



SECRETARIA GENERALIS
SYNODI

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

Towards October 2024

Gathered below are the directions, developed and approved by the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod, **on the steps to be taken in the months between now and the Second Session of the Synodal Assembly (October 2024)**, enabling us to continue the journey initiated by the Holy Father on 9 October 2021: For a Synodal Church. Communion, participation, mission.

The whole process of the Synod 2021-2024 constitutes the source of inspiration to continue the journey. Those who took part in the synodal meetings at the different levels during the listening and consultation phase, and especially the participants in the First Session, have had a concrete experience of a Church that is plural and able to live with differences as a richness in communion. This experience constitutes a prophetic word addressed to a world that finds it hard to believe that peace and concord are possible. We are called and sent by the Risen One to proclaim the Gospel to the world today. Growing as a synodal Church is a concrete way to respond to this call and this mission.

The testimony of those who participated in the Assembly is precious. Their account constitutes an inalienable part of the gift we have received, conveying the richness of an experience that no text can condense. The synodal encounter between brothers and sisters who recognise each other as disciples called and sent by the Lord, is a grace and a source of joy. Out of this experience comes the desire to share this gift, involving ever more people in this dynamism.

In addition to the accounts of the participants, the fruit of the First Session is gathered in the Synthesis Report, approved at the end of the work and available in many languages on the Synod 2021-2024 website (www.synod.va). This document constitutes the reference point for the journey of the People of God in the time between the two Sessions. In particular, the synodal process will continue along the lines presented below; they intertwine the three levels on which we have been working so far in succession: the level of each local Church, that of the groupings of Churches (national, regional and continental), and that of the Church as a whole. As the Holy Father recalled in approving these lines of work, “the Synod is about synodality and not about this or that theme.... The important thing is *how* the reflection is done, that is, in a synodal way.”

In this direction the process has been carried out so far, and it is also in this direction that we are called to develop the work of the First Session, during which **the Assembly addressed in a synodal way matters of great relevance**, noting convergences, indicating questions to be addressed and formulating proposals. These are matters of great importance, **some of which need to be considered at the level of the whole Church and in collaboration with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia**. These matters include, for example, the preliminary study in view of the updating of the CIC and the CCEO (*Synthesis Report*, ch. 1 lett. r), of the *Ratio fundamentalis* on the formation of ordained ministers (chap. 11 lett. j), of the document *Mutuae relationes* (chap. 10 lett. g); or the deepening of theological and pastoral research on the diaconate and, more specifically, on women’s admission to the diaconate (chap. 9 lett. n), etc. **A list of these topics will be submitted to the Holy Father** as the fruit of the Synod Assembly. Groups of experts from all continents together with the relevant Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and coordinated by the General Secretariat of the Synod will be asked to work in a synodal way on the topics indicated by the Holy Father. A report on the progress of this work will be presented at the Second Session in October 2024.

1. A guiding question to deepen reflection

The local Churches and the groupings of Churches are firstly invited to contribute by deepening aspects of the Synthesis Report that are fundamental to the Synod's theme. These contributions are guided by the question:

“HOW can we be a synodal Church in mission?”

The objective of these new reflections is to identify **the paths we can follow and the tools we might adopt** in our different contexts and circumstances in order to enhance the unique contribution of each baptised person and of each Church in the one mission of proclaiming the Risen Lord and his Gospel to the world today. This is not, therefore, a request that limits you to a plan of technical or procedural improvements to make the Church's structures more efficient, but rather an invitation for reflection on the concrete forms of the missionary commitment to which we are called, that express the dynamism between unity and diversity proper to a synodal Church.

In this regard, it will be helpful to reread no. 27 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*: “I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II once said to the Bishops of Oceania: ‘All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion’”. The horizon towards which the in-depth work identified in the guiding question is oriented, is a reform animated by the dynamic of mission that Christ has entrusted to us. In this we are sustained by the pastoral conversion that the Spirit, who according to the Lord’s promise never leaves us alone, invites us to accomplish and makes possible.

1.1 The two levels of deepening

The guiding question needs to be addressed on two levels, always having as its reference point the Synthesis Report as a whole.

- a) At the level of each local Church: **HOW can we enhance the differentiated co-responsibility in the mission of all the members of the People of God?** What ways of relating, structures, processes of discernment and decision-making with regard to mission make it possible to recognise, shape, and promote co-responsibility? What ministries and participatory bodies can be renewed or introduced to better express this co-responsibility? Within the Synthesis Report, reference can be made more specifically to Chapters 8-12, 16 and 18.
- b) At the level of relations between Churches, between groupings of Churches at different levels and with the Bishop of Rome: **HOW** can these relations be creatively articulated in order **to find “a dynamic balance between the dimension of the Church as a whole and its local roots”** (Synthesis Report chap. 5, lett. g)? Here reference can be made above all to Chapters 13, 19 and 20 of the Synthesis Report.

1.2 Some suggestions for organising the work

Starting from the guiding question and the two levels indicated above, **each local Church is invited to carry out a further consultation**, determining for themselves what is possible in the time available and

the best approach to take. The first step will be to choose the perspective with which to approach the guiding question, reflecting on the relative chapters of the *Synthesis Report*. Realistically, it will not be possible to examine all the implications. Therefore, each local Church is invited to focus on those aspects that enable it to make a contribution in the light of its own situation, character and experience, sharing good practices that represent visible and concrete signs of synodality. On the basis of what has been decided, each Diocese or Eparchy will send the fruits of this further consultation to the Episcopal Conference or Oriental Hierarchical Structure to which it belongs, in the times and ways that each Conference or Oriental Hierarchical Structure will soon indicate.

