



SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM

VAT 01	25-05-2021
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Vatican, May 21, 2021

Prot. N. 210122

Dear Sister / Dear Brother in Christ!

Aware that the Synod is an epiphanic event of the *koinonia* of the Church and that your religious life is also an in-depth experience of this *koinonia*, and this way of being is your specific contribution to the life of the Church, I wish to send you the pathway for the next Synod of Bishops on the theme: "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission", which you will find in the attached documents.

From the beginning of this ecclesial adventure I wish to be close to all of you to encourage and support you on this journey together with the people of God. We are all "connected" and therefore everyone's contribution is precious in this process of mutual listening to the Holy Spirit. I am aware of the great gift that the Holy Spirit has bestowed on the Church over the centuries through His charisms and through women and men who, accepting the gift of consecration, have "left everything" to follow God alone and be a sign of His love in the world. Also, in this time, in which the Holy Spirit is urging the entire Church to move towards a more effective synodal experience, I would like to encourage and support you in the experience the Church-as-communion within your Institutes and within the whole Church.

Therefore, to emphasise that this synodal path is a shared journey, the Holy Father will celebrate the opening of the Synod in the Vatican, on October 9-10, 2021. The following Sunday, 17 October 2021, the diocesan Bishops will celebrate the opening of the Synod in their dioceses.

I would like to emphasize the importance of the phase of the diocesan consultation, which will culminate in a pre-synodal meeting. In this phase, we will 'listen' to the whole People of God, without exception, with particular care to involve also those who are more distant and more difficult to consult. We remember the Rule of St. Benedict wherein he writes, "every time some important issue has to be dealt with in the monastery [in the diocese], the abbot is to summon the whole community and personally explain the matter in question [...]. But we said to consult the whole community, because often it is to the youngest that the Lord reveals the best solution."(Chapter 3)

As stated in the Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, in this phase of consultation religious life is a special partner: “The Unions, the Federations and the male and female Conferences of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life consult the Major Superiors, who in their turn may approach their own Councils and other members of the Institutes and Societies in question” (art. 6 § 2). Therefore, in order to undertake this synodal journey with you, to deepen and develop the experience of synodality in a concrete and creative way, together with Msgr. Luis Marín de San Martín, OSA, and Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ, Undersecretaries, we have recently had a very interesting meeting with the Presidents and Executive Secretaries of the UISG and USG.

In order to facilitate this synodal dialogue, we invite each religious order and institute to appoint a contact person (team) for the synodal consultation, who can act as a liaison and point of reference with us and with the local Churches.

Together with my colleagues in the General Secretariat, we are also preparing various formation and information aids to accompany the Preparatory Document. You can contact us at the following email address: synodus@synod.va

Along with the itinerary for this Synod, is a copy of Pope Francis’ speech in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015. The Holy Father himself has explicitly asked me to bring to your attention the foundational importance of this text for our synodal journey.

This upcoming 21 of May 2021 at Midday (Rome time), the Press Office of the Holy See in the *Bollettino* will release the documents enclosed in this letter. Until that moment, all the documents and content of this letter are under embargo.

I sincerely thank you for all the work you will undertake and I ask for your continued prayers for the success of this synodal journey.



