



## THE WORKING DOCUMENT

### OF THE

## CONTINENTAL STAGE

### A SUMMARY

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### Chapter 1.

#### The Experience of the Synodal Journey

##### A Summary

15. The reports express the experience that is common across the world. They want a Church that walks with Christ under the guidance of the Spirit. Our current 'synod' experience has encouraged the laity to get involved in the life of the Church and in its engagement with the world today.

##### **1.1 "The fruits, seeds, and weeds of synodality"**

16. The first part of the synodal journey has been a success. Many saw it as the start of a new phase in the life of the Church. It has encouraged people to see that the Church is made up of all the People of God- not just priests and bishops. From different parts of the world people experienced a similar sense of being together as the Church.

17. The Synod required honest and open conversation in which listening was important. While many spoke of the pain of losing members from the Church, the synod allowed some to make it the means of their return. Many were encouraged that the Church wanted to hear their voice. There was a desire to continue this process.

18. There have been challenges. The Synod took place during the Covid pandemic. Many were unsure of what the Synod expected of them. There are different attitudes towards the synodal process in different parts of the world. There were some who did not expect the Church to be capable of change. Others feared that the Synod would damage the Church.

19. There were doubts from some about the role of the clergy, including the bishops. There was a concern that many of the laity would not take part. Many reports mention these fears and the resistance to change on the part of some clergy. The synodal process was a challenge for laity as well as for clergy. Some reports reflected on these tensions.

20. The clerical sex abuse scandal was an open wound that continues to inflict pain on victims and survivors, on their families, and on their communities. Many synod groups called for a cultural change in the Church with a view to greater transparency, accountability and co-responsibility.

21. Many countries were conducting a synodal process during a time of armed conflict and civil unrest. There was a desire that the Synod should encourage people to work for a just settlement of such differences.

##### **1.2. Our common baptismal dignity**

22. The creation of a synodal process has encouraged people to recognise our common Baptism. With it comes the responsibility to live out our baptismal promises in helping to build up the Church. A synodal process is incomplete without meeting brothers and sisters from other faiths, sharing and discussing with them, and engaging in common actions. The reports express a desire for a deeper encounter between people of faith and the training to support this work.

23. The reports present the synod process as an experience of novelty and freshness. The People of God were encouraged to speak freely and taking part in organized conversations that were open-ended and attentive. They spoke of how, after decades of church going, they had been asked to speak for first time.

24. There were reports that suggested that the synodal process was allowing people to return to the Church as it was meant to be. The synodal Church is one that welcomes all those who have felt estranged.

## Chapter 2

### Listening to the Scripture

#### A Summary

“Enlarge the space of your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly, lengthen your ropes and make firm your pegs” (Is 54:2)

25 The prophet Isaiah is speaking to an exiled people when he says “Enlarge the space of your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly, lengthen your ropes and make firm your pegs” (Is 54:2). The words are equally important to a people involved in synodality- journeying together.

26 The Israelites were experiencing the Exodus, when they dwelt in tents, and hoped for the Promised Land.

27. These words of Isaiah invite us to imagine the Church similarly as a tent, indeed as the tent of meeting, which accompanied the people on their journey through the desert. This is how many reports envision the Church: an open and hospitable space to which all are invited to enter.

28. Enlarging the tent requires welcoming others into it, making room for their diversity. It thus entails a willingness to die to self out of love. “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (Jn. 12:24). The success of the Church depends on our being Christ to each other

## Chapter 3.

### Towards a Missionary Synodal Church

#### A Summary

29. The biblical imagery of the tent relates to images of the family and of home, the place to which people wish to belong, and to which they wish to return. Many reports note that the church is a home for many but that others feel excluded.

30. This section recognises the need to see the wholeness of the Church. There are a variety of ways of being Church and the account of the first Pentecost reassures us of the value of this variety. We are called, too, to journey together so we must be involved in other people's journeys. The teachings of Christ point to a need for conversion but always in the context of helping our neighbour.

31. The vision is of a Church capable of including all, sharing everything and offering hospitality according to the teachings of Jesus. This is the reality of a synodal Church.

