Synthesis Report

Dear Sisters, dear Brothers

"For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:13). This is the experience, full of joy and gratitude, that we have had in this First Session of the Synodal Assembly held from 4 to 29 October 2023 on the theme "For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission". Despite our diversity of backgrounds, languages and cultures, through the common grace of Baptism we have been able to live these days together with one heart and spirit. We have sought to sing like a choir, many voices as though expressing one soul. The Holy Spirit has gifted us with an experience of the harmony that He alone can generate; it is a gift and a witness in a world that is torn and divided.

Our Assembly has taken place while wars both old and new have raged in the world, with dramatic consequences that are impacting upon countless victims. The cry of those who are poor resounded among us, of those forced to migrate and of those suffering violence and the devastating consequences of climate change. We heard their cry not only through the media, but also through the voices of many present, who are personally involved in these tragic events whether through their families or their people. We have all, at all times, taken this cry into our hearts and prayers, wondering how our Churches can foster paths of reconciliation, hope, justice and peace.

Our meeting took place in Rome, gathered around the successor of Peter, who confirmed us in our faith and encouraged us to be audacious in our mission. It was a grace to begin these days with an ecumenical vigil, which saw the leaders and representatives of the other Churches and Christian communities praying together with the Pope at the tomb of Peter. Unity ferments silently within the Holy Church of God; we see it with our own eyes, and we bear witness to it full of joy. "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity" (Ps 133:1).

At the behest of the Holy Father, the Assembly saw other members of the People of God gathered together and around the bishops. The bishops, united among themselves and with the Bishop of Rome, made manifest the Church as a communion of Churches. Lay people, those in consecrated life, deacons and priests were, together with the bishops, witnesses of a process that intends to involve the whole Church and everyone in the Church. Their presence reminded us that the Assembly is not an isolated event, but an integral part and a necessary step in the synodal process. The multiplicity of interventions and the plurality of positions voiced in the Assembly revealed a Church that is learning to embrace a synodal style and is seeking the most suitable ways to make this happen.

It is more than two years since we began the journey that has led us to this Session. After the opening of the synodal process on 9 October 2021, all the Churches, albeit at different paces, have engaged in a listening process at diocesan, national and continental stages, the results of which were recorded in their respective documents. This Session opened the phase in which the entire Church received the fruits of this consultation in order to discern, in prayer and dialogue, the paths that the Spirit is asking us to follow. This phase will last until October 2024, when the Second Session of the Assembly will complete its work, offering it to the Holy Father.

The entire journey, rooted in the Tradition of the Church, is taking place in the light of conciliar teaching. The Second Vatican Council was, in fact, like a seed sown in the field of the world and the Church. The soil in which it germinated and grew was the daily lives of believers, the experience of the Churches of every people and culture, the many testimonies of holiness, and the reflections of theologians. The Synod 2021-2024

continues to draw on the energy of that seed and to develop its potential. The synodal path is, in fact, implementing what the Council taught about the Church as Mystery and People of God, called to holiness. It values the contribution all the baptised make, according to their respective vocations, in helping us to understand better and practice the Gospel. In this sense, it constitutes a true act of further reception of the Council, prolonging its inspiration and reinvigorating its prophetic force for today's world.

After a month of work, the Lord is now calling us to return to our Churches to hand over to all of you the fruits of our work and to continue the journey together. Here in Rome, we were not many, but the purpose of the Synod path called by the Holy Father is to involve all the baptised. We ardently desire this to happen and want to commit ourselves to making it possible. In this Synthesis Report we have collected the main elements that emerged in the dialogue, prayer and discussion that characterised these days. Our personal stories will enrich this synthesis with the tenor of lived experience, which no document can adequately capture. We will thus be able to testify to the richness of our experience of listening, of silence and sharing, and of prayer. We will also share that it is not easy to listen to different ideas, without immediately giving in to the temptation to counter the views expressed; or to offer one's contribution as a gift for others and not as something absolute or certain. However, the Lord's grace has led us to achieve this, despite our limitations, and this has been for us a true experience of synodality. By having practised it, we understand it better and have grasped its value.

We understood, in fact, that walking together as baptised persons, in the diversity of charisms, vocations, and ministries, is important not only for our communities, but also for the world. Evangelical solidarity is like a lamp, which must not be placed under a bushel, but on a lampstand so that it may shed light on the whole house (cf. Mt 5:15). The world needs this testimony today more than ever. As disciples of Jesus, we cannot shirk the responsibility of demonstrating and transmitting the love and tenderness of God to a wounded humanity.

