



Conferenza Stampa di presentazione della Tappa Continetale del Processo Sinodale 2021-2023

Sala Stampa Vaticana, 26 agosto 2022



Intervention of Cardinal Mario Grech, General Secretary of the Synod

We meet one year after the press conference presenting the 16th Assembly of the Synod. At that time, the synodal process seemed like a blank page entrusted to the discernment in the Spirit of the local churches. Today we can give some insight into the journey that has been made.

At the present time we are living the first phase of the synodal process, with the conclusion of two decisive moments: the consultation of the People of God in the particular Churches and the discernment of the Pastors in the Episcopal Conferences. Drawing from the syntheses of the Episcopal Conferences, the Secretariat of the Synod together with a qualified Group of experts will soon meet to draft a synthesis that will launch the continental phase.

It is precisely in this consultation that the nature of the synodal church as the "journeying together" of the People of God is revealed. The syntheses received will reveal how much this ecclesial principle (style) has been lived out in the local churches, and from the result we will understand how much more we can work to make everyone more responsible and involved.

We are under no illusion that the principle of consultation has been applied with the same care in all the Churches: we are at the beginning of an ecclesial journey that demands patience, asks for an awareness that everyone be made a participant, each according to his or her condition and function, in ecclesial life and therefore in the synodal journey. The important thing is to have shown and to continue to show that the Church's journey begins and takes strength from listening.

In any case, I address all of you today and those following us from home with a sense of gratitude and much hope for the future of the synodal Church. Regardless of the content that will emerge from reading the syntheses, the experiences heard or lived show a Church that is alive, in need of authenticity, healing, and which yearns more and more to be a community that celebrates and announces the joy of the Gospel, learning to journey and discern together.

I would like to thank all the People of God who have participated.

Precisely because no one in the Church has an exclusive claim to the truth, the consultation with the People of God demands discernment. To understand the synodal process, we need to think of *a fecund circularity of prophecy and discernment*. If all are prophets in the People of God (cf. Nm 11:29), not everything said is the voice of the Spirit: within the sound of the voices, the voice of the Spirit must be grasped. Therein lies the function of discernment, which is already operative in the process of listening, when the community converges on a point. It is a matter of having full intelligence of what the Spirit is saying to the Church through a process of **in-depth reading**, which resembles a process of decantation. Certainty about what the Spirit is saying to the Church comes only by the **hearing together** (sentire insieme), indeed the **agreement** (con-sentire), the **converging** in faith of the People of God, which happens by listening to one another.

But discernment continues in the Assemblies of Bishops who are the principle of unity of their Churches. More than a few argue that the syntheses of the Episcopal Conferences will be the grave

of prophecy. **It is time to overcome this suspicion**, this reservation which certainly has its historical reasons, but which contrasts with the nature of the Church, which is "the 'sacrament of unity,' that is, a holy people united and ordered under the guidance of the bishops" (SC 26). If the Church is the body of the Churches, because each Church is such since the bishop is the bearer of the branch of apostolicity (cf. LG 20), we must trust one another, not opposing a Church of the People against a hierarchical Church, but making dynamic and fruitful the relationships in the Church: of each *portio Populi Dei* with its bishop and presbyterate, and of all the bishops among themselves and with the Bishop of Rome, "the visible principle and foundation of unity whether of the bishops and of the multitude of the faithful," but also of all the Churches (cf. LG 23).

The current synodal process is governed by this **principle of circularity**, guaranteed by an act that makes it operative in ecclesial experience: that of **restitution to the Churches**, which will be implemented in the coming months. With the results of the consultation of the People of God and the discernment of the Episcopal Conferences, the Secretariat of the Synod will be able to prepare a synthesis that could have become the *instrumentum laboris* for the assembly phase that will be celebrated in Rome. Instead, the inclusion of a continental level was desired to ensure even more respect for the consultation of the People of God. In order to prevent the various steps from impoverishing what the Spirit has told the Churches in the consultation, this further moment of discernment was conceived, in which the continental Assemblies are called to reread the synthesis produced by the Secretariat of the Synod, indicating whether it actually expresses the synodal horizon that has emerged in the particular Churches of that continent.