#### **3.1 Listening that becomes welcoming**

32. In this journey, the Churches have realised that the path to this enlarged tent is a gradual one. It begins with listening and requires an openness, as well as new ways of walking with others. We are called to recognise the needs of those at the edges. When we do this, others feel welcomed, not judged, free to share their own spiritual journey. The synodal experience can be a means to welcome those who do not feel sufficiently recognised in the Church.

33. The reports also reflect on the difficulty of listening deeply and call for more training in this area. They point to various obstacles, including:

- Church structures
- Poor relationships between priests and laity
- The gap between rich and poor and the different levels of education.

Much of the Church's work is affected by poor communication between the different parts of the community.

34. The reports reflect on the loneliness and isolation of many members of the clergy. One of the least evident voices in the reports is that of priests and bishops, speaking for themselves and of their experience of walking together.

#### *An option for young people, people with disabilities and the defence of life*

35. There is universal concern regarding the meagre presence of the voice of young people in the synod process, as well as increasingly in the life of the Church. A renewed focus on young people, their formation and accompaniment is an urgent need, also as a way to implement the conclusions of the previous Synod on "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment" (2018).. The "Digital Synod" initiative is a significant attempt to listen to young people and offers new insights for the proclamation of the Gospel.

36. Numerous reports point to the lack of appropriate structures and ways of accompanying persons with disabilities, and call for new ways of welcoming their contribution and promoting their participation.

37. Equally prominent is the commitment of the People of God to the defence of fragile and threatened life at all its stages. The Church is called to understand better the experience of women forced to consider abortion and the effect it is likely to have.

### *Listening to Those who Feel Neglected and Excluded*

38. Many communities have already understood synodality as an invitation to listen to those who feel exiled from the Church. There are many such groups. Some reports reflect on those who feel unwelcome following the changes to the liturgy. For many, the experience of being seriously listened to is a first step towards feeling included. On the other hand, it was a source of sadness that some felt that their participation in the synod process was unwelcome: this is a feeling that requires understanding and dialogue.

39. Some feel a tension between belonging to the Church and their own loving relationships, such as: remarried divorcees, single parents, people living in a polygamous marriage, LGBTQ people, etc. Reports show how this demand for welcome challenges many local Churches. Those who left ordained ministry and married, too, ask for a more welcoming Church, with greater willingness to dialogue.

40. There are many similarities between the various continents regarding those who are perceived as excluded, in society and also in the Christian community. In many cases their voice has been absent from the synod process, and they appear in reports only because others speak about them. Among the most frequently mentioned excluded groups are:

- the poorest,
- the lonely elderly
- indigenous peoples
- migrants
- street children
- alcoholics and drug addicts
- survivors of abuse (in the Church and beyond)
- prisoners
- groups who suffer discrimination and violence because of race, ethnicity, gender, culture and sexuality.

### **3.2 Sisters and brothers for mission**

41. The Church proclaims the fullness of life: “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn10:10). The Church’s mission is to make Christ present in the midst of His People through reading the Word, the celebration of the Sacraments and through all actions that care for the wounded and suffering.

42. ‘Enlarging our tent’ is at the heart of this missionary activity. A synodal Church offers a powerful witness to the world. Contained in the reports is the dream of such a Church: one deeply involved with the world’s challenges, and capable of responding to them.

#### *The Church’s mission in today’s world.*

43. Synodality is a call from God to walk together with the whole human family. In many places, Christians live in the midst of people of other faiths or non-believers and are engaged in a dialogue formed in the exchanges of everyday life and common living.

44. The wounds of the Church are connected to those of the world. The reports speak of the challenges of racism, poverty, and gender inequality within the life of the Church, as well as the world. In the structures of the Church “the rich and the educated are listened to more than others”. The Gospel that the Church is charged to proclaim must also convert the structures of sin that hold humanity and creation captive.

45. The People of God express a deep desire to hear the cry of the poor and that of the earth. The reports invite us to recognise the connections between challenges facing society and the environment, and to respond to them by working with other Christians, with other faiths and all people of good will.

46. Some reports also noted the role of the Church in relation to processes of peace-building and reconciliation. In heavily divided societies this is often seen as a crucial part of mission.

47. A theme common to many reports is the weakness of engagement with other faiths. Starting with concrete, daily collaboration on common concerns for social and environmental justice.

48. Many reports emphasize that there is no complete synodality without unity among Christians. This begins with the call for closer communion between Churches of different rites. The reports request greater attention to the question of sharing the Eucharist.

