

For a Synodal Church

Communion, Participation, Mission

Final Document

XVI Ordinary General Assembly
of the Synod of Bishops

For a Synodal Church

Communion, Participation, Mission

Final Document

With an Accompanying Note by
Pope Francis

NCP
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Abbreviations

AA	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decr. <i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i> (18 November 1965)
AG	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decr. <i>Ad Gentes</i> (7 December 1965)
AL	FRANCIS, Ap. Exhort. <i>Amoris Laetitia</i> (19 March 2022)
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
CCEO	<i>Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium</i> (18 October 1990)
CD	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decr. <i>Christus Dominus</i> (28 October 1965)
CIC	<i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i> (25 January 1983)
CV	BENEDICT XVI, Enc. Lett. <i>Caritas in Veritate</i> (29 June 2009)
DCS	GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD, <i>Working Document for the Continental Stage</i> (27 October 2022)
DD	FRANCIS, Ap. Lett. <i>Desiderio Desideravi</i> (29 June 2022)
DN	FRANCIS, Enc. Lett. <i>Dilexit Nos</i> (24 October 2024)
DV	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const. <i>Dei Verbum</i> (18 November 1965)
EC	FRANCIS, Ap. Const. <i>Episcopalis Communio</i> (15 September 2018)
EG	FRANCIS, Ap. Exhort. <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> (24 November 2013)
EN	S. PAUL VI, Ap. Exhort. <i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> (8 December 1975)

FT	FRANCIS, Enc. Lett. <i>Fratelli Tutti</i> (3 October 2020)
GS	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Past. Const. <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> (7 December 1965)
ITC	INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, <i>Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church</i> (2 March 2018)
LG	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const. <i>Lumen Gentium</i> (21 November 1964)
LS	FRANCIS, Enc. Lett. <i>Laudato Si'</i> (24 May 2015)
MC	S. PAUL VI, Ap. Exhort. <i>Marialis Cultus</i> (2 February 1974)
NMI	S. JOHN PAUL II, Ap. Lett. <i>Novo Millennio Ineunte</i> (6 January 2001)
PE	FRANCIS, Ap. Const. <i>Praedicate Evangelium</i> (19 March 2022)
SC	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Const. <i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> (4 December 1963)
SRS	S. JOHN PAUL II, Enc. Lett <i>Sollicitudo Rei Socialis</i> (30 December 1987)
UR	VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decr. <i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i> (21 November 1964)
UUS	S. JOHN PAUL II, Enc. Lett. <i>Ut Unum Sint</i> (25 May 1995)

Accompanying Note

by the Holy Father Francis

In the various moments of the journey of the Synod that I launched in October 2021, we have been listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Churches at this time.

The *Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly* of the Synod of Bishops gathers the fruits of a journey marked by listening to the People of God and by the discernment of Pastors. The whole Church, allowing itself to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, was called to review its own experience and identify the steps to be taken to live communion, realize participation and promote the mission that Jesus Christ entrusted to the Church. The synodal journey began in the local Churches and then proceeded through the national and continental phases, leading to the celebration of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in the two sessions of October 2023 and October 2024. Now, the journey continues in the local Churches and their groupings, treasuring the *Final Document that was voted on and approved by the Assembly* in all its parts on 26 October. I, too, approved it and, signing it, ordered its publication, joining the “we” of the Assembly, which, through the *Final Document*, addresses the holy faithful People of God.

Acknowledging the value of the synodal journey undertaken, I now hand over to the whole Church all that is contained in the *Final Document* restoring to the Church what has matured over these years through listening and discernment and as an authoritative orientation for the Church’s life and mission.

The *Final Document* is part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter (cf. EC 18 § 1; CCC 892), and as such, I ask that it be welcomed and received. It represents a form of

exercise of the authentic teaching of the Bishop of Rome that has some novel features but which, in fact, corresponds to what I had the opportunity to point out on 17 October 2015, when I affirmed that synodality is the appropriate interpretative framework for understanding hierarchical ministry.

