



We Are Church Intl

**The Final Report of the XVI Session of the Synod of Bishops -October 2024**

**Executive Summary**

This Executive Summary has been produced so that more people can have an understanding of the Final Document of the Synod 2024. It does not replace the Final Document. It is based on the Working Translation of the original, approved Italian version. Titles of chapters and sections have been retained, as have references to paragraphs, so the reader can cross-refer.

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## **Introduction - Paragraphs 1-12**

The Introduction recognises the importance of the Synod as a process set up by Pope Francis. It recognises that the world is torn by war and injustice. It pays tribute to the work of many around the world who have contributed to this process, while acknowledging the suffering caused to many. It celebrates the fact that all the baptised are called to contribute and recognises that the Synod 2021-24 is one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council. Study Groups have been established to examine some complex issues in greater detail. The Final Document is set out in five distinct sections.

## **Part I - The Heart of Synodality**

### **The Church as the People of God, Sacrament of Unity [paras 13-20]**

- The story of the first Easter demonstrates how critical it is that everyone plays their part in transmitting the story of the Resurrection. Mary Magdalene is the first evangelist.
- Jesus is at the heart of the Christian story of Redemption, and it is His command to go out and teach all nations.
- Mission is how we live out our baptism. It gives us a duty to proclaim the Gospel.
- We live in communion with each other; not just with those of faith but with all the peoples of the world.
- Synod means that we walk with the whole of humanity.
- The Bishop is placed to serve the Church through its people. The Bishop of Rome is the guarantor of unity in the Church.
- The Church exists to meet the needs of the poor, who often have a special place in the scheme of spreading the Gospel.
- The Synod recognised the call for the Church to unite humanity with God's plan of salvation.

### **The Sacramental Roots of the People of God [paras 21 -27]**

- Baptism unites all the People of God and is the primary source of our salvation.
- Our baptism unites us in our understanding of our faith [sensus fidei]. The synodal discussions demonstrate the power of this process.
- Our baptism allows us to walk together – to act synodally but also challenges us to work with others of faith. Our initiation into the life of faith – baptism- leads us to the sacrament of Confirmation which is intended to strengthen our commitment to a life of mission.
- The celebration of the Eucharist helps to bind the community of faith. It links our living of the faith with the sacrifice of Jesus.
- As Jesus is present in the Eucharist so is the Holy Spirit in the synodal discussions. The divine is active in both assemblies.
- A Study Group should be convened to examine the ways in which liturgy is reflective of a synodal Church.

### **Meaning and Dimensions of Synodality [paras 28-33]**

- The term “synod” has different significance in different Christian traditions, but all recognise the attempt to discern the ways in which the Church's mission is exercised. It is a necessary condition for the Church to walk with the whole of humanity.
- The example of the Blessed Virgin Mary as one who listens, mediates, and responds to the needs of the world helps to express the essence of synodality.
- Synodality describes three aspects of the Church:
  - Journeying together and assembling as a community of belief
  - The specific areas of discussion and discernment as well as the structures that support it.
  - Arriving at a plan for taking forward the work of the Church.
- Synodality is not an end but rather it helps the Church to fulfil, more properly, its function of spreading the Gospel.
- The sacrament of Holy Orders underpins the synodal process and reflects Christ's gift of people ordained to the service of the people.

### **Unity as Harmony [paras 34-42]**

- People exist and are shaped by and through their relationships with others and with God.
- A synodal Church recognises the variety of experience of social and domestic life that is the hallmark of diverse societies.
- Families represent the domestic church and in their intertwined relations they manifest something of the synodal Church.
- The Synod recognised the concerns for more evident signs of co-responsibility, for recognition of those who felt excluded, for the rightful call for inclusion. Equally, there was a concern at the lack of participation by many of the People of God.
- In this regard, the Church needs to recognise the distinct character of the local Church and the contribution that these differences make to the unity of the whole.
- Through recognising the differences of culture and social contexts we can see how the synodal Church can operate in association with other Christian churches.
- We recognise our duty to engage with those of other faiths to build a world based on justice and peace.
- In this recognition of differences, we assert the need to address issues of discrimination and prejudice and remain open to the viewpoints of others.