49. The reports point to the growth in the number of inter-church and interfaith families, with their specific needs.

#### *Cultural contexts*

50. Many reports note that the Church proclaims the Gospel within specific cultures and is influenced by profound and rapid social changes. The Church must remain alert to the need to be universal.

51. Many reports expressed concern about the impact of a lack of trust and credibility resulting from the abuse crises.

52. In some contexts, the witness of the faith is lived to the point of martyrdom. There are countries where Christians face the challenge of systematic forced conversion to other religions.

#### *Cultures, religions and dialogue*

53. An essential element of a synodal Church is the call to a more meaningful approach towards other faiths and cultures. This approach begins by walking together with others, with appreciating and understanding cultural differences,

54. The Church's approach to diverse cultures is to see them as a part of the Kingdom of God. In this diversity, we can find unity and the opportunity to cooperate with God's grace. The universal Church must remain the guarantor of unity, but Dioceses should be able to adapt the faith to local need.

55. In a good number of reports, there is a call to better recognise, engage, integrate, and respond to the richness of local cultures.

56. The reports call especially for attention to the situation of indigenous peoples. Their spirituality, wisdom, and culture have much to teach. We need to reread history together with these peoples, to draw inspiration from those situations in which the Church's action has been at the service of their integral human development, and to ask forgiveness for the times when it has instead been complicit in their oppression

### **3.3 Communion, participation, and co-responsibility**

57. The mission of the Church is realised through the lives of all the baptised. The reports express a deep desire to recognise and reaffirm this common dignity as the basis for the renewal of life and ministries in the Church. They affirm the value of all vocations in the Church.

### *Beyond clericalism*

58. The tone of the reports is not anti-clerical (against priests or the ministerial priesthood). Many express deep appreciation of their priests, and concerns about the many demands that they face. They also voice the desire for better formed, better accompanied and less isolated priests. Clericalism is seen as a culture that isolates clergy and harms the laity.

59. They express a deep and energetic desire for renewed forms of leadership – priestly, episcopal, religious and lay. Lay people, religious and clerics desire to put their talents and abilities at the disposal of the Church, and to do so they call for an exercise of leadership that enables them to be free.

### *Rethinking women's participation*

60. The conversion of the Church's culture is linked to establishing new practices and structures. A critical and urgent area in this regard concerns the role of women. A growing awareness and sensitivity towards this issue is registered all over the world.

61. From all continents comes an appeal for Catholic women to be valued first and foremost as baptised and equal members of the People of God. Women love the Church deeply, but many feel sadness because their lives are often not well understood, and their contributions and charisms not always valued. The Church must find ways to attract lay men to a more active membership in the Church and to enable women to participate more fully at all levels of Church life.

62. Women look to the Church to be their ally in tackling oppression, but it needs to address its own failures in order to do so.

63. The problem is present across almost all cultures and concerns the participation and recognition of laywomen as well as women religious.

64. Almost all reports raise the issue of full and equal participation of women. The reports do not agree on a single or complete response to the question of the vocation, inclusion and flourishing of women in Church and society. The issue of the priestly ordination of women was raised in some reports, while others considered the matter closed.

65. A key element of this process concerns the recognition of the ways in which women, especially women religious, are already at the forefront of synodal practices in some of the most challenging social situations we face.

### *Charisms, vocations and ministries*

66. Responsibility for the synodal life of the Church cannot be delegated, but must be shared by all, in response to the gifts the Spirit bestows on the faithful. How this is practised is more difficult.

66. Responsibility for the synodal life of the Church cannot be delegated, but must be shared by all, in response to the gifts the Spirit bestows on the faithful. How this co-responsibility is practised is more difficult.

67. This desire for co-responsibility involves service/ ministry. Ministry is central to the life of the Church. It serves the single purpose of the Church- its mission. Many synodal reports recognised the need for further development of this feature of the Church's work.

68. Many reports refer to practices for the recognition and promotion of ministries, supporting an effective community. In this way, each ministry becomes a structural and structuring element of community life. The relationship of lay and priestly ministry needs further attention.

69. The Church needs to assess this variety of charisms and ministries. The way in which such offices are established needs to build up the unity of the local Church. How these ministries work together will require discretion and direction.