In approving the *Final Document* on 26 October, I said that it “is not strictly normative” and that “its application will need various mediations.” This does not mean that it does not commit the Churches from now on to make choices consistent with what is stated in it. The local Churches and groupings of Churches are now called upon to implement, in their different contexts, the authoritative proposals contained in the Document through the processes of discernment and decision-making provided for by law and by the *Document* itself. In my *Final Greeting*, I also added that “time is needed in order to arrive at decisions that involve the whole Church.” This is particularly true for the topics entrusted to the ten study groups, to which others may be added as necessary decisions are made. The conclusion of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops does not put an end to the synodal process.

I take up here with conviction what I indicated at the end of the complex and coordinated synodal path that led to the promulgation of *Amoris laetitia* (19 March 2016): “Not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it. This will always be the case as the Spirit guides us towards the entire truth (cf. Jn 16:13), until he leads us fully into the mystery of Christ and enables us to see all things as he does. Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs” (AL 3).

The *Final Document* contains proposals that, in the light of its basic orientations, can already now be implemented in

the local Churches and groupings of Churches, taking into account different contexts, what has already been done, and what remains to be done so that the style proper to the missionary synodal Church can be ever-better learned and developed.

In many cases, it is a matter of effectively implementing what is already provided for in existing law, both Latin and Eastern. In other cases, it will be possible to proceed, through a synodal discernment and within the framework of the possibilities outlined in the *Final Document*, to the creative activation of new forms of ministeriality and missionary action, experimenting and testing or verifying these experiences. In the report envisaged for the *ad limina visit*, each bishop will take care to report what choices have been made in the local Church entrusted to him in relation to the indications in the Final Document, what difficulties have arisen, and what fruits have resulted.

The task of accompanying the “implementation phase” of the synodal path, on the basis of the guidelines offered by the *Final Document*, is entrusted to the General Secretariat of the Synod together with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia (cf. EC 19-21).

The synodal path of the Catholic Church, also animated by the desire to continue the journey towards the full and visible unity of Christians, “needs shared words to be accompanied by actions” (*Final Greeting*, 26 October 2024). May the Holy Spirit, gift of the Risen Lord, sustain and guide the whole Church on this journey. May the Holy Spirit, who is harmony, continue to rejuvenate the Church with the power of the Gospel, renew her and lead her to perfect union with her Bridegroom (cf. LG 4). For the Spirit and the bride say to the Lord Jesus: “Come” (cf. Rev 22:17).

Vatican, 24 November 2024
Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ
King of the Universe

Francisco

Introduction*

Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (Jn 20:19-20)

1. Every new step in the life of the Church is a return to the source. It is a renewed experience of the disciples’ encounter with the Risen One in the Upper Room on Easter evening. Like them, during this synodal Assembly, we, too, felt enfolded in His mercy and drawn to His beauty. We felt His presence in our midst as we lived conversation in the Spirit and listened to one another: the presence of He, who, in bestowing the Holy Spirit, continues to build among His people a unity that establishes harmony amidst differences.
2. Contemplating the Risen One, we recall that we “have been baptized [...] into his death” (*Rom* 6:3). We have seen the mark of His wounds transfigured by a new life, yet engraved forever in His humanity. These are wounds that continue to bleed in the bodies of many brothers and sisters, including as a result of our own actions. Looking upon the Lord does not distance us from the tragedies of history. Instead, it opens our eyes to the suffering of those around

* The *Final Document* of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was approved during the 17th General Congregation, on 26 October 2024, with the favorable vote of more than two-thirds of the Assembly Members present at the voting. The results of the vote are available at www.vatican.va. The official version of the text is in Italian. In preparation for publication, editorial changes were made to ensure linguistic correctness and fluency, as well as the accuracy of quotations.

us, and we are pierced: the faces of war-stricken terrorized children, weeping mothers, the shattered dreams of so many young people, refugees who face terrible journeys, the victims of climate change and social injustice. Their sufferings have resounded among us not only via the media but also through the voices of many amongst us in our Assembly whose families and peoples have been directly involved in these tragic events. In the days during which we have been gathered, wars have continued to cause death and destruction, a desire for revenge and a loss of conscience. We join Pope Francis in his repeated appeals for peace, condemning the logic of violence, hatred and revenge and committing ourselves to promoting the logic of dialogue, fellowship and reconciliation. Genuine and lasting peace is possible, and together, we can build it. “The joys and hopes and the sorrows and anxieties of people today, especially of those who are poor and afflicted” (GS 1) have been once again the joys and sorrows of all of us, Christ’s disciples.