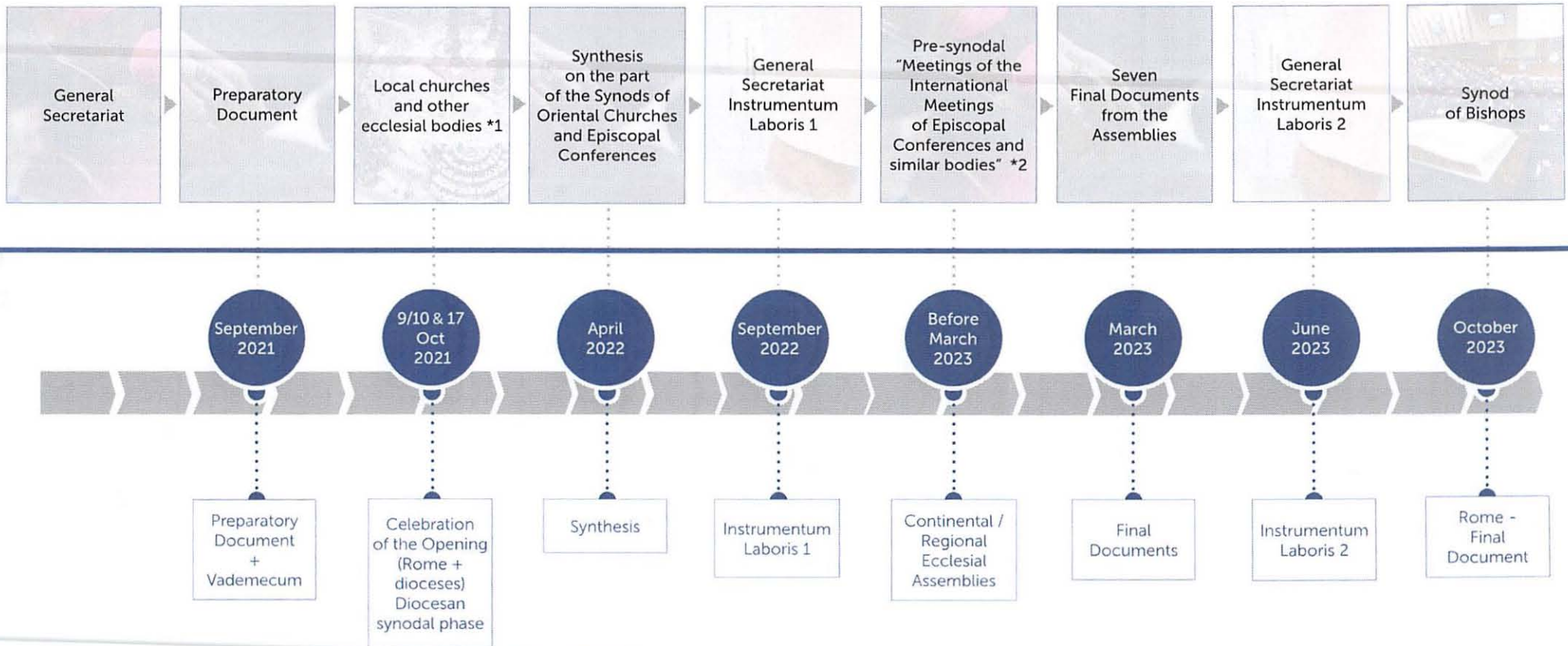
Mario Card. Grech
Segretario Generale

Attached:

1. Itinerary for the Synod
2. Infographic for the Itinerary for the Synod
3. Speech of Pope Francis in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION AND MISSION

XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS



*1 Dicastries, Consecrated Life (UISG-USG UNIONS & FEDERATIONS), Associations of the Faithful, Institutions of Higher Education

*2 Africa (SECAM), Oceania (FCBCO), Asia (FABC), Middle East (CPCO), Europa (CEE), Latin America (CELAM), North America (USCCB+CCCCB)





The Holy See

CEREMONY COMMEMORATING THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE
SYNOD OF BISHOPS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 17 October 2015*

[Multimedia]

*Your Beatitudes,
Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Brothers and Sisters,*

As the Ordinary General Assembly is in full session, this commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops is, for all of us, a cause for joy, praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. From the time of the Second Vatican Council until the present Assembly, we have experienced ever more intensely the necessity and beauty of “journeying together”.

On this happy occasion I offer cordial greetings to Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, the Secretary General, the Undersecretary, Archbishop Fabio Fabene, the Officials, the Consultors and the other collaborators in the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, those who are behind the scenes and work late each evening. I also greet and thank the Synod Fathers and the other participants in the current Assembly, as well as all those present.

At this time we also wish to remember those who, in the course of the last fifty years, have offered their services to the Synod, beginning with the successive General Secretaries: Cardinal Władysław Rubin, Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Cardinal Jan Pieter Schotte and Archbishop Nikola Eterović. I also take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to those — both living and deceased — who contributed so generously and competently to the Synod’s work.

From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I sought to enhance the Synod, which is

one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council.(1) For Blessed Paul VI, the Synod of Bishops was meant to reproduce the image of the Ecumenical Council and reflect its spirit and method.(2) Pope Paul foresaw that the organization of the Synod could “be improved upon with the passing of time”.(3) Twenty years later, Saint John Paul II echoed that thought when he stated that “this instrument might be further improved. Perhaps collegial pastoral responsibility could be more fully expressed in the Synod”.(4) In 2006, Benedict XVI approved several changes to the *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum*, especially in light of the provisions of the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, which had been promulgated in the meantime.(5)

We must continue along this path. The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.