This further level of discernment cannot in any way be reduced to the celebration of an ecclesial Assembly. Therefore, it is necessary that the principle of circularity be realized through an act of restitution of the synthesis not to an Assembly, but to the particular Churches. There the consultation took place, there the Document returns. This restitution guarantees the respect of the actors in the synodal process: indeed, by rendering to the subject of the consultation the fruit of their listening, the possibility is offered to each particular Church to respond with another eminently ecclesial act: that of reception. With this act each Church makes its own the document and its contents, and evaluates its correspondence to its identity as a Church which is called to incarnate in a place the Gospel of Christ. For this reason, each bishop is requested to bring the synthesis to the attention of his Church and to make an attentive reading of it at least in the bodies of participation and to draft with the synodal team any observations to be forwarded to the Episcopal Conference or to the Secretariat of the continental Assembly.

Consequently, the continental Assembly will be able to begin its task of critically reading the synthesis on the basis of the observations coming from the Churches. Anyone can realize how the act of restitution is able to activate the synodal dynamic by means of the circularity among the subjects and the levels of ecclesial life. We are confident that, despite the difficulties of translating a synodal style into act, where we are all apprentices, the signs of a change of mentality can already be seen.



Conferenza Stampa di presentazione della Tappa Continetale del Processo Sinodale 2021-2023

Sala Stampa Vaticana, 26 agosto 2022



Address by Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, General Rapporteur of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

Last 09-10 October, Pope Francis opened the current synod process on a universal level by calling the Church into a synod. Since then, hundreds of thousands of meetings have taken place all over the world (spiritual conversations, dialogue and prayer meetings, conferences...) at various levels (parish, diocesan, national... and also in the digital sphere) and involving ecclesial realities of various kinds: from parish groups, religious congregations, associations of the faithful, professional groups, informal groups...

It was impressive to discover the enthusiasm and creativity of all these groups. It was clear from the very first weeks that the Spirit was at work!

The heart of these synodal experiences was **listening to God through listening to each other**, inspired by the Word of God. We then asked to collect in a "synthesis" the fruits of prayer and reflection that emerged during these synod experiences.

Before going into the merits of the syntheses, it is important to understand what these syntheses are. The synthesis requested is neither a **presentation of the chronology** of the stages of the synod process concretely followed, nor a **report** (minutes) that indiscriminately lists all the points that emerged during the synod experience. Rather, it is to be understood as the culmination of communal spiritual discernment. They aim to **gather and express the fruits** of the synod process in a way that is understandable even to those who did not participate, **indicating how the Holy Spirit's call to the Church was understood in the local context**.

The reading of the syntheses received has produced in me, as a disciple of Christ and as a bishop, a great spiritual consolation that opens up to a great hope. This hope must now be transformed into missionary dynamism.

The syntheses received by the General Secretariat of the Synod as at **25 August 2022** can be divided into the following five categories:

From the Bishops' Conferences. Generally speaking, the synthesis of an individual Bishops' Conference is the fruit of discernment from the syntheses received from the dioceses, which, in turn, are the fruit of discernment from the various ecclesial instances at diocesan level: parishes, associations, movements, religious congregations, as well as from various other national ecclesial instances federations schools, Catholic schools, Catholic universities, associations, etc.

Already 98% of the 114 Bishops' Conferences had appointed a contact person or synod team. The summaries received to date number **100** ... and they are still coming. This incredible figure tells us that yes, the Church is in synod!

Eastern Catholic Churches. The individual Eastern Catholic Churches have been invited to send their own specific syntheses. It is clear that in the traditionally Latin-rite territories, the eparchies in the area also sent their own contribution to their respective Episcopal Conferences.

From the USG and UISG. The Union of Superiors General and the International Union of Superiors General sent their specific contribution made from the contributions of Religious Congregations (male and female) and Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (male and female). I express my deep gratitude to these two institutions for their important and generous investment. These communities have a 'synodal' patrimony to offer to the whole Church, and the synodal process has reminded them and has reminded us of it.