To be clear, this work is not a question of starting the synodal process from scratch or repeating the process of listening and consultation undertaken during the first stage. In this stage, in addition to the participatory bodies at diocesan level and the synodal team already established, **it will be important to involve people and groups that express a variety of experiences, skills, charisms, ministries within the People of God** and whose point of view is of particular help in focusing on the ‘*how*’: e.g. ordained ministers (in particular parish priests); other pastoral leaders (e.g. catechists and leaders of grassroots communities and small Christian communities, particularly in some regions; leaders of pastoral offices); consecrated men and women; leaders of Lay Associations, ecclesial Movements and new Communities; people who hold positions of responsibility in Church-related institutions and organisations (schools, universities, hospitals, reception centres, cultural centres, etc.); theologians and canonists, etc.

The Episcopal Conferences and the Oriental Hierarchical Structures are the reference point for this part of the process and **are invited to coordinate the collection of contributions from dioceses and eparchies**, setting out its methods and timing. They are also invited to continue the in-depth study starting from the same guiding question at their level and at the continental level, according to what appears appropriate and feasible.

At the local level as well as at the level of the groupings of Churches, the prospect of an authentically synodal discernment also requires **the contribution of theological and canonical expertise, as well as of the human and social sciences**, involving experts in these disciplines and academic institutions in the area.

After collecting the contributions of the Dioceses or Eparchies, the Episcopal Conferences and the Oriental Hierarchical Structures, as well as the Dioceses that do not belong to any Episcopal Conference, **have the task of drawing up a summary of a maximum length of 8 pages**, to be sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod by 15 May 2024. On the basis of the material thus gathered, the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Second Session will be drafted.

2. Keeping the synodal dynamism alive

Preserving and reviving the synodal dynamic that has involved the entire People of God over the past two years is just as important as the work of in-depth study and consultation outlined above. The First Session indicated as a priority “the enlargement of the number of people involved in the synodal processes, overcoming the obstacles to participation that have emerged so far” (*Synthesis Report*, ch. 1, lett. m), also indicating different modalities and groups of people to which attention should be paid, including the digital environment.

To this end, the local churches are also invited to go through the entire *Synthesis Report* and collect the requests that are most consonant with their situation. On this basis, they will be able **to promote the most appropriate initiatives to involve the whole People of God** (formative activities, theological in-depth studies, celebrations in synodal style, grassroots consultations, listening to minority populations and groups living in conditions of poverty and social marginality, spaces in which to address controversial issues, etc.), using the methods already successfully adopted during the first phase, in particular Conversation in the Spirit. Religious Congregations, Institutes of Consecrated Life, Lay Associations, Ecclesial Movements and new Communities are also invited to do the same, contributing to the work of the Dioceses and Eparchies where they are present. The aim is to keep alive that dynamism of listening and

dialogue with everyone, especially with those who remain more on the margins of the life of the Church, which the first phase of the synodal process launched and which has produced significant fruits.

Each local Church that wishes to do so may **send** to the Episcopal Conference or to the Oriental Hierarchical Structure to which it belongs **a brief testimony of the work carried out and the experiences lived (maximum two pages), sharing any good practice** that it considers significant for the growth of a missionary synodal dynamism. Episcopal Conferences and Oriental Hierarchical Structures will be responsible for sending these to the General Secretariat by 15 May 2024.

These contributions will not directly constitute the subject of the Assembly's discernment during the Second Session, but will nevertheless be made available to its members. Their purpose is to help compose a framework in which to situate the work of the Assembly. The sharing of experiences and good practices may also **activate dynamics of encounter and collaboration** between the Churches that find themselves called to address the same points.

3. Those responsible and their tasks

The main subjects of the journey between the two Sessions of the Assembly are each and every local Church. In this phase, each Diocesan or Eparchial Bishop has an irreplaceable role in providing stimulus: it is his task to open and accompany this further consultation in his own Diocese or Eparchy, and then validate its outcomes.

In order to conduct and animate this process, it is suggested that the contribution of the members of the Synodal Assembly from each territory be sought, as well as that of the synodal teams set up in the previous phase at the different levels.

The Episcopal Conferences and the Oriental Hierarchical Structures are asked to directly engage in the in-depth work at their level, and to play a coordinating role for the local Churches.

In particular,

1) With respect to the work of deepening indicated in the guiding question, the Episcopal Conferences and the Oriental Hierarchical Structures are asked:

- to accompany this process, offering the local Churches indications on the methods and timing of the consultation;
- to also undertake the in-depth study of the guiding question at the level of the groupings of Churches, according to the methods the Conferences' and Oriental Hierarchical Structures deem appropriate;
- to prepare a summary of the contributions received or produced and send it to the General Secretariat of the Synod by 15 May.

2) With respect to the commitment to keep the synodal dynamism alive, the Episcopal Conferences and the Oriental Hierarchical Structures are requested:

- to continue to promote initiatives enabling growth as a synodal Church in mission, including groupings of Churches;
- to collect the testimonies and good practices prepared by the Dioceses and Eparchies and send them all, without summarising them, to the General Secretariat of the Synod, again by 15 May.

Vatican, 11 December 2023