What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word “synod”. Journeying together — laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice.

After stating that the people of God is comprised of all the baptized who are called to “be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood”,(6) the Second Vatican Council went on to say that “the whole body of the faithful, who have an anointing which comes from the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Jn 2:20,27), cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people of God, when ‘from the bishops to the last of the faithful’ it manifests a universal consensus in matters of faith and morals”.(7) These are the famous words *infallible “in credendo”*.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, I emphasized that “the people of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo*”,(8) and added that “all the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients”.(9) The *sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between an *Ecclesia docens* and an *Ecclesia discens*, since the flock likewise has an instinctive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church.(10)

Such was the conviction underlying my desire that the people of God should be consulted in the preparation of the two phases of the Synod on the family, as is ordinarily done with each *Lineamenta*. Certainly, a consultation of this sort would never be sufficient to perceive the *sensus*

fidei. But how could we speak about the family without engaging families themselves, listening to their joys and their hopes, their sorrows and their anguish?(11) Through the answers given to the two questionnaires sent to the particular Churches, we had the opportunity at least to hear some of those families speak to issues which closely affect them and about which they have much to say.

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simply hearing”.(12) It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (*Jn 14:17*), in order to know what he “says to the Churches” (*Rev 2:7*).

The Synod of Bishops is the point of convergence of this listening process conducted at every level of the Church’s life. The Synod process begins by listening to the people of God, which “shares also in Christ’s prophetic office”,(13) according to a principle dear to the Church of the first millennium: “*Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet*”. The Synod process then continues by listening to the pastors. Through the Synod Fathers, the bishops act as authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church, which they need to discern carefully from the changing currents of public opinion. On the eve of last year’s Synod I stated: “For the Synod Fathers we ask the Holy Spirit first of all for the gift of listening: to listen to God, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us”.(14) The Synod process culminates in listening to the Bishop of Rome, who is called to speak as “pastor and teacher of all Christians”,(15) not on the basis of his personal convictions but as the supreme witness to the *fides totius Ecclesiae*, “the guarantor of the obedience and the conformity of the Church to the will of God, to the Gospel of Christ, and to the Tradition of the Church”.(16)

The fact that the Synod always acts *cum Petro et sub Petro* — indeed, not only *cum Petro*, but also *sub Petro* — is not a limitation of freedom, but a guarantee of unity. For the Pope is, by will of the Lord, “the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful”.(17) Closely related to this is the concept of “*hierarchica communio*” as employed by the Second Vatican Council: the Bishops are linked to the Bishop of Rome by the bond of episcopal communion (*cum Petro*) while, at the same time, hierarchically subject to him as head of the college (*sub Petro*). (18)

Synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself. If we understand, as Saint John Chrysostom says, that “Church and Synod are synonymous”,(19) inasmuch as the Church is nothing other than the “journeying together” of God’s flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord, then we understand too that, within the Church, no one can be

“raised up” higher than others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person “lower” himself or herself, so as to serve our brothers and sisters along the way.

Jesus founded the Church by setting at her head the Apostolic College, in which the Apostle Peter is the “rock” (cf. *Mt* 16:18), the one who must confirm his brethren in the faith (cf. *Lk* 22:32). But in this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located beneath the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called “ministers”, because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all. It is in serving the people of God that each bishop becomes, for that portion of the flock entrusted to him, *vicarius Christi*,⁽²⁰⁾ the vicar of that Jesus who at the Last Supper bent down to wash the feet of the Apostles (cf. *Jn* 13:1-15). And in a similar perspective, the Successor of Peter is nothing else if not the *servus servorum Dei*.⁽²¹⁾

Let us never forget this! For the disciples of Jesus, yesterday, today and always, the only authority is the authority of service, the only power is the power of the cross. As the Master tells us: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave” (*Mt* 20:25-27). *It shall not be so among you*: in this expression we touch the heart of the mystery of the Church, and we receive the enlightenment necessary to understand our hierarchical service.

In a synodal Church, the Synod of Bishops is only the most evident manifestation of a dynamism of communion which inspires all ecclesial decisions.

The first level of the exercise of *synodality* is had in the particular Churches. After mentioning the noble institution of the Diocesan Synod, in which priests and laity are called to cooperate with the bishop for the good of the whole ecclesial community,⁽²²⁾ the *Code of Canon Law* devotes ample space to what are usually called “organs of communion” in the local Church: the presbyteral council, the college of consultors, chapters of canons and the pastoral council.⁽²³⁾ Only to the extent that these organizations keep connected to the “base” and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape: these means, even when they prove wearisome, must be valued as an opportunity for listening and sharing.