The work of this Session was carried out in accordance with the ‘roadmap’ laid down in the *Instrumentum laboris*, by means of which the Assembly was able to reflect on the characteristic signs of a synodal Church and the dynamics of communion, mission and participation that it contains. We were able to discuss the merits of issues, identify themes in need of in-depth study, and take forward a preliminary set of proposals. In the light of the progress made, the Synthesis Report does not repeat or reiterate all the contents of the *Instrumentum laboris*; rather, it gives new impetus to the questions and themes we considered to be priorities. It is not a final document, but an instrument at the service of ongoing discernment.

The Synthesis Report is structured in three parts. The first outlines "the face of the synodal Church", presenting the practice and understanding of synodality and its theological underpinning. Here it is presented first and foremost as a spiritual experience that stems from contemplation of the Trinity and unfolds by articulating unity and variety in the Church. The second part, entitled "All disciples, all missionaries", deals with all those involved in the life and mission of the Church and their relationships with one another. In this part, synodality is mainly presented as a joint journey of the People of God and as a fruitful dialogue between the charisms and ministries at the service of the coming of the Kingdom. The third part bears the title "Weaving bonds, building community". Here, synodality is presented mainly as a set of processes and as a network of bodies enabling exchange between the Churches and dialogue with the world.

In each of the three parts, individual chapters bring together convergences, matters for consideration and proposals that emerged from the dialogue. The convergences identify specific points that orientate reflection, akin to a map that helps us find our way. The matters for consideration summarise points about which it is necessary to continue deepening our understanding pastorally, theologically, and canonically. This is like being at a crossroads where we need to pause so we can understand better the direction we need to take. The proposals indicate possible paths that can be taken. Some are suggested, others recommended, others still requested with some strength and determination.

In the coming months, Episcopal Conferences as well as the hierarchical structures of the Eastern Catholic Churches, serving as a link between the local Churches and the General Secretariat of the Synod, will play an important role in developing our reflections. Taking their starting point from the convergences already reached, they are called to focus on the questions and proposals that are considered most urgent. They are asked to encourage a deepening of the issues both pastorally and theologically, and to indicate their canonical implications.

We carry in our hearts the desire, sustained by hope, that the climate of mutual listening and sincere dialogue that we experienced during the days of common work in Rome will radiate in our communities and throughout the world, at the service of the growth of the good seed of the Kingdom of God.

a) We welcomed the invitation to recognise the synodal dimension of the Church with a new awareness. Synodal practice is attested to in the New Testament and the Early Church, taking particular historical forms in different Churches and traditions. The Second Vatican Council "updated" this practice, and Pope Francis has once again encouraged the Church to renew it. The Synod 2021-2024 is part of this renewal. Through it, the Holy People of God have discovered that a synodal way of being silent, praying, listening, and speaking, rooted in the Word of God and in joyful, if also sometimes painful encounters, leads to a deeper awareness that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. An invaluable fruit of this process is the heightened awareness of our identity as the faithful People of God, within which each is the bearer of a dignity derived from Baptism, and each is called to differentiated co-responsibility for the common mission of evangelisation.

b) This process has renewed our experience of and desire for the Church as God's home and family, a Church that is closer to the lives of Her people, less bureaucratic and more relational. The terms “synodal” and “synodality” have been associated with this experience and desire, offering an understanding that now requires further clarification. This is the Church that young people first declared they desired in 2018 on the occasion of the Synod of Youth.

c) The manner in which the Assembly proceeded in the Paul VI Hall, including the seating of people in small groups at round tables, was likened for some cultures to the biblical image of the wedding banquet (Rev 19:9). This was understood as emblematic of a synodal way of being Church and an image of the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of synodality, with the Word of God at the centre. In a Church that is living synodally, different cultures, languages, rites, ways of thinking, and realities can engage together and fruitfully in a sincere search for the Spirit's guidance.

d) In our midst there have been sisters and brothers coming from peoples afflicted by war, martyrdom, persecution, and famine. The plight of their people, unable often to participate in the synodal process, has nevertheless entered into the cycle of our discussions and prayers, deepening our sense of communion with them and our determination to be peacemakers.

e) The Assembly frequently spoke of hope, healing, reconciliation, and restoration of trust among the many gifts the Spirit has poured out on the Church during this synodal process. Openness to listening and accompanying all, including those who have suffered abuse and hurt in the Church, has made visible many who have long felt invisible. The long journey towards reconciliation and justice, including addressing the structural conditions that abetted such abuse, remains before us, and requires concrete gestures of penitence.