### **Synodal Spirituality [paras 43-46]**

- Synodality has its own spirituality characterised by humility, a capacity to listen to the Spirit and the views of others.
- Conversations in the Spirit are opportunities to align our thinking with that of the Holy Spirit, to recognise that we share our perceptions of the ways that the Spirit calls us to be Church to each other.
- The need for renewal and reform in the Church was clearly expressed by many. The scandals of abuse have seriously affected the Church, and the rebuilding of trust is a central concern of a synodal Church.

### **Synodality as Prophetic in Today's World [paras 47-48]**

- Contemporary society is riven by many challenges – autocracy, growing gaps of rich and poor, the rise of anti-democratic tendencies.
- Synodality is a model for reaching consensus, of bridging the divides in society.
- Synodality develops an understanding of the need for consensus – of meeting the needs of the many by hearing their voice.
- We learn to depend on the things that bind us together and, in that, it shares its roots with a concern for the ecology of the planet.

## **Part II - On the Boat, Together**

### **The Conversion of Relationships**

- The call of the Apostles is compared to the call to synodality of Pope Francis

### **New Relationships [paras 49- 52]**

- A lengthy discourse on the meaning of human relationships. The Church, through its synodal journey, recognises that the building of human relationships is the very heart of what it is to be Christian,
- The Church understands the power of feeling for those who experience a sense of exclusion – through marital status, sexuality, sense of identity. The building of relationships is not a tool for spreading the Gospel- it is the only means by which we can build up the Church.
- The equal status of men and women is derived from our baptism. The multiple examples of how women have felt excluded from the Church is a mark of how often the Church fails to meet the ideals set before it.

### **In a Plurality of Contexts [paras 53-56]**

- We need to recognise the different environments in which the Church operates. The variety of contexts can be positive and, equally, a source of dissension.
- Many of the differences in our societies can be the cause of conflict, of prejudice and even ecological damage. A lack of care for the unborn and the elderly are symptoms of this attitude.
- The poor and marginalised are the victims of dissension and the Church has a duty to reach out and address their needs.
- The cause of dissension has often been the differences between faith communities themselves. Growing understanding of these differences and acceptance of them is at the heart of the synodal approach.

### **Charisms, Vocations and Ministries for Mission [paras 57- 67]**

- The gifts we receive from the Holy Spirit are not for our exclusive use but for the benefit of all. The diversity of these gifts is for the building up of the Church.
- People live in a variety of conditions and their baptismal character allows them to use their gifts as God intends. In the workplace and in civil society they operate with the gifts they have from God for the building up of society.
- The synod recognised the need for the Church to sustain people in their support of Gospel values [ the text calls on the Church “not to abandon them”]
- Baptism confers equal dignity on men and women. Yet, women encounter obstacles to their full involvement in the Church.
- The role of women in the Church needs to be recognised – by virtue of their being often the first teachers of faith.
- Scriptural references to the role of women in the early Church need to find their place in liturgical celebrations.
- The Report calls for the full implementation of opportunities for women within Canon Law.
- The access of women to the diaconate remains under consideration.
- The Assembly recognised the impact of language, imagery, and narrative in the depiction of the role of women in the Church.
- The pastoral needs of children, too, should be considered. They have much to teach the wider Church and special efforts must be made to listen to their voices.
- Those who have a disability have a special place in the mission of the Church. They can suffer discrimination and rejection. A centre for the study of the needs of people with disabilities is proposed.
- The Assembly recognised both the married state and the single state as places for transmitting Gospel values and building social networks.
- Those who dedicate their lives to God in religious communities have much to teach the Church about living synodally. Their gift to the Church is to create models for living in community.
- All the baptised are called to spread the Gospel. According to the discernment of the local Church this might require new forms of ministry. Not all ministries need to be instituted and might be at the service of the Church in areas beyond the celebration of the liturgy.
- The contribution of theologians to the understanding and practice of synodality as recognised.