The second level is that of Ecclesiastical Provinces and Ecclesiastical Regions, Particular Councils and, in a special way, Conferences of Bishops.⁽²⁴⁾ We need to reflect on how better to bring about, through these bodies, intermediary instances of *collegiality*, perhaps by integrating and updating certain aspects of the ancient ecclesiastical organization. The hope expressed by the Council that such bodies would help increase the spirit of episcopal *collegiality* has not yet been fully realized. We are still on the way, part-way there. In a synodal Church, as I have said, “it is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue

which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound ‘decentralization’.”.(25)

The last level is that of the universal Church. Here the Synod of Bishops, representing the Catholic episcopate, becomes an expression of *episcopal collegiality* within an entirely synodal Church.(26) Two different phrases: “episcopal collegiality” and an “entirely synodal Church”. This level manifests the *collegialitas affectiva*, which can also become in certain circumstances “effective”, joining the Bishops among themselves and with the Pope in solicitude for the People God.(27)

The commitment to build a synodal Church — a mission to which we are all called, each with the role entrusted him by the Lord — has significant ecumenical implications. For this reason, speaking recently to a delegation from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, I reaffirmed my conviction that “a careful examination of how, in the Church’s life, the principle of synodality and the service of the one who presides are articulated, will make a significant contribution to the progress of relations between our Churches”.(28)

I am persuaded that in a synodal Church, greater light can be shed on the exercise of the Petrine primacy. The Pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but within it as one of the baptized, and within the College of Bishops as a Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time — as Successor of Peter — to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches.(29)

While reaffirming the urgent need to think about “a conversion of the papacy”,(30) I willingly repeat the words of my predecessor Pope John Paul II: “As Bishop of Rome I am fully aware [...] that Christ ardently desires the full and visible communion of all those Communities in which, by virtue of God’s faithfulness, his Spirit dwells. I am convinced that I have a particular responsibility in this regard, above all in acknowledging the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian Communities and in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation”.(31)

Our gaze also extends to humanity as a whole. A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations (cf. *Is* 11:12) in a world which — while calling for participation, solidarity and transparency in public administration — often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups. As a Church which “journeys together” with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.(32) Thank you.

- 1) Cf. FRANCIS, *Letter to the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, on the elevation of the Undersecretary, Mgr Fabio Fabene, to the episcopal dignity*, 1 April 2014.
- 2) Cf. BLESSED PAUL VI, *Address for the Opening of the first Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 30 September 1967.
- 3) BLESSED PAUL VI, Motu proprio *Apostolica Sollicitudo* (15 September 1965) Proemium.
- 4) SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Address for the Conclusion of VI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 29 October 1983.
- 5) Cf. AAS 98 (2006), 755-779.
- 6) SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964) 10.
- 7) Ibid., 12.
- 8) FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 119.
- 9) Ibid., 120.
- 10) Cf. FRANCIS, *Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting*, Rio de Janeiro, 28 July 2013, 5,4; ID , *Address on the occasion of a meeting with Clergy, Consecrated Persons and members of Pastoral Councils*, Assisi, 4 October 2013.
- 11) Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), 1.
- 12) Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 171.
- 13) SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 12.
- 14) FRANCIS, *Address at the Prayer Vigil for the Synod on the Family*, 4 October 2014.
- 15) FIRST VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* (18 July 1870), ch. IV: Denz. 3074. Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 749, § 1.
- 16) FRANCIS, *Address to the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 18

October 2014.

- 17) SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 23. cf. FIRST VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, Prologue: Denz. 3051.
- 18) Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 22; Decree *Christus Dominus* (28 October 1965), 4.
- 19) SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Explicatio in Ps. 149*: PG 55, 493.
- 20) Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 27.
- 21) Cf. FRANCIS, *Address to the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 18 October 2014.
- 22) Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, cann. 460-468.
- 23) Cf. *ibid.*, cann. 495-514.
- 24) Cf. *ibid.*, cann. 431-459.
- 25) FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 16. cf. *ibid.*, 32.
- 26) Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree *Christus Dominus*, 5; *Codex Iuris Canonici*, cann. 342-348.
- 27) Cf. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* (16 October 2003), 8.
- 28) FRANCIS, *Address to the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople*, 27 June 2015.
- 29) Cf. SAINT IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Epistula ad Romanos*, Proemium: PG 5, 686.
- 30) FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 32.
- 31) SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* (25 May 1995), 95.
- 32) Cf. FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 186-192; Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), 156-162.