70. The gifts given by the Holy Spirit are inseparable from the gifts which are linked to the Sacrament of Orders in its various degrees. A great challenge of synodality that emerged during the first year is the harmonisation of these gifts. They need to operate in support of both the Church's charismatic and institutional nature.

### **3.4 Synodality takes shape**

71. The synodal journey has brought out a number of tensions, made explicit in the preceding. We should not be afraid of them, but we should consider them carefully, so as to harness them as a source of energy. This is why the Church also needs to oversee its own institutions and structures, particularly with regard to governance. Canon law will need to adapt to any change.

72. However, structures will need to be inhabited by people who are well-formed, in terms of vision and skills. This new vision will need to be a spiritual renewal and not simply dealing with technical or organizational issues. For there to be synodality, the presence of the Spirit is necessary, and there is no Spirit without prayer.

#### *Structures and institutions*

73. The Church is facing a new challenge- the relation of the local [ national] church with the Universal Church. There are only a few communities with a long history of working in synodality. This new Continental Stage is new territory for most. It recognises the differences between parts of the world even as we proclaim a common Gospel message. Some challenges are common and some unique to particular regions.

74. This synodal process is a challenge for the Roman Curia itself. The Holy Father has encouraged the Roman Curia to adopt a culture of greater synodality.

75. The Conferences of Bishops around the world are also questioning what synodality means for them. What is to be their role in such a Church? How does this impact on their role as pastor?

76. During the Continental Stage, these Conferences will be able to experience a new role based on their dialogue with their local Churches and their reaching out to others within their area. In addition, this Continental Stage will offer the opportunity to work out how to express this way of being Church and of being a pastor within it.

77. Dioceses of the Eastern Churches offer a wealth of synodal structures, which are called to renewal today. There is an experience of synodality which has helped to shape the local and regional churches and contributed to their ministry.

78. The Church is supported by the energy that clergy and laity bring to their ministry. Different structures are at the service of the Church. Many reports show the need for these bodies to be not only consultative, but places where decisions are made on the basis of processes of communal discernment rather than on the majority principle used in democratic regimes.

79. In different parts of the world, transparency is seen as an essential practice for a Church growing into a more authentic synodality. A style of leadership anchored in a synodal way of proceeding will produce trust and credibility: In addition, many reports note the need to involve people with adequate professional competence in the management of economic and governance issues.

80. All Church institutions are called to consider how they might become more synodal. Teaching establishments might reflect on the need for greater formation for synodality.



81. Those in consecrated life will also face the challenge of synodality. Their life is centred around the need for the participation of all members in the life of the community to which they belong. Their experience of discernment is important as is their active involvement with their community.

### *Formation*

82. The overwhelming majority of reports indicate the need to provide for formation in synodality. Structures alone are not enough: there is a need for ongoing formation to support a widespread synodal culture. It is not a matter of providing specific skills. Training in synodality affects the whole of all of a Christian life. It is necessary to:

- live life in a spirit of synodality
- mature and grow in faith
- participate in public life
- exercise real co-responsibility as a member of the Church

83. However, the need for more specific formation in listening and dialogue is also emphasised, for example through the establishment of synodality agents and teams.

### *Spirituality*

84. Synodality requires adequate formation, and, above all, needs to be nurtured by familiarity with the Lord and the capacity to listen to the voice of the Spirit

85. A synodal Church first of all needs to deal with the many tensions that emerge from encountering diversity. Therefore, a synodal spirituality can only be one that welcomes differences and celebrates variety. .

86. The first year of the synodal journey has already offered stimulating experiences in this direction, through the proposed method of spiritual conversation. This method has enabled the People of God to share an interpersonal encounter around the Word of God.

87 A synodal Church is built around diversity, and the encounter between different spiritual traditions can be challenging but of great benefit.

### **3.5 Synodal life and liturgy**

88. The reports emphasise the deep link between synodality and liturgy.

89. The Eucharist is already, in itself, the 'source and summit' of a synodal Church. Prayer and liturgy are means of binding the members in communion with each other.

90. In many countries people are brought into the life of the Church and they need to learn about their being called to live in the Church's liturgical life.

91. Many reports strongly encourage a synodal liturgy which recognises the breadth of charisms, the totality of ministry and the central place of all the baptised.