### **Ordained Ministers at the Service of Harmony [ paras 68- 78]**

- The section identifies the specific role of bishop, priest, and permanent deacon.

### **The bishop's ministry: integrating the gifts of the Spirit in unity [paras 69-71]**

- The bishop represents the local Church and provides a link to others of faith. He works with and through the clergy to support the building up of the Church.
- The Assembly recognised the importance of all the baptised having a voice in the choosing of a bishop.
- The meeting of a bishop with all the baptised gives occasion for hearing of their needs of the pastor.
- Some forms of bishopric need further research.
- There is a need to accept the limitations of bishops whose work is enhanced by their participation with all the baptised.

### **With the Bishop: Priests and Deacons [paras 72-73]**

- The bishop is supported by the priests of his diocese. Some clergy are members of orders or congregations, and they bring specific charisms/gifts to the service of the Church.
- Dioceses share their work with clergy from overseas and these bring specific understanding and perceptions.
- The deacon is at the service of the local church and works with the poor as well as supporting the parish liturgical life.

### **Collaboration between ordained ministers within a Synodal Church [para 74]**

- Priests and deacons were recognised, by the Assembly, for the valuable work that they undertook.
- They were aware, too, of a sense of being over-burdened and isolated.
- Working with all the baptised, discerning what work can be shared with others in the parish and delegating where appropriate were not only helping the clergy but supporting the synodal Church.
- The greater division of work and the adoption of a more collaborative model of working was also to address the dangers of clericalism.

### **Together for Mission [paras 75-78]**

- Some ministries have been created to meet specific need. These give a formal recognition to a particular charism or gift. The ministries of lector [reader] and catechist[teacher] are open to all the baptised.
- A Conference of Bishops will decide on the criteria for such ministries and the formation that they require.
- Both the Eastern and the Latin Church recognise other forms of ministry – coordinating local prayer groups, leading small communities, developing support for the poor. Extraordinary ministers represent another example of lay ministry.
- The Assembly recommends greater access of the lay faithful to all phases of decision-making. Increasing opportunities for men and women to attain positions of responsibility in parishes and dioceses.
- Greater use of the charisms of consecrated people to the service of the diocese.
- Improved rights for those employed by the Church.

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## **Part III - Cast the Net** **The Conversion of Processes**

- The synodal process learns from the scriptural account of the fishing expedition in which Jesus instructed his disciples.
- We need to learn to listen, to trust the voice of the Spirit and to discern in cooperation.
- Formation and training to participate fully in these exercises is critical. The synodal process serves the development of a co-responsible laity.
- There is special need for training in discernment.

### **Ecclesial Discernment for Mission [paras 81-86]**

- The synodal process is not a task but rather a process of dialogue within the community regarding a way forward.
- The dialogue focuses most attention of listening to and respecting the views of others.
- The involvement of all voices is critically important if the discernment is to be valid.
- All the work of the Church is grounded in Scripture and so it is with discussions within a synodal Church.
- There are key steps in the process of discernment, and they can be characterised as:

- Clearly setting out the issue for discussion with adequate information
- giving sufficient time for prayerful preparation, for listening to the Word of God and for reflection on the question
- recognising, both group and personal attitudes, and a commitment to the pursuit of the common good
- allowing time to listen attentively and respectfully to each person's voice.
- searching for the widest possible consensus which will emerge when "our hearts burn within us" (cf. *Lk 24.32*)
- the facilitators of the process formulating the consensus in such a way that commands the respect of all.
- True ecclesial discernment requires some understanding of Church teaching / Scripture.
- Support for and training in discernment is necessary and should be made available especially for those in leadership /facilitating roles.