3. Since 2021, when the Holy Father embarked the Church upon this synodal journey, we have been discovering its richness and fruitfulness more and more. We began by listening, taking care to grasp in the many voices “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (*Rev 2:7*). The journey began with the vast consultation of the People of God in our dioceses and eparchies and continued with the national and continental stages. This cycle of dialogue has been continually reinvigorated by the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops through the Synthesis Reports and Working Documents. The celebration of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in its two sessions has permitted us today to present to the Holy Father and to all the Churches this witness to what we have experienced and the fruit of our discernment for a renewed missionary impulse. During each stage, the journey was characterized by the wisdom of the “sense of faith” (*sensus fidei*) of the

People of God. Step by step, we came to understand that at the heart of the *Synod 2021-2024. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission* there is a call to joy and to the renewal of the Church in following the Lord, in committing to service of His mission, and in searching for ways to be faithful.

4. This call is based upon a shared baptismal identity. It is rooted in the diversity of contexts in which the Church is present and finds unity in the one Father, one Lord, and one Spirit. It challenges all the Baptized, without exception: “The whole People of God is an agent of the proclamation of the Gospel. Every baptized person is called to be a protagonist of mission since we are all missionary disciples” (ITC 53). For this reason, the synodal journey directs us towards a full and visible unity of Christians, as the presence of delegates of other Christian traditions testifies. Unity ferments within the holy Church of God, prophetically so, for the entire world.

5. Rooted in the Tradition of the Church, the entire synodal journey took place in the light of the conciliar Magisterium. The Second Vatican Council was indeed like a seed thrown onto the field of the world and the Church. The daily life of believers, the experience of the Churches in every people and culture, the many testimonies of holiness, and the reflection of theologians represented the soil upon which it has taken root and grown. The *Synod 2021-2024* continues to draw upon the energy of that seed and develop its potential, putting into practice what the Council taught about the Church as Mystery and Church as People of God, called to holiness through a continual conversion that comes from listening to the Gospel. In this sense, the synodal journey constitutes a further act of reception of the Council, thus deepening its inspiration and reinvigorating its prophetic force for today’s world.

6. We cannot deny that we have faced fatigue, resistance to change and the temptation to let our own ideas prevail over listening to the Gospel and the practice of discernment. Yet, the mercy of God, our most loving Father, purifies our hearts, thus enabling us to continue along this journey. Acknowledging this, we began the Second Session of the Assembly with a penitential vigil, through which, feeling our shame, we asked forgiveness for our sins, and we lifted up our prayers for the victims of the evils of the world. We identified our sins: against peace, against Creation, against indigenous peoples, migrants, children, women, and those who are poor, in our failure to listen and to seek communion. We were brought to a renewed understanding, namely, that synodality requires repentance and conversion. In celebrating the sacrament of the mercy of God, we experience unconditional love: the hardness of heart is conquered, and we open ourselves to communion. This is why we want to be a merciful Church, capable of sharing with everyone the forgiveness and reconciliation that come from God: the pure grace of which we are not masters but only witnesses.

7. We were able to witness to the first fruits of the synodal journey that began in 2021, the simplest and most precious of which mature in the life of families, parishes, movements, small Christian communities, schools and other movements. This is where the practice of conversation in the Spirit, community discernment, sharing of vocational gifts and co-responsibility in the mission is growing. The meeting of *Parish Priests for the Synod* (Sacrofano [Rome] 28 April – 2 May 2024) made it possible to listen closely to these rich experiences and to renew the journey. We are grateful and happy for the voices of many communities and of the faithful who ensure that the Church is experienced as a place of welcome, hope and joy.

8. The first Session of the Assembly has yielded other results. The Synthesis Report drew attention to key themes of

great importance for the life of the Church. The Holy Father, at the end of an international consultation, entrusted these themes to Study Groups made up of pastors and experts from all continents, who were asked to work using a synodal methodology. The areas of the life and mission of the Church that they have already begun to study in depth are the following:

1. Some aspects of the relationship between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church.
2. Listening to the cry of the poor and the earth.
3. The mission in the digital environment.
4. The revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a missionary synodal perspective.
5. Some theological and canonical matters regarding specific ministerial forms.
6. The revision, in a synodal missionary perspective, of the documents touching on the relationship between Bishops, consecrated life, and ecclesial associations.
7. Some aspects of the person and ministry of the Bishop (in particular: criteria for selecting candidates to the episcopacy, the judicial function of the Bishops, the nature and structure of *ad limina Apostolorum* visits) from a missionary synodal perspective.
8. The role of Pontifical Representatives in a missionary synodal perspective.
9. Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues.
10. The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in the People of God.