f) We know that "synodality" is a term unfamiliar to many members of the People of God, causing some people confusion and concern. Among the fears expressed is that the teaching of the Church will be changed, causing us to depart from the Apostolic faith of our forebears and, in so doing, will fail to respond to needs of those who hunger and thirst for God today. However, we are confident that synodality is an expression of the dynamic and living Tradition.

g) Without being dismissive of the importance of representative democracy, Pope Francis responds to the concern expressed by some that the Synod may become a body of majority

deliberation denuded of its ecclesial and spiritual character, so jeopardising the hierarchical nature of the Church. It is clear that some people are afraid that they will be forced to change; others fear that nothing at all will change or that there will be too little courage to move at the pace of the living Tradition. Also, perplexity and opposition can sometimes conceal a fear of losing power and the privileges that derive from it. In all cultural contexts, however, the terms "synodal" and “synodality" speak of a mode of being Church that integrates communion, mission, and participation. An example is the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA), a fruit of the synodal missionary process in the region.

h) In its broadest sense, synodality can be understood as Christians walking in communion with Christ toward the Kingdom along with the whole of humanity. Its orientation is towards mission, and its practice involves gathering in assembly at each level of ecclesial life. It involves reciprocal listening, dialogue, community discernment, and creation of consensus as an expression that renders Christ present in the Holy Spirit, each taking decisions in accordance with their responsibilities.

i) Through experience and encounters, we have grown together in this awareness. In summary, from the very first days, the Assembly found itself shaped by two convictions: the first is that the experience we have shared over these years is authentically Christian and should be embraced in all its richness and depth; the second is that the terms "synodal" and "synodality" require a more accurate clarification of their levels of meaning in different cultures. The substantial agreement emerged that, with the necessary clarifications, synodality represents the future of the Church.

Matters for Consideration

j) Building on the reflective work already undertaken, there is a need to clarify the meaning of synodality at different levels, in pastoral, theological, and canonical terms. This helps to avert the risk that the concept sounds too vague or generic or appears as a fad or fashion. It enables us to offer a broad understanding of walking together with further theological deepening and clarification. Likewise, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between synodality and communion and between synodality and collegiality.

k) A desire emerged to enhance understanding and appreciation of the differences in the practice and understanding of synodality between the tradition of the Christian East and the Latin Tradition, including in this ongoing synodal process, by fostering encounters between them.

l) In particular, the many expressions of synodal life in cultural contexts where people are used to walking together as a community and where individualism has not taken root, should be considered for deeper reflection. In this way, synodal practice plays an important part in the Church's prophetic response to an individualism that causes people to turn in on themselves, a populism that divides, and a globalisation that homogenises and flattens. Although not solving these problems, it nonetheless provides an alternative way of being and acting for our times, integrating a diversity of perspectives. This is a hopeful alternative that needs further exploration and illumination.

m) The richness and depth of the synodal process indicates the value of expanding participation, and overcoming the obstacles to participation that have emerged so far.

n) There is a need to find ways to involve the clergy (deacons, priests, bishops) more actively in the synodal process during the course of the next year. A synodal Church cannot do without their

voices, experiences or contributions. We need to understanding better the reasons why some have felt resistant to the synodal process.

o) The synodal culture needs to become more intergenerational, with spaces for young people to speak freely for themselves, within their families, and with their peers and pastors, including through digital channels.

p) The Assembly proposes to promote theological deepening of the terminological and conceptual understanding of the notion and practice of synodality before the Second Session of the Assembly, drawing on the rich heritage of theological research since the Second Vatican Council and in particular the documents of the International Theological Commission on *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church* (2018) and *Sensus fidei in the life of the Church* (2014).

q) The canonical implications of synodality require similar clarification. For these, too, we propose an intercontinental special commission of theological and canonical experts, ahead of the Second Session of the Assembly.

r) Finally, a wider revision of the Code of Canon Law and the Code of Canon Law of the Oriental Churches is called for at this time. A preliminary study is therefore advised.

a) According to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the Church is "a people brought together by virtue of the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (LG 4). The Father, through the mission of the Son and the gift of the Spirit, involves us in a dynamism of communion and mission that moves us from the "I" to the "we" and places us at the service of the world. Synodality translates the Trinitarian dynamism with which God comes to meet humanity into spiritual attitudes and ecclesial processes. For this to happen, it is necessary for all the baptized to commit themselves to the reciprocal exercise of their vocation, charism, and ministry. Only in this way can the Church truly become a "conversation" (cf. *Ecclesiam suam* 67) within itself and with the world, walking side by side with every human being in the style of Jesus.