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SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM

“For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission”

XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

Presentation of the Programme for the celebration of the upcoming Synod approved by Pope Francis during his audience with Cardinal Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, 24 April 2021.

1. “It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium. What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word ‘synod.’ Journeying together — laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice.” (*Address of His Holiness, Pope Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015*). For this reason, the theme of the next Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is, *For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission*.
2. Indeed, synodality refers to the very essence of the Church, her constitutive reality, and is thus oriented towards evangelization. It is an ecclesial way of being and a prophetic example for today's world. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.” (1 Cor 12:12). In a similar way, Augustine speaks of the *Whole Christ* (cf. *Sermon 341*), head and members who form an indivisible and inseparable unity. Only in union with Christ the head, is it possible to understand the plurality of the members of the body, which enriches the Church, overcoming any temptation to uniformity. Since this is a unity in plurality in the power of the Spirit, the Church is called to open new paths whilst embarking on that same journey.
3. **The Synod of Bishops** is the dynamic point of convergence that calls for mutual listening to the Holy Spirit at every level of the Church's life (cf. *Address of His Holiness, Pope Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015*). It is not just an event, but also a process that involves in synergy the People of God, the College of Bishops and the Bishop of Rome, each according to their proper function (cf. *Address by Cardinal Mario Grech to the Holy Father in the Consistory for the creation of new cardinals, November 28, 2020*).

PROMGRAMME FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SYNOD

4. Considering that the local churches, in which and from which the one and only Catholic Church exists, contribute effectively to the good of the entire mystical

body, which is also the body of the churches (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 23), the fullness of the synodal process can only truly exist if the local churches are involved that process. For a genuine participation of the local churches, there also must be the involvement of other ecclesial bodies in this process, such as, the Synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Councils and Assemblies of the Churches *sui iuris*, and Episcopal Conferences, with their own national, regional, and continental entities.

5. This synodal journey will begin with a solemn opening and consist of three phases:

5.1. OPENING OF THE SYNOD: October 2021

This synodal journey will commence both in the Vatican and in the local churches.

5.1.1. Official Opening with the Holy Father in the Vatican: 9-10 October 2021.

- a. Opening session and time for reflection
- b. Liturgical prayers and celebration of the Eucharist

5.1.2. Official Opening in each local church: Sunday 17 October 2021.

The local diocesan bishop will celebrate the same programme:

- a. Opening session and time for reflection
- b. Liturgical prayers and celebration of the Eucharist

5.2. PHASE IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES AND OTHER ECCLESIAL REALITIES: October 2021-April 2022

The objective of this phase is to consult the People of God (cf. *Episcopalis Communio*, 5,2) so that the synodal process is carried out through listening to all of the baptised, who are the subject of the *sensus fidei* – infallible – *in credendo*.

The following program will facilitate the consultation and participation of all.

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS:

5.2.1. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will send a Preparatory Document, accompanied by a Questionnaire and a *Vademecum* with proposals for consultation in each local church.

5.2.2. The Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the Union of Superiors General - International Union Superiors General (USG - UISG) and other Unions and Federations of Consecrated life, international lay movements, and University - Faculties of Theology will also receive this Questionnaire and *Vademecum*.

LOCAL CHURCHES AND EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OR CORRESPONDING BODIES:

- 5.2.3. Each bishop will appoint a diocesan contact person (team) for the synodal consultation; they shall be a point of reference and link with the Episcopal Conference. They will accompany all the stages of the consultation process in the local church. *(Before October 2021)*
- 5.2.4. Each Episcopal Conference (or corresponding body) will also appoint a contact person responsible for liaising with both diocesan officials and with the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops. *(Before October 2021)*

LOCAL CHURCHES:

- 5.2.5. Consultation in the local churches will include those groups of participation as envisioned in *Episcopalis Communio*, without excluding other modalities deemed appropriate for the consultation to be real and effective (cf. *Episcopalis Communio*, 6).
- 5.2.6. Consultation with the People of God in each local church will conclude with a **pre-synodal meeting**, which will be the culmination of diocesan discernment.
- 5.2.7. At the conclusion of the diocesan phase, each local church will submit their contributions to their Episcopal Conference on a date determined by the Episcopal Conference itself. The Eastern Churches will submit their contributions to their corresponding bodies.

EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OR CORRESPONDING BODIES:

- 5.2.8. A period of discernment will begin for bishops gathered in an assembly (Episcopal Conference). They will listen to what the Spirit has inspired in the churches entrusted to them.
- 5.2.9. Participants in the discernment period and the drafting of the synthesis include the contact person of the Episcopal Conference with regard to the synodal process and their team, as well as those representatives elected to participate in the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod, following their ratification by the Holy Father.
- 5.2.10. This synthesis will be sent to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops along with the contributions of each of the local churches. *(Before April 2022)*

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS:

- 5.2.11. The Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the University - Faculties of Theology, the Union of Superiors General - International Union Superiors General (USG – UISG) and other Unions and Federations of Consecrated life, and international lay movements, shall also provide their own contributions to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. *(Before April 2022)*

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS:

5.2.12. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will proceed with the drafting of the first *Instrumentum Laboris*. (Before September of 2022)

5.3. CONTINENTAL PHASE: September 2022 - March 2023

The purpose of this phase is to promote dialogue at the continental level about the text of the first *Instrumentum Laboris* and deepen discernment within the specific cultural context of each continent.

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS:

5.3.1. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will publish and send the first *Instrumentum Laboris*. (September of 2022)

INTERNATIONAL REUNIONS OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES:

5.3.2. Each International Reunion of Episcopal Conferences will also appoint a contact person to liaise with both the Episcopal Conferences and the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops. (Before September 2022)

5.3.3. Pre-synodal discernment in the continental Assemblies. The criteria for the participation of the residential bishops and other members of the People of God is to be established.

5.3.4. The Assemblies will conclude with the drafting of a final document to be sent to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops. (March 2023)

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS:

5.3.5. At the same time as the pre-synod meetings at the continental level, it is recommended that international assemblies of specialists also be held, who may send their contributions to the General Secretariat of the Synod. (March 2023)

GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD:

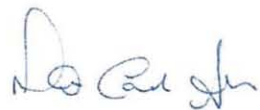
5.3.6. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will proceed to draft the second *Instrumentum Laboris*. (Before June 2023)

5.4. UNIVERSAL CHURCH PHASE: October 2023

5.4.1. The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops will send the second *Instrumentum Laboris* to the participants of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

5.4.2. Celebration of the Synod of Bishops will take place in Rome according to the norms established in the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*. (October 2023)

6. The articulation of the different phases of the synodal process makes possible a real listening to the People of God including all bishops at the different levels of ecclesial life (local churches, Episcopal Conferences or corresponding bodies, and International Reunions of Episcopal Conferences). In this way, the participation of all in the synodal process is guaranteed and the exercise of collegiality is configured within the exercise of synodality, as emphasized by Pope Francis on the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops.
7. In a spirit of collaboration, the General Secretariat of the Synod is open to clarify and accompany any moment of this synodal process, which must be, essentially, a spiritual event of discernment. "One listening to the others; and all listening to the Holy Spirit." (*Discourse of Pope Francis on the Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015*).



Mario Card. Grech
General Secretary

Vatican, 21 May 2021

“For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission”

XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

**PHASE IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES
AND OTHER ECCLESIAL REALITIES**

October 2021-April 2022

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS	LOCAL CHURCH AND OTHER ECCLESIAL BODIES	EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES (OR SYNODS OF EASTERN CHURCHES)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparatory document • Questionnaire • <i>Vademecum</i> for consultation (September 2021) 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of diocesan contact person • Eventual appointment of a team (before or October 2021) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of contact person for the Episcopal Conference • Eventual appointment of a team (before October 2021)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia • Consultation with the International Union of Superiors General and Major Superiors of Consecrated Life • Consultation with associations of the faithful • Consultation with Faculties and Universities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and organize consultation with the People of God (Process to be established by the local church; possible dialogue in the Episcopal Conference) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-synodal meeting for discernment at the diocesan level (after consultation with the People of God) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission of the synthesis of the diocesan contributions to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops and the Episcopal Conference (Deadline to be decided by the Episcopal Conference) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discernment of the Episcopal Conference: work on the contributions sent by the local churches (Process to establish the Episcopal Conference)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission of the synthesis of the Episcopal