From the Vatican Dicastries. The Vatican Dicastries also sent a contribution. Some of them have also been entrusted with the task of collecting the syntheses of specific ecclesial instances. This is the case of the **Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life**, which collected and elaborated the syntheses of a further path of discernment of Religious Congregations and Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

For its part, the **Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life** has been charged with collecting and working on the syntheses of the ecclesial associations and movements. The Dicastery also oversees the creation of a synthesis based on the listening and discernment carried out by realities that deal with the pastoral care of people with disabilities.

In addition to its own internal path of listening and discernment, the **Dicastery for Communication** also followed the implementation of a *pilot project* (initiated by the RIAL network in collaboration with Imission), entitled '**The Church listens to you**'. This was a listening activity in the social networks carried out by some *influencers*. In this case, about 110,000 responses were received and an estimated 20 million people were reached.

The **Secretariat of State** also produced, for the first time, a synthesis by listening to the Apostolic Nuncios.

The last group is that of the so-called "Observation" group (Osservazioni). In addition to these categories, more than a thousand contributions were collected from individual believers or church groups or not officially recognised by the local church authority. For the latter in particular, these are realities that feel "on the periphery or margins" of the life of the Church. In receiving these contributions, we have always asked that they also be sent to the respective local ordinaries.

It was nice to see how these groups felt challenged by the call of Pope Francis. I feel I must thank them. Contrary to what one might think, many of the contributions sent are not mere lists of claims, but true works of listening and discernment. I want to assure them that we will read their contributions carefully and take them seriously!

From all these data, I am convinced that **we are facing an ecclesial dialogue without precedent in the history of the Church**, not only for the quantity of responses received or the number of people involved (which to some who want to rely solely on numbers - which can only be approximate - may seem limited) but also for the quality of participation.

The listening and discernment process was certainly not perfect. We know this, but we also know that we are trying to be more and more the image of the synodal Church, we are also learning from our mistakes.

I would like to conclude this address with the testimony of a priest, Father Michael G. Ryan, parish priest of St. James Cathedral in Seattle, who sums up the synod process well. This is what we hoped would happen.

Reading over the reports and reflecting on them, I found myself thinking how blessed I am to be pastor of a parish that is full of people who love the Church so much that they embrace it, affirm it,

celebrate it, and thank God for it, but at the same time are not at all afraid to criticize it, challenge it, question it, and express anger, disappointment, and frustration with it.

The gospel tells us that “With God, all things are possible.” I can’t say that the same is true for the Church! We have to be realistic in our expectations. But isn’t it wonderful that Pope Francis is determined to hear from the whole Church and not just the hierarchy? The idea is revolutionary. To my knowledge, an effort of this sort and on this scale has never been undertaken by the Church—not even in its earliest days when the numbers were modest. And not only does Pope Francis want to hear from the whole Church, he wants us—who are the Church—to listen to each other. And that is precisely what happened during our parish’s synodal process. And it is clear that those of you who accepted the invitation and came together to listen to each other in prayerful, respectful dialogues, were surprised by what happened, delighted by what happened, changed by what happened. I think our parish can never be quite the same as a result, and I’m willing to bet that the same is true for the entire Church.



Conferenza Stampa di presentazione della Tappa Continetale del Processo Sinodale 2021-2023



Sala Stampa Vaticana, 26 agosto 2022

Witness of Sr. Nathalie Becquart X.M.C.J., Under-Secretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod

The first phase of the Synod gave rise to a great desire in the local Churches to pursue the path of synodality

Since the announcement of the Synodal Process in May 2021, with Card. Mario Grech and Mgr Luis Marin de San Martin, we have sought to establish a dialogue with all the local Churches, in particular with the Bishops' Conferences through a series of focus groups and face-to-face meetings. We have also had numerous encounters and connections with movements, religious communities, Church bodies and networks, as well as with the Dicastries of the Roman Curia. Today I can witness to the impressive momentum around the world in response to Pope Francis' call to participate in the Synod.