b) Since the origins, the Church's synodal journey is oriented toward the Kingdom, which will be fully accomplished when God is all in all. The witness of ecclesial fraternity and missionary dedication to the service of the least will never measure up to the Mystery of which they are also a sign and instrument. The Church does not reflect on its synodal configuration in order to place itself at the centre of the proclamation, but to best fulfil, even in its constitutive incompleteness, its service to the coming of the Kingdom.

c) The renewal of the Christian community is possible only by recognizing the primacy of grace. If spiritual depth is lacking, synodality remains cosmetic. What we are called to, however, is not only to translate into community processes a spiritual experience gained elsewhere, but more deeply to experience how reciprocal relationships are the place and form of an authentic encounter with God. In this sense, while drawing on the rich spiritual heritage of the Tradition, the synodal perspective contributes to renewing its forms: of a prayer open to participation, a discernment lived together, and a missionary energy that arises from sharing and that radiates as service.

d) Conversation in the Spirit is a tool that, even with its limitations, enables authentic listening in order to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. Its practice has elicited joy, awe and

gratitude and has been experienced as a path of renewal that transforms individuals, groups, and the Church. The word "conversation" expresses more than mere dialogue: it interweaves thought and feeling, creating a shared vital space. That is why we can say that conversion is at play in conversation. This is an anthropological reality found in different peoples and cultures, who gather together in solidarity to deal with and decide matters vital to the community. Grace brings this human experience to fruition. Conversing "in the Spirit" means living the experience of sharing in the light of faith and seeking God's will in an authentically evangelical atmosphere within which the Holy Spirit's unmistakable voice can be heard.

e) Since synodality is ordered to mission, Christian communities are to enter into solidarity with those of other religions, convictions and cultures, thus avoiding, on the one hand, the risk of self-referentiality and self-preservation, and on the other hand the risk of loss of identity. The logic of dialogue, expressed in mutual learning and journeying together must come to characterize evangelical proclamation, service to those experiencing poverty, care for our common home, and theological research.

Matters for Consideration

f) To bring about true listening to the Father's will, it seems necessary to deepen the criteria of ecclesial discernment from a theological perspective so that the reference to the freedom and newness of the Spirit is appropriately coordinated with the fact that Jesus Christ comes "once for all" (*Heb* 10:10). This implies, first of all, to specify the relationship between listening to the Word of God attested to in Scripture, the reception of Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church, and the prophetic reading of the signs of the times.

g) To this end, it is crucial to promote anthropological and spiritual visions capable of integrating and not merely juxtaposing the intellectual and emotional dimensions of faith experience, overcoming any and all reductionism and dualism between reason and feeling.

h) It is important to clarify how conversation in the Spirit can integrate the contributions of theological thought and the humanities and social sciences, alongside other models of ecclesial discernment that are used such as the "see, judge, act" approach or the steps of "recognize, interpret, choose."

i) The contribution that *Lectio Divina* and different spiritual traditions, ancient and recent, can offer to the practice of discernment should be developed. Indeed, it is appropriate to value the plurality of forms and styles, methods and criteria that the Holy Spirit has suggested over the centuries and that are part of the Church's spiritual heritage.

j) It is proposed that the Churches should experiment with and adapt conversation in the Spirit, and other forms of discernment in ways they may consider appropriate drawing from diverse spiritual traditions relevant to the needs and cultures of their contexts. Appropriate forms of accompaniment can facilitate this practice, helping to grasp its logic and overcome possible resistance.

k) Each local Church is encouraged to equip itself with suitable people trained to facilitate and accompany processes of ecclesial discernment.

l) In order to illuminate ecclesial life, the practice of discernment can usefully be implemented in the pastoral sphere, in a way that is contextually appropriate. This will make it possible to recognise more readily the charisms present in the community, to entrust tasks and ministries wisely. Going beyond the mere planning of activities we will be able to plan pastoral paths in the

light of the Spirit.

3. Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation

a) Christian initiation is the journey by which the Lord, through the ministry of the Church, introduces us to Easter faith and draws us into Trinitarian and ecclesial communion. This journey takes a variety of forms depending on the age at which it is undertaken and differing emphases characteristic of Eastern and Western traditions. However, listening to the Word and conversion of life, liturgical celebration and insertion into the community and its mission are always intertwined. Precisely for this reason, the catechumenal journey, with the gradualness of its stages and steps, is the paradigm for every ecclesial experience of walking together.

b) Initiation brings us into contact with a great variety of vocations and ecclesial ministries. All of these express the maternal face of a Church, a way of being that teaches its children to walk by walking with them. It listens to them and, as it responds to their doubts and questions, is enriched by the newness that each person brings through his or her history, language and culture. Through this pastoral action, the Christian community encounters synodality for the first time, often without being fully aware of it.

c) Before any distinction of charisms and ministries, "we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body" (*1Cor.* 12:13). Therefore, among all the baptised, there is a genuine equality of dignity and a common responsibility for mission, according to the vocation of each. By the anointing of the Spirit, who "teaches all things" (*1Jn* 2:27), all believers possess an instinct for the truth of the Gospel, the *sensus fidei*. This consists in a certain connaturality with divine realities and the aptitude to grasp what conforms to the truth of faith intuitively. Synodal processes enhance this gift, allowing the existence of that consensus of the faithful (*consensus fidelium)* to be confirmed. This process provides a sure criterion for determining whether a particular doctrine or practice belongs to the Apostolic faith.

d) The grace of Pentecost abides in the Church through the Sacrament of Confirmation. It enriches the faithful with the abundance of the gifts of the Spirit. It calls them to develop their specific vocation, rooted in their common baptismal dignity, in the service of mission. Its importance requires greater emphasis and it needs to be located in relation to the variety of charisms and ministries that form the synodal face of the Church.

e) The celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sunday, is the first and fundamental form by which the Holy People of God gather and meet. When this is not possible, the community although desiring the Eucharist gathers to celebrate a Liturgy of the Word. In the Eucharist, we celebrate a mystery of grace which is given to us. By calling us to participate in his Body and Blood, the Lord forms us into one body, with one another and with Himself. Beginning with Paul's use of the term *koinonia* (cf. *1 Cor*. 10:16-17), the Christian tradition has treasured the word "communion" to indicate at the same time full participation in the Eucharist, and, the nature of relationships among the faithful and among the Churches. While it opens us to the contemplation of the divine life, to the unfathomable depths of the Trinitarian mystery, this term also refers to the ‘everydayness’ of our relationships: in the simplest gestures by which we open ourselves to one another the breath of the Spirit genuinely breathes. This is why communion, which springs from the Eucharist and is celebrated in it, configures and directs the paths of synodality.

f) From the Eucharist we learn to articulate unity and diversity: unity of the Church and multiplicity of Christian communities; unity of the sacramental mystery and variety of liturgical traditions; unity of celebration and diversity of vocations, charisms and ministries. Nothing shows more than the Eucharist that the harmony created by the Spirit is not uniformity and that every ecclesial gift is intended for common edification.

Matters for Consideration

g) The Sacrament of Baptism cannot be understood in isolation or outside the logic of Christian initiation, nor can it be understood in an individualistic way. Therefore, we need to explore further the contribution that a more unified vision of Christian initiation can make to the understanding of synodality.

h) A mature exercise of the *sensus fidei* requires not only reception of Baptism but a life lived in authentic discipleship that develops the grace of Baptism. This enables us to distinguish the action of the Spirit from merely dominant forms of thinking or cultural conditioning, or from matters inconsistent with the Gospel. Understanding the exercise of the *sensus fidei* is to be deepened with appropriate theological reflection.

i) Reflection on synodality can offer renewed insights into the understanding of Confirmation, by which the grace of the Spirit articulates the variety of gifts and charisms in the harmony of Pentecost. In light of different ecclesial experiences, ways to make the preparation and celebration of this Sacrament more fruitful should be considered, to awaken in all the faithful the call to community building, mission in the world and witness to the faith.

j) From a pastoral theological perspective, it is important to continue research into how the catechumenal way can offer inspiration for other pastoral paths, such as that of marriage preparation, or accompaniment in choosing professional and social commitments, or formation for the ordained ministry, in which the whole ecclesial community should be involved.

k) If the Eucharist shapes synodality, then the first step we should take is to celebrate the Mass in a way that befits the gift, with an authentic sense of friendship in Christ. Liturgy celebrated with authenticity is the first and fundamental school of discipleship. Its beauty and simplicity should form us prior to any other organised formation programme.

l) A second step refers to the widely reported need to make liturgical language more accessible to the faithful and more embodied in the diversity of cultures. Without calling continuity with tradition and the need for better liturgical formation into question, deeper reflection is needed. Episcopal Conferences should be entrusted with a wider responsibility in this regard, according to the Motu Proprio *Magnum principium.*

m) A third step consists in the pastoral commitment to widen community prayer beyond the celebration of Mass. Alternative forms of liturgical prayer, as well as practices of popular piety, in which the distinctiveness of local cultures is reflected, are elements of great importance in fostering the involvement of all the faithful. They introduce the faithful to the Christian mystery and bring those less familiar with the Church closer to an encounter with the Lord. Among the forms of popular piety, Marian devotion stands out because of its ability to sustain and nourish the faith of many.