Furthermore, in agreement with the Dicastery for Legislative Texts, a Canonical Commission has been established to work

on innovations needed regarding ecclesial norms. In addition, discernment concerning the pastoral accompaniment of people in polygamous marriages has been entrusted to the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar. The work of these groups and commissions has marked the beginning of the implementation stage, has enriched the work of the Second Session, and will assist the Holy Father in pastoral and governance decisions.

9. The synodal process does not conclude with the end of the current Assembly of the Synod of Bishops but also includes the implementation phase. As members of the Assembly and as synodal missionaries within the communities from which we come, we feel it is our responsibility to promote this process. The local Churches are asked to continue their daily journey with a synodal methodology of consultation and discernment, identifying concrete ways and formation pathways to bring about a tangible synodal conversion in the various ecclesial contexts (parishes, Institutes of consecrated life and Societies of apostolic life, movements of the faithful, dioceses, Episcopal Conferences, groupings of Churches, etc.). Planning for an evaluation of the progress made in terms of synodality and the participation of all the Baptized in the life of the Church should also occur. We suggest to the Episcopal Conferences and Synods of the Churches *sui iuris* to allocate personnel and resources to accompany the pathway of growth as a synodal Church in mission and to maintain contact with the General Secretariat of the Synod (cf. EC 19 § 1 and 2). We ask the Secretariat to continue to watch over the synodal quality of the working method of the Study Groups.

10. This *Final Document*, offered to the Holy Father and to the Churches as the fruit of the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, encapsulates all the steps taken so far. It brings together the important convergences that emerged during the First Session, the contributions that arrived from

the Churches in the months between the First and Second Sessions, and what has matured, especially through conversation in the Spirit, during the Second Session.

11. The *Final Document* expresses awareness that the call to mission is, at the same time, the call to the conversion of each local Church and of the whole Church, in line with the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (cf. EG 30). There are five parts to the text. The first, entitled *The Heart of Synodality*, outlines the theological and spiritual foundations that enlighten and nourish what is to come. It restates the shared understanding of synodality that emerged in the First Session and develops its spiritual and prophetic perspectives. The conversion of the emotions, images and thoughts inhabiting our hearts proceeds together with the conversion of pastoral and missionary action. The second part, entitled *On the Boat, Together*, is dedicated to the conversion of the relationships that are formed in the intertwining of vocations, charisms and ministries, building the Christian community and shaping mission. The third part, “*Cast the Net*,” identifies three practices that are intimately connected: ecclesial discernment, decision-making processes, and a culture of transparency, accountability and evaluation. With respect to these, we are also asked to initiate pathways of “missionary transformation,” for which a renewal of participatory bodies is urgently needed. The fourth part, under the title *An Abundant Catch*, outlines how we can cultivate new forms of the exchange of gifts and renew the intertwining of the bonds that unite us in the Church at a time when the experience of being rooted in a place is changing profoundly. This is followed by a fifth part, “*So I Send You*,” which enables us to look at a particular step we need to take: caring for the formation of all, of the People of God, all as synodal missionaries.

12. The development of the *Final Document* is guided by the Gospel Resurrection narratives. The race to the tomb

on Easter morning and the appearances of the Risen One in the Upper Room and on the lakeshore inspired our discernment and enriched our dialogue. We invoked the Easter gift of the Holy Spirit, asking Him to teach us what we must do and show us the way forward together. With this document, the Assembly recognizes and bears witness that synodality, a constitutive dimension of the Church, is already part of the experience of many of our communities. At the same time, it suggests pathways to follow, practices to implement and horizons to explore. The Holy Father, who convened the Church in Synod, will instruct the Churches, entrusted to the pastoral care of the Bishops, how to continue our journey supported by the hope that “does not disappoint us” (*Rom 5:5*).

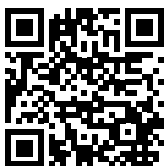


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