I am particularly touched and marked by the way in which countries with extremely difficult socio-political situations have engaged in the Synodal Process. To read the synodal summaries of countries such as Nicaragua, Ukraine, Haiti, Myanmar, Lebanon, Central African Republic – and unfortunately one could name many more, in our world which faces so many crises – to discover the stories of the initiatives they implemented for the synodal consultation despite all the obstacles, and to hear the voices of the baptized of these countries in difficulty. Their joys and sorrows, their dreams and their views of the Church expressed in such a candid way is an experience of the Holy Spirit at work in the life of Christian communities on all continents. Our mission at the Secretariat of the Synod, through all our encounters, whether online meetings or in the field, has really given me the opportunity to contemplate the way in which the spirit of synodality has unfolded more and more over the months in the local Churches through an abundance of synodal initiatives and meetings. The website <https://www.synodresources.org/> has also played a vital role as a platform for sharing initiatives and good practices.

All those who have experienced listening and dialogue according to the proposed synodal method of spiritual conversation testify to the joy they have received, their gratitude for having been able to make their voices heard and their desire to continue on this path of synodality. Something is underway that is already bearing fruit on the ground and which will continue.¹ I am very confident for the continuation of the Synod because the Spirit is blowing. The fears, tensions, and resistances that are naturally expressed are part of all spiritual discernment processes.

This whole synodal journey has been possible thanks to the incredible mobilisation of the national and diocesan synodal teams (made up in general, following our suggestion, of both men and women,

¹ Excerpt from the synthesis of the Spanish Bishops' Conference: "Finally, the groups wished to express their deep gratitude for what they had experienced: a moment of grace, built on active and respectful mutual listening, on openness to frank discussion, on the sharing of gratifying experiences and on constructive exchanges. (...) The fraternal dialogue and shared reflection gave us hope and enthusiasm, and was an opportunity to energise the community by expressing the desire to continue walking together."

priests, lay people, and religious) who have deployed a lot of energy and creativity to animate and accompany the Synodal Process, to train the facilitators of the synodal groups, and to prepare the synodal assemblies and syntheses through a process of prayer and discernment.

I am struck in reading all these syntheses by their very frank style, which does not hesitate to name not only the good experiences of “walking together” that are already being lived out, but also to denounce the real obstacles and difficulties without any ambiguity. All these summaries give us a very rich picture of the concrete life of Christian communities throughout the world who are seeking to be ever more missionary and faithful to the Gospel in order to serve today's world, which is marked by so many fractures and sufferings.

What emerges very strongly is that this first stage of the Synod constituted a very practical school of synodality, enabling a large number of people to integrate more personally and communally how much synodality is truly God's call for the Church of the third millennium, and to take up the challenge of becoming ever more a Church of listening and dialogue.

It must also be emphasised that if the Synod has given rise to a form of common experience throughout the world, each ecclesial reality has entered into this process at its own pace and according to its own starting point, depending on its specific situation and culture. Some who have already had a long experience of synodal dynamics – such as religious communities who in some way have synodality in their DNA or countries which have held numerous diocesan synods or even plenary councils – have sometimes expressed a form of doubt. For other countries this approach was very new and often generated a lot of enthusiasm. But one has the impression that everyone has taken a step further through this first year of the Synod. Synodality is a gradual learning process, a learning-by-doing that starts from reality. We must accept that it takes time and that the path itself is already the goal.

In conclusion, I would like to share my joy that this synodal experience has allowed many to realise more strongly that the Church is truly the People of God in the diversity of her members, all called to walk together as missionary disciples. I heard in many ways a very strong desire for a more synodal, more fraternal, more missionary, more welcoming and inclusive Church against the backdrop of a great denunciation of clericalism. This made me realise that this call to missionary synodality, which was a major fruit of the Synod on Young People – which led to Pope Francis writing in *Christus Vivit* §206 that “Youth ministry can only be synodal” – does not only reflect today what was asked for by young people, but more broadly what the People of God as a whole has said in this consultation.

The challenge at the opening of this new continental phase is therefore to continue the synodal conversion at all levels – the “synodalisation” of all ecclesial realities – which requires a real change of mentality as well as new ways of living out the life and mission in the Church as brothers and sisters in Christ, clothed in equal dignity. This requires, among other things, training in listening, discernment, and teamwork. And this cannot be done without young people, women, the poorest and most suffering – especially victims of abuse – whose voices we must continue to hear and involve in this process of discernment because they are the driving force of synodality.