4. People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Churc

a) Those in poverty ask the Church for love. By love, they mean respect, acceptance and recognition, without which providing food, money or social services represents forms of support that are certainly important but which do not fully take account of the dignity of the person. Each person needs to be enabled to determine their own means of growth rather than be the object of the welfare action of others. Being afforded recognition and respect are powerful ways of enabling this.

b) The preferential option for the poor is implicit in Christological faith: Jesus, poor and humble, befriended people in poverty, shared a table with them, and denounced the causes of poverty. For the Church, the preferential option for the poor and those at the margins is a theological category before being a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. For St. John Paul II, God offers His mercy first to them. This divine preference has consequences for the lives of all Christians, who are called to nourish “the same mind … as Jesus Christ” (Phil 2:5).

c) Poverty is not just of one kind. Among the many faces of those in poverty are those who do not have the things they need to lead a dignified life. There are also migrants and refugees; indigenous peoples, original and Afro-descendent peoples; those who suffer violence and abuse, in particular women; people struggling with addiction; minorities who are systematically denied a voice; abandoned elderly people; victims of racism, exploitation, and trafficking, especially minors; exploited workers; the economically excluded, and others living on the peripheries. The most vulnerable of the vulnerable, on whose behalf constant advocacy is needed, include the unborn and their mothers. The Assembly hears the cry of the "new poor," produced by wars and terrorism that plague many countries on several continents, and the Assembly condemns the corrupt political and economic systems that cause such strife.

d) Alongside forms of material poverty, many also experience spiritual poverty, understood as lacking a sense of life’s meaning. An excessive preoccupation with oneself can lead to seeing others as a threat, which in turn causes us to further turn in on ourselves, expressing a certain kind of individualism. When the spiritually and materially poor encounter one another, they begin a journey towards finding answers to each other’s needs. This is a way of walking together that makes the perspective of the synodal Church concrete, which will reveal to us the fullest sense of the Gospel beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Mt 5:3).

e) Standing with those who are poor requires engaging with them in caring for our common home: the cry of the earth and the cry of those living in poverty are the same cry. The lack of responses to this cry makes the ecological crisis, and climate change in particular, a threat to the survival of humanity. The Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, published by Pope Francis to coincide with the opening of the work of the Synod Assembly, emphasises this. The Church in countries most exposed to the consequences of climate change are keenly aware of the urgent need to change course, and this represents their contribution to the journey of other local churches in various parts of the planet.

f) The Church’s commitment must address the causes of poverty and exclusion. This includes actions to protect the rights of those who are excluded, and this may require public denunciation of injustices, whether perpetrated by societal structures or by individuals, corporations or governments. Essential to hearing the voice of those in poverty is listening to their demands and points of view, and utilising their own words.

g) Christians have a duty to commit themselves to active participation in building up the common good and defending the dignity of life, drawing inspiration from the Church's social doctrine and working together in various ways, through engagement in civil society organizations, trade unions, popular movements, grassroots associations, in the field of politics, and so forth. The Church is deeply grateful for them. The community has a duty to support those who work in these fields in a genuine spirit of charity and service. Their action is part of the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel and bring about the coming of the Kingdom of God.

h) The Christian community encounters the face and flesh of Christ, who, though he was rich, became poor for our sake, that we might become rich through his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). It is called not only to be close to them, but to learn from them. If becoming synodal means walking together with the One who is *the* Way, a synodal Church needs to put those experiencing poverty at the centre of all aspects of its life: through their sufferings, they have direct knowledge of the suffering Christ (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 198). The likeness of their lives to that of the Lord makes those who are poor heralds of a salvation received as a gift and witnesses to the joy of the Gospel.