		Conference to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops (April 2022)
• Drafting of the First <i>Instrumentum Laboris</i> (September 2022)		• Appointment of representatives to the General Assembly

CONTINENTAL PHASE
September 2022 - March 2023

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS	INTERNATIONAL REUNIONS OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES
• Release of the first <i>Instrumentum laboris</i> (September 2022)	• Appointment of a continental responsible (referent) • Possible formation of a team (before September 2022)
	• Discernment in Continental Assemblies (process to be decided by the International Reunions of Episcopal Conferences)
• International Assemblies of Specialists	
	• Drafting of the final document (before March 2023)
	• Submission of the document to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops (March 2023)
• Drafting of the Second <i>Instrumentum laboris</i> (June 2023)	

PHASE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH
October 2023

• XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2023)



SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM

Vatican, 20 May 2021

Prot. N. 210114

Dear brother in the episcopate,

I am writing to you personally to send you the itinerary for the next Synod of Bishops, “*For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission*,” which you will find in the attached documents. The Holy Father has asked me to share with every diocesan bishop his sincere desire that we undertake this path together, so that we all might grow together through this concrete experience of synodality. Often, the Holy Father has invited me to remain “open to everything that comes from the local churches.”

Given the significance that this synodal journey has for the good of both the Universal and local church, if it were possible I would come and present it personally to every bishop. I would have gladly done so not only because its contents need to be communicated with due delicacy, but also because I have wished from the beginning of this ecclesial adventure to be close to all of you so as to encourage and support you on this journey we make together with the People of God entrusted to you. Since we are all ‘connected’, the contribution of everyone is precious in this process of mutual listening to the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, to emphasise that this synodal path is a shared journey, the Holy Father will celebrate the opening of the Synod in the Vatican, 9-10 October 2021. The following Sunday, 17 October 2021, each of you will celebrate the opening of the Synod in your own diocese.

I would like to emphasise the importance of this phase of diocesan consultation, which will culminate in a pre-synodal meeting. In this phase, we will ‘listen’ to the whole People of God, without exception, with particular care to involve also those who are further away and are consulted with greater difficulty. We remember the Rule of St Benedict wherein he writes, “every time some important issue has to be dealt with in the monastery [in the diocese], the abbot is to summon the whole community and personally explain the matter in question [...]. But we said to consult the whole community, because often it is to the youngest that the Lord reveals the best solution.”(Chapter 3)

Therefore, each bishop will appoint a diocesan contact person (team) for the synodal consultation, who can act as a liaison and point of reference.

Your Eminences/Beatitudes/Excellences

THEIR SEES

As I write this letter, I am aware of the many difficulties caused by the pandemic, as well as those countries suffering from war and violence. I hope that this synodal process, in a sense of renewed communion, might help the local churches notwithstanding the great challenges they face. I am also aware of the many countries and dioceses who have already embarked on a local synodal journey. With God's grace, we will find creative ways to articulate diocesan dynamics, agendas, and priorities in preparation for the next Synod. I am sure that our common love for Jesus and his Church will help us to walk this path together.

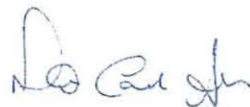
At the same time, we would be grateful to those brother bishops who have synodal experiences already underway, and are willing to share with us unpublished testimonies of how they have seen the Holy Spirit acting in the midst of the People of God. They may also wish to share with us the moments and ways in which they have been surprised by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

Together with my colleagues in the General Secretariat, we are also preparing various training and information aids to accompany the Preparatory Document. Furthermore, before October 2021, we hope to be able to contact every Episcopal Conference to dialogue directly in this preliminary phase. In any case, any bishop may contact us so that we might help with any need (synodus@synod.va; m.grech@synod.va).

Along with the itinerary for this Synod, is a copy of Pope Francis' speech in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015. The Holy Father himself has explicitly asked me to bring to your attention the foundational importance of this text for our synodal journey.

This upcoming 21 May 2021 at Midday (Rome time), the Press Office of the Holy See in the *Bollettino* will release the documents enclosed in this letter. Until that moment, all the documents and content of this letter are under embargo.

I sincerely thank you for all the work you will undertake and I ask for your continued prayers for the success of this synodal journey.



Mario Card. Grech
General Secretary

Attached:

1. Itinerary for the Synod
2. Infographic for the Itinerary for the Synod
3. Speech of Pope Francis in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015

N.B. a copy of these documents will be sent through the Apostolic Nunciature