Conferenza Stampa di presentazione della Tappa Continetale del Processo Sinodale 2021-2023



Sala Stampa Vaticana, 26 agosto 2022

Testimony of H.E. Monsignor Luis Marín de San Martín, O.S.A., Under-Secretary of the Synod General Secretariat

1. Acknowledgements

- First of all, I would like to thank all those who, from different sensibilities, different mentalities, different options and different cultures, have been involved in this process. It is a beautiful experience of ecclesiality, with all that it has of unity and plurality: of *pluriform unity*.
- Thanks also to the media who have not only limited themselves to reporting, but have been able to accompany this unprecedented historical process, echoing the enormous creativity that has been shown and helping us in our task.
- And thanks to those who, from outside the Church, dialogue with us with good will. Brothers of other religions, so many non-believers... Thanks to all those who consider more what unites than what divides.

2. Assessment

My assessment is resolute and clearly positive.

- I believe that we are in an irreversible process, with different speeds, full of nuances and in need of clarification, but with no turning back. Little by little, it is taking hold, purifying itself and renewing and reforming the Church.
- Personally: it has enriched me as a Christian, as a religious and as a bishop; it has made me grow in my love for the Church; it has helped me to live my service and my responsibility with enthusiasm.

3. Perspectives

At the end of the diocesan phase and at the beginning of the continental stage, I would like to comment on five dimensions of synodality which have been highlighted and which, in my opinion, should be taken into account.

a. It is a spiritual process. *In and of the Holy Spirit.* It is not, therefore, primarily a question of changing structures (this will come as a consequence), detailed programming, deep academic reflection and much less of power-sharing or marketing for personal or group promotion. It is about the coherent living of our Christian faith and its witness. Thus:

- *It links us to Christ and to our brothers and sisters.* I have summed it up in the expression: "Synodality means more Christ and more Church".
- *It must take care of the prayerful dimension,* both personal and communal.
- *It has true love at its core:* towards God, towards the Church, towards humanity. It avoids the danger of both "spiritualism" and "sociologism".
- *It opens us to evangelising dynamism:* four verbs: "to go out", "to risk", "to witness", "to transform".

There is no doubt that, from the Holy Spirit, the process acquires an enormous, truly revolutionary force.

Question: Is the Holy Spirit really present in this process, are we open to Him and do we allow ourselves to be challenged by Him?

b. It is a process of solidarity. It does not distance us from the present reality, but involves us in the world. In the face of contrasts, injustices, bleeding inequalities, intolerance, it is good to remember the words of 1 Cor 12:26, which opened the message sent by the Bishops' Conference of Brazil to the Church on pilgrimage in Nicaragua. "If one member of the body suffers, the whole body suffers". Let us not forget this. The synodal process has made us aware that we must recover the basic brotherhood, which springs from the image of God in every human being (cf. Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 8). Thus, the concept of "companions on the way" has been broadened. And so has the concept of "peripheries". The "walking together" is something experiential and everyday, which leads us to abandon the spaces of supposed security, of separation.

Question: Does everything that is truly human find an echo in our hearts, as the Council asked us to do (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 1)?

c. It is an open process. It is a matter of listening, discerning and deciding. Not in order to dilute one's own responsibility, but so that it is truly a response to God's call, to what God wants. I have noticed the widespread desire to express ourselves freely, without fear. But I am also aware of the need to improve our listening (which is not just "hearing") and, above all, our discernment. Then we will be able to make decisions at all levels.

- *Listening* to all (the People of God has infallibility "*in credendo*").
- *Discern*: seeking, among all, the good of the Church here and now (time, place, culture).
- *Decide*: each one according to the particular richness of his charism and vocation. No more and no less. Overcoming clericalism is particularly necessary.