Matters for Consideration

i) In some parts of the world, the Church is poor, with those who are poor, and for those who are poor. There is a constant risk, one to be carefully avoided, of viewing those living in poverty in terms of "them" and "us," as "objects" of the Church's charity. Putting those who experience poverty at the centre and learning from them is something the Church must do more and more.

j) Prophetic denunciation of situations of injustice, on the one hand, and efforts to persuade policy makers to act for the common good, which require recourse to diplomacy, on the other, must be maintained in a dynamic tension so as not to lose a clear focus or fruitfulness. In particular, care must be taken to ensure that the use of public or private funds by Church bodies does not limit freedom to speak up for the demands of the Gospel.

k) The provision of services in the fields of education, health care and social welfare, without discrimination or the exclusion of anyone, is a clear sign of a Church that promotes the integration and participation of the most vulnerable in Church and society. Organizations active in this field are encouraged to consider themselves as expressions of the Christian community and to avoid charity becoming impersonal. They are also urged to network and coordinate with others.

l) The Church must be honest in examining how it meets the demands of justice among those who work in its affiliated institutions so as to ensure it acts with consistency and integrity.

m) In a synodal Church, solidarity also manifests itself in the form of an exchange of gifts and in sharing resources between local churches from different regions. These relationships foster the unity of the Church by creating bonds between the Christian communities involved. There is a need to focus on the conditions necessary to ensured that priests who come to the aid of churches needing clergy are not providing merely a functional solution but represent a resource for the growth both of the Church that sends them and the Church that receives them. Similarly, it is necessary to ensure that economic aid does not degenerate into the mere provision of welfare, but also promotes authentic evangelical solidarity and is managed transparently and reliably.

n) The Church's social doctrine is a too little-known resource. This needs to be addressed. Local churches are invited not only to make its contents better known but to foster its reception through practices that put its inspiration into action.

o) The experience of encounter, sharing a common life and serving those living in poverty and on the margins should be an integral part of all formation paths offered by Christian communities: it is a requirement of faith, not an optional extra. This is especially true for candidates for ordained ministry and consecrated life.

p) As part of the rethinking of diaconal ministry, the Church should promote a stronger orientation towards service to those who are poor.

q) Church teaching, liturgy, and practice must more explicitly and carefully integrate the biblical and theological foundations of integral ecology.

ut of every tribe, tongue, people and nation"

a) Christians live in specific cultures, bringing Christ to them in Word and Sacrament, engaging in the service of charity with humility and joy, receiving the mystery of Christ that already awaits us in every place and time. In this way we become a Church that welcomes people from "every tribe, tongue, people and nation" (*Rev.* 5:9).

b) The cultural, historical, and continental contexts in which the Church is present reveal different spiritual and material needs. This shapes the culture of the local churches, their missionary priorities, the concerns and gifts that each of them brings to the synodal dialogue, and the languages with which they express themselves. During the days of the Assembly, we were able to experience directly, and mostly joyfully, the diverse expressions of being Church.

c) Churches live in increasingly multicultural and multireligious contexts. This necessitates finding ways to create dialogue between religions and cultures, with which Christians should engage alongside the many groups that compose a society. Living the Church's mission in these contexts requires a style of presence, service and proclamation that seeks to build bridges, cultivate mutual understanding and engage in evangelisation that accompanies, listens and learns. In the Assembly the image of "taking off one's shoes" to cross the threshold towards encounter with the other resonated as a sign of humility and respect for a sacred space, on an equal footing.

d) Migration reshapes local churches as cross-cultural communities. Migrants and refugees, many of whom bear the wounds of uprooting, war and violence, often become a source of renewal and enrichment for the communities that welcome them and an opportunity to establish direct links with geographically distant churches. In the face of increasingly hostile attitudes toward migrants, we are called to practice an open welcome, to accompany them in the construction of a new life and to build a true intercultural communion among peoples. Respect for the liturgical traditions and religious practices of migrants is an integral part of an authentic welcome.

e) Missionaries have given their lives to carry the Good News to the whole world. Their commitment is a great testimony to the power of the Gospel. However, particular attention and sensitivity are needed in contexts where "mission" is a word laden with painful historical memories that hinders communion today. In some places, the proclamation of the Gospel was associated with colonization, even genocide. Evangelising in these contexts requires acknowledging mistakes made, learning a new sensitivity to these issues, and accompanying a

generation seeking to forge Christian identities beyond colonialism. Respect and humility are fundamental attitudes needed to recognise that we complement each other and that encounters with different cultures can enrich the living and thinking of the faith of Christian communities.

f) The Church teaches the need for and encourages the practice of interreligious dialogue as part of building communion among all peoples. In a world of violence and fragmentation, a witness is ever more urgent to the unity of humanity, its common origin and common destiny, in a coordinated and reciprocal solidarity toward social justice, peace, reconciliation and care for our common home. The Church is aware that the Spirit can speak through women and men of every religion, belief and culture.