### **The Structure of the Decision-making Process [paras 87-94]**

- A synodal Church requires the participation of all. With the participation of all, the Church is living out the fullness of its mission.
- The mission of the Church is "nothing without" – "Nothing without the bishop" Nothing without the clergy," "Nothing without the consent of the people."
- The commitment to co-responsibility means recognising the differences in the levels of responsibility.
- Decision making processes need to demonstrate a commitment to consultation, as well as an opportunity for discernment before the decision is made by the competent authority.
- Attention must be paid to the views expressed in a consultation and decisions should be made in the best interests of the community.
- The authority of the bishop, the College of Bishops and the Pontiff are set out in Scripture.
- The balance of consultative and deliberative powers needs to be reviewed in the light of the synodal process.
- There needs to be evidence of adequate consultation, with appropriate information, of a decision made in the best interests of the community based on the process of consultation as well as an acceptance of the decision.
- The exercise of these consultative processes will reinforce the sense that a synodal Church has supported the participation of all. Local churches need to consider how this might be implemented.

### **Transparency, Accountability and Evaluation [paras 95-102]**

- The discernment process requires evidence of accountability with reference to St Peter being held accountable for his actions [ Acts of the Apostles Chap 11]
- With accountability comes transparency. Transparency as seen in a Biblical sense rather than simply in terms of correct procedures. It is an attitude of openness and honesty.
- Transparency builds up trust and credibility in the synodal process. They are particularly important regarding the Church's work with minors /vulnerable adults.
- The absence of traits of accountability and transparency give rise to clericalism. A concern with power and control to the detriment of an inclusive community.
- The Church needs to recognise that accountability is not simply to those in authority but to the community at large.
- Evaluation as a tool to improve the effectiveness of pastoral leadership is central to the synodal Church.
- The process that is adopted must be decided synodally within the local Church. The model will form part of a bishop's ad limina visit [ the regular meeting of a bishop with the pope].
- The basic requirements of such a process would include:

- effective functioning of finance councils
- effective involvement of the People of God, in pastoral and financial planning.
- preparation and publication (appropriate to the local context and in an accessible form) of an annual financial report, externally audited, demonstrating the transparency of how the temporal goods and financial resources of the Church and its institutions are being managed.
- preparation and publication of an annual report on the exercise of the local Church's mission, including safeguarding initiatives (the protection of minors and vulnerable adults), and progress made in promoting the laity's access to positions of authority and to decision-making processes, specifying the proportion of men and women.
- Regular evaluations of all the ministries and roles within the Church.

### **Synodality and Participatory Bodies [paras 103- 108]**

- The baptised participate in issues of transparency and accountability through structures within the local Church. As the synodal process moves forward these structures will themselves be subject to the norms of accountability and transparency.
- These structures are so important that they will be mandatory and developed in the light of local need.
- The method of operating must be in line with the experience of synodality. This includes opening the agenda to all members of the Pastoral Council. Consideration needs to be given to inviting members of other faith traditions to join in this work. In this way, good practices can be shared.
- The local Church will need to shape the synodal Council to better reflect the work that is to be undertaken, with appropriate strengthening of established provision and a regularity of meeting.

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## **Part IV - An Abundant Catch**

### **The Conversion of Bonds**

- The synodal process is compared to St Peter and the others bringing their catch into the boat. Each has a distinct role and responsibility.

### **Firmly Rooted yet Pilgrims [paras 110- 119]**

- The Church is defined by the nature of its members in a specific place and time. It takes its character from the local communities and represents something of the diversity of the Church. Our mission is to engage with those beyond our immediate community.
- Our sense of Church responds to our understanding of place but that is no longer defined by geography. Our "place" is defined by our networks and relationships.
- In a world more transient and unrooted the Church is called to build new senses of community – the "missionary creativity" to build new models of pastoral care. The challenge of isolation needs to be recognised.
- Migration and the movement of populations provide socio-economic challenges. Migration means people are cut off from their original social structures. The Eastern Catholic Church faces especial challenges.
- The development of a digital environment is a further challenge. Social media can be used for negative as well as positive purposes. The Church needs to learn how to evangelise within a digital culture but recognises this unique environment as one conducive to a synodal Church.

