also be studied 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

i) An evaluation of synodal processes at all levels of the Church should be ensured.

j) The fruits of the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops are to be evaluated.

#### TO CONTINUE THE JOURNEY

"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, even those of a Synod, are only an echo of what he himself says.

To proclaim the Kingdom, Jesus chose to speak in parables. He found in the fundamental experiences of human life – in the signs of nature, in the gestures of work, in the events of everyday life – the images to reveal the mystery of God. Thus he told us that the Kingdom transcends us, but it is not alien 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 earth, Jesus saw his destiny represented. Apparently a nothingness destined to rot, yet inhabited by an unstoppable, unpredictable, Easter dynamism of life. A dynamism destined to give life, to become bread for many. Destined to become the Eucharist.

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

"To what can we compare the kingdom of God, or by what parable can we describe it?" This question of the Lord sheds light on the work that now awaits us. It is not a question of dispersing on many fronts, pursuing an efficiency and procedural logic. Rather, it is a matter of seizing from the many words and proposals of this Report what appears to be a small seed, but full of the future, and imagining how to hand it over to the earth that will make it mature for the lives of many.

"How will this come to pass?" asked Mary in Nazareth (Lk 1:34) after hearing the Word. There is only one answer: to remain in the shadow of the Spirit and to allow oneself to be enveloped by his power.

As we look back to the time that separates us from the Second Session, let us thank the Lord for the journey he has made so far and for the graces with which he has blessed it. Let us entrust the next phase to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a sign of sure hope and consolation on the journey of the faithful People of God, and of the Holy Apostles Simon and Jude, whose feast is celebrated today.

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus!

Rome, 28 October 2023, Feast of Saints Simon and Jude, Apostles

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