Question: Can we express ourselves freely in the Church, as do its members in a family? Do we know how to dialogue (cf. St. Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*)? Do we know how to discern God's will, not our own?

d. It is an integrating process. The diocesan stage just concluded, the continental stage just begun, the future celebration of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, are events which are integrated into the one synodal process which belongs to the ecclesial identity: to the being, the acting and the style of the Church. All the concrete manifestations or forms in which synodality is expressed cannot and must not be seen as isolated and disconnected events. For this reason:

- National or local synods, assemblies, pastoral councils at different levels, dicasteries of the Roman Curia, etc., are structures which retain their own identity, but which only take on true meaning when integrated into the ecclesial whole.
- We also need to move forward in the relationship between the local Churches and the national-continental bodies and between the local Churches among themselves and in the universal Church.

Question: Are we living the dimension of "process", are we moving forward in integration at all levels or are we content to create elites, whether clerical or lay?

e. It is a dynamic process. It never ends. Thus the syntheses and the diocesan or national assemblies are not a point of arrival, but an impulse that encourages further progress. These synthesis-documents should not be forgotten once they have been written and sent out, but can and should be developed at all levels (parish, diocesan, episcopal conference), because they point the way and offer great opportunities for renewal.

Question: How do we approach the future at local, national and universal level after the diocesan stage, and are we making concrete decisions in which the synodal dimension of the Church is expressed?

We are aware of the enormous possibilities that synodality offers. We should not be frightened by the different speeds, nor should we be anxious to achieve immediate results; the important thing is to assume a new, more coherent way of being Church, advancing serenely along this path of renewal and hope. If possible, with enthusiasm.

I conclude by recalling some beautiful words of Saint John XXIII, which we can apply to this exciting task in which we are engaged: "We must always think big and look high and far".



Press Conference for the Presentation of the Continental Phase of the Synodal Process 2021-2023



Holy See Press Office, August 26, 2022

Original Language: ITALIAN

Intervention by Father Giacomo Costa, SJ

1. In the wake of the Diocesan Phase, the Continental Phase we continue the consultation of the People of God for Synod 2021-2023. **The main objective remains listening**, guided by the fundamental question that inspired the first year of this journey. The question is: “How does this ‘journeying together,’ which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?” ([Preparatory Document](#), no. 2). This question helps us to focus on a very important point: the Synod is not an opportunity to address all the problems of the Church in a generic way, but rather places them in a specific perspective, that of seeking the way to walk forward together in order to proclaim the Gospel. It is therefore always a question of “**listening in order to walk together.**”

Walking together in this upcoming Continental Phase means making an effort **to respect and value the originality of each local Church**, without imposing the same approach on everyone, as well as **seeking relationships, perspectives, and paths** that can be shared between neighbouring Churches across a vast territory.

The Diocesan Phase has built a web of relationships between individuals and groups down to the parish level, both within and outside the Christian community. The Continental Phase aims to broaden this dynamic, investing in relations between neighbouring Churches and Bishops’ Conferences, within what we have referred to as “Continents,” even if this should not be understood in a strictly geographical sense.

An internal task force of the General Secretariat closely accompanies each continent, not in order to impose an identical model for all of them, which is not the aim, but rather ensuring that each continent finds an approach that is adapted to its circumstances in order to create an opportunity for exchange, comparison, and contrast.

2. The great novelty of the Synod 2021-2023 is, therefore, that the consultation is also carried out through **a dialogue between the universal Church and the local Churches**. Indeed, this is precisely the specificity of the Continental Phase. The Synod is not a process of gradual abstraction that gradually becomes detached from reality, but **a circular process of dialogue. We want a back-and-forth circularity between those who are invited to listen and those who are listened to**, obviously within the realm of possibility, with a great willingness on the part of the General Secretariat to learn from what is received, and even to review the way things work. But in concrete terms, how will this dialogue occur during the Continental Phase?

- a. The starting point is the contributions that the General Secretariat of the Synod has received from the Diocesan Phase.
- b. We are currently in the process of drafting a text that is the fruit of listening to all these voices: the Document for the Continental Phase (DCP). This is a delicate task: it must not only reflect all the voices that we have heard, but also **choose (or rather discern) the key points** that emerge from the consultations in relation to the fundamental question of the Synod. I will speak about this DCP in greater detail in a moment.