- In a world where “local” and “home” are being re-defined the Church needs to be, more than ever, a place of welcome.
- The diocese is the natural centre for the community to gather as a eucharistic community.
- The parish, throughout history, has been the centre of the worshipping life for all, providing support at key stages, involved in the formation and development of its members.
- Institutes and associations can work effectively within the local area to support the synodal process and it will be the duty of the bishop to “nurture the bonds of unity.”
- New structures – e.g. Continental Assemblies provide a link between the local Church and the Universal Church.

#### **The Exchange of Gifts [ paras 120-123]**

- Our synodal journey involves the exchange of gifts – between people and between the local church and the wider assembly of the People of God.
- The Church has a special interest in the ways in which it helps to shape the social issues that affect people in various parts of the world.
- The Church embodies the network of relationships that call for social justice with a commitment to supporting those areas that remain weak with a special concern for those who give aid and those who receive it.
- Equally, there is a need to recognise the efforts to recognise the common roots of our Christian heritage.
- The commitment to work with those of other faiths to achieve a world that represents the best that God calls us to.

#### **The Bonds of Unity: Episcopal Conferences and Ecclesial Assemblies [paras 124-129]**

- The Assembly recognised the value of unity in diversity.
- It recognised, too, the importance of Episcopal Conferences.
- To explore the limits of their authorised power, to represent the teachings of the Church in a way that recognised the elements of the local culture.
- The report identified the need for further work to study the status of Ecclesial Assemblies and their contribution to the synodal process. The process of decentralisation and inculturation were central to the development of a responsive synodal process.

#### **The Service of the Bishop of Rome [paras 130- 139]**

- The ministry of the Bishop of Rome was examined within this synodal process.
- The Bishop of Rome is the guarantor of the synodal process; as such he is the guarantor of unity while recognising the structures of the Eastern rite.
- The synodal process is a suitable time to revisit the historic divides of Eastern and Latin Catholicism.
- The migration of peoples from the territories of the Eastern church to the Latin West poses specific problems of pastoral care/ governance.
- The doctrine of “sound decentralisation” requires further study of those areas where Episcopal Conferences can initiate activities that do not encroach on doctrinal matters.
- The synodal process is evident in the ways in which the Dicasteries will work with Episcopal Conferences and assemblies of the Eastern Church to identify areas for common endeavour.
- There is a recognition that the synodal process has given further impetus to the work of ecumenism.
- Further research will be undertaken on finding a common date for Easter between the Latin and Eastern Catholic Churches.



**Part V - "So I Send You"**  
**Forming a People for Missionary Discipleship**

**[paras 140-151]**

- The Lord appeared on the evening of Easter Sunday. He gives His peace and commands them to spread the Gospel.
- The People of God require formation for missionary discipleship. Synodality gives the person a sense of a lived relationship with the Church and a commitment to participation.
- This work begins with Baptism. The celebration of the Eucharist gives a focus to the communion, mission and participation that are the cornerstones of synodality.
- Formation needs to be inclusive – clergy, religious and laity together – and continuous.
- The development of ongoing catechesis as a keystone of synodality is essential.
- There are a range of other settings for catechetical work- schools / colleges/universities. Catholic -focussed associations are well-placed to support this endeavour.
- Within the general formation for synodality, there is a need for specific formation for ministries and vocations that emerge from the synodal process.
- Some attention needs to be given to formation for ordained ministry in a synodal Church.
- There is scope for developing materials within a digital environment. The Church is aware of the power of this environment to spread the Gospel.
- Increased attention to safeguarding minors and vulnerable adults is also important. The Church needs to be welcoming of those who have been victims of abuse.
- Allied to the above, the Church is aware of the need for supporting members in their understanding of Catholic Social Teaching including care for Creation and justice and peace and recognising them as a basis for missionary discipleship.

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**Conclusion**  
**A Feast for All Peoples [paras 152-155]**

- The miraculous draught of fishes is followed by a feast. Christ is the centre of this call to share a communion that encourages participation and involves being sent out s missionary disciples.
- The synodal process becomes a prophetic call to salvation. The essential meaning of synodality is to make the Church fit to announce the Good News.
- The synodal process is dedicated to Mary, the Mother of God.