92. In some Churches, there needs to be a synodal approach to varying instincts for liturgy. This was true of those who wished to celebrate the rites as practised before the Second Vatican Council The Eucharist, sacrament of unity in love in Christ, cannot become a reason for confrontation, ideology, rift or division.

93. The reports point out some shortcomings of the celebration of the Eucharist. In particular, the following are emphasized:

- the central role of the priest in liturgy
- the risk of the passivity of the wider liturgical community
- poor preaching,
- the separation between the liturgical life of the assembly and the family network of the community.

The quality of homilies is almost unanimously reported as a problem.

94. There was significant concern at the difficulty of accessing some of the Sacraments and there is a strong demand to find solutions to these forms of sacramental deprivation.

#### *A synodal style of celebrating*

95. The synod process represented an opportunity to experience anew the diversity in forms of prayer and celebration.

96. Many Churches also emphasise the importance of habitually linking liturgical celebration with the various forms of sharing in dialogue.

97. The variety of ritual traditions of liturgical prayer, as well as the symbolic forms with which diverse cultures express themselves, is considered by all to be an asset.

## Chapter 4.

### The Next Steps

98. The synodal process requires two very different time horizons. The first is the long-term horizon. The second, is the one that focuses our attention on the events of the Continental Stage that we are experiencing.

#### **4.1 A journey of conversion and reform**

99. In the reports, the People of God express a desire to be less a Church of maintenance and more a Church that goes out in mission.

100. The People of God have found joy in walking together and express the desire to continue doing so. How to do this as a truly global Catholic community is something that still needs to be fully discovered: The laity are capable, talented and willing to contribute more and more, provided they are given opportunities.

101. At the same time, walking together as the People of God requires us to recognise the need for continual conversion, individual and communal.

102. In the journey of conversion and reform, we are supported by the gifts we have received during the first year of the synodal journey. The reports do not call for uniformity, but ask that we learn to grow harmony

103. The message of our synodal way is simple: we are learning to walk together, and sit together to break the one bread, in such a way that each is able to find their place. Everyone is called to take part in this journey, no one is excluded.

#### **4.2 Methodology for the Continental Stage**

104. This Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) invites us to take a further step in this spiritual journey.

105. The DCS, which gathers and restores to the local Churches, what the People of God from around the world said in the first year of the Synod, is meant to guide us and enable us to deepen our discernment.

106. This document is the guide for how we determine the next stage of our journey. The reflection will focus on three questions:

1. “After having read and prayed with the DCS, which intuitions resonate most strongly with the lived experiences and realities of the Church in your continent? Which experiences are new, or illuminating to you?”
2. “After having read and prayed with the DCS, what substantial tensions or divergences emerge as particularly important in your continent’s perspective? Consequently, what are the questions or issues that should be addressed and considered in the next steps of the process?” – “Looking at what emerges from the previous two questions, what are the priorities, recurring themes and calls to action that can be shared with other local Churches around the world and discussed during the First Session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023?” Key stages in the process

107. Each Continental Assembly is called to put in place a discernment process and draft a Final Document to account for it.

108. The vast majority of Episcopal Conferences want representatives from the entire People of God to be involved in the Continental Stage. It is therefore asked that all participants represent the variety of the People of God. bishops, presbyters, deacons, consecrated women and men, laymen and women.

109. The process leading from the publication of this DCS to the drafting of the Instrumentum Laboris will be marked by the following steps:

1) The DCS will be sent to all diocesan bishops; each of them, together with the diocesan synodal team that coordinated the first phase, will arrange an ecclesial process of discernment on the DCS, starting with the three questions indicated above in no. 106.

2) With the involvement of its synodal team, each Episcopal Conference has the task of collecting and synthesizing in the form most appropriate to its own context the reflections around the three questions coming from the individual Dioceses.

3) The reflection and discernment of each Episcopal Conference will then be shared within the Continental Assembly,

4) In planning the conduct of each specific Continental Assembly, it may be useful to reflect on how to use the widespread and much-appreciated method of “spiritual conversation”

5) Each Continental Assembly will draft its own Final Document of a maximum of about twenty pages confronting the three questions from its own specific context. The Final Documents are to be submitted by each Continental Task Force to the Synod Secretariat by March 31, 2023.

Based on the Final Documents of the Continental Assemblies, the Instrumentum laboris will be drafted by June 2023