- c. Once drafted and approved, **this DCP will be sent back to all dioceses and episcopal conferences**. This is not about repeating what was done during the Diocesan Phase. The Bishops' Conferences have shared their experiences; they are now called to see, via the DCP, how their experience compares and contrasts with that of other particular Churches in the world, in a process which culminates in the Continental Gatherings.
- d. There is a precise aim for this process: to recognise within the DCP **the intuitions** that need to be highlighted from their continental perspective and the questions that need to be addressed. But above all, the most ambitious and therefore the most difficult objective is to identify priorities.
- e. We hope that the Continental Gatherings will also have a dialogical structure. They will include a phase in Ecclesial Assembly, with a rich representation of all the components of the people of God. Then there will be a phase in Episcopal Assembly. In a perspective of "circularity" and dialogue, **we hope that after the Continental Gathering, the bishops will find ways to "return" the text to the whole People of God before sending it to the General Secretariat**, so that it can be corroborated by as broad and conscious an ecclesial consensus as possible.
- f. From the syntheses produced at continental level, the *Instrumentum laboris* will then be drawn up which, in practice, will outline the agenda of the Synodal Assembly of October 2023.

3. In the light of the dynamics we have just outlined, it is clear **that the DCP is a key instrument for dialogue**, between the local Churches amongst themselves as well with the universal Church. **The text is and must remain a tool**: what really counts is that relationships are established, dialogue is engaged, and priorities are identified.

What's more: the process of drafting the DCP is not a pure synthesis or distillation of the material received, since even a machine produce a generic list of the most recurrent terms. Rather, the drafting of the DCP is **a journey of listening to the Holy Spirit and discerning together**: it will take place in an atmosphere of prayer, listening to the Word of God, celebrating with one another, and sharing moments of silence.

The work of drafting the DCP is entrusted to a group composed of the General Secretary (Card. Grech), the Under-Secretaries, and some officials of the General Secretariat of the Synod, as well as the members of the Coordination Committee, in addition to 25 other persons, **chosen in such a way as to ensure a certain variety in terms of geographical origin, ecclesial role** (diocesan priests, religious men and women, laity), and **gender**. These 25 'experts' were not chosen to inject their ideas into the DCP, but to be the instrument through which the voice of the People of God from all parts of the world can be heard. This is a role of service.

In particular, the documents received from across the world have been divided and allocated in such a way that each one will be read several times by different people and therefore from different perspectives. Each person will draw up a summary sheet for each document read and an analysis or summary sheet, highlighting what seems particularly significant. **What is important is not only what comes up most frequently**. It may also be something that may only appear in one contribution, but which sheds new light on things, makes them clearer or even opening up a promising way forward.

Starting September 21, 2022, the whole group will meet for two weeks of working together, which will consist of three stages:

- a. First, we will compare the results of the different readings in order to obtain an overview, or rather to bring out more and more clearly the deepest cores and the most significant elements,

according to the criteria that I have just outlined. On this basis, a first draft of the DCP will be drawn up.

- b. The second stage is the writing stage: everyone will be asked to provide parts of the text relating to the different core nuclei identified. In order to give homogeneity to the text, the final drafting will be entrusted to two editors (one woman and one man, both lay people) and will be done simultaneously in two languages (Italian and English). This is the first time this has happened, but proceeding in this way guarantees a progressive refinement of the text beyond the idiosyncratic expressions of a single culture.
- c. The final stage is verification and approval, through a personal and collective rereading of the text aloud, in which those ultimately responsible for the text will participate, namely the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat, as well as some members of the four Commissions constituted in the General Secretariat to serve the synodal journey (who will participate remotely).

We will do our best to have the DCP ready by the end of October, at least in the main languages. We are aware that this process has its limits, the foremost among which is *time*. But it is also **an innovative – and even pioneering – process: it is a consultation in dialogue**, which has never happened before. The text of the DCP, once produced, will again be entrusted to the reflection and prayer of all the People of God and to their sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*). This reassures us. We are doing our utmost to try and walk together.