Matters for Consideration

g) We need to cultivate a greater sensitivity towards the riches of our diverse expressions of being Church. This requires a search for a dynamic balance between the dimension of the Church as a whole and its local rootedness, between respect for the bond of Church unity and the risk of homogenization that stifles variety. Meanings and priorities vary among different contexts, and this requires identifying and fostering forms of decentralization.

h) The Church too is affected by polarization and distrust in vital matters such as liturgical life and moral, social and theological reflection. We need to recognize the causes of each through dialogue and undertake courageous processes of revitalizing communion and processes of reconciliation to overcome them.

i) In our local churches, we sometimes experience tensions between different ways of understanding evangelisation: emphasis on a witness of life, commitment to human advancement, dialogue with faiths and cultures, and explicit proclamation of the Gospel. Equally, a tension emerges between the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ and valuing the characteristics of each culture in search of the Gospel traits (*semina Verbi*) it already contains.

j) Possible confusion between the Gospel's message and the culture of those engaged in evangelisation was mentioned as one of the issues to be explored.

k) Increasing conflicts, with the trade and use of increasingly powerful weapons, opens up the question, raised in several groups, of more reflection and formation in order that we can manage conflicts in a non-violent way. This is a valuable contribution that Christians can offer to today's world in dialogue and collaboration with other religions.

l) Renewed attention is needed to the question of the languages we use to speak to people's minds and hearts in a wide diversity of contexts in a way that is both beautiful and accessible.

m) We need a shared framework for managing and evaluating experimentations with forms of decentralisation, identifying all the actors involved and their roles. For the sake of coherence, discernment processes regarding decentralisation must take place in a synodal style, envisaging the concurrence and contribution of all actors involved at different levels.

n) New paradigms are needed for pastoral engagement with indigenous peoples, taking the form of a common journey and not an action done to them or for them. Their participation in decision-making processes at all levels can contribute to a more vibrant and missionary Church.

o) From the work of the Assembly, there is a call for better knowledge of the teachings of Vatican II, post-conciliar teaching and the Church's social doctrine. We need to know our different traditions better in order to be more clearly a Church of Churches in communion, effective in service and dialogue.

p) In a world where the number of migrants and refugees is increasing while the willingness to welcome them is decreasing and where the foreigner is viewed with increasing suspicion, it is appropriate for the Church to engage decisively in education, in the culture of dialogue and encounter, combating racism and xenophobia, especially through pastoral formation. Equally, it is necessary to engage in concrete projects for the integration of migrants.

q) We recommend continued engagement in dialogue and discernment regarding racial justice. Systems within the Church that create or maintain racial injustice need to be identified and addressed. Processes for healing and reconciliation should be created, with the help of those harmed, to eradicate the sin of racism.

a) Among the Eastern Churches those in full communion with the Successor of Peter enjoy a liturgical, theological, ecclesiological and canonical distinctiveness that greatly enriches the whole Church. In particular, their experience of unity in diversity can make a valuable contribution to the understanding and practice of synodality.

b) Throughout history, the level of autonomy granted to these Churches has gone through different phases. Some customs and procedures are now considered outdated, such as Latinization. In recent decades, the path of recognizing the specificity, distinction and autonomy of these Churches has developed considerably.

c) The substantial migration of faithful from the Catholic East into Latin-majority territories raises important pastoral questions. If the current pattern continues or increases, there may be more members of the Eastern Catholic Churches in diaspora than in canonical territories. For several reasons, the establishment of Eastern hierarchies in the countries of immigration is not sufficient to address the problem, but there is a need for the local Latin-rite Churches, in the name of synodality, to help the Eastern faithful who have emigrated to preserve their identity and cultivate their specific heritage, without undergoing processes of assimilation.

Matters for Consideration

d) We suggest further study of the contribution that the experience of the Eastern Catholic Churches can make to the understanding and practice of synodality.

e) Some difficulties remain regarding the Pope's role in giving his assent to bishops elected by the Synods of the Churches *sui iuris* for their territory and the papal appointment of bishops outside canonical territory. The request to extend the jurisdiction of the Patriarchs outside the Patriarchal territories is also a matter for discernment and dialogue with the Holy See.

f) In regions where the faithful of different Catholic Churches are present, we need to find models that render visible effective forms of unity in diversity.

g) We need to reflect on the contribution that the Eastern Catholic Churches can make to Christian unity and their role in interreligious and intercultural dialogues.

h) First and foremost, the request emerged to establish a permanent Council of the Patriarchs and Major Archbishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches to the Holy Father.

i) Some requested to convoke a Special Synod dedicated to the Eastern Catholic Churches, their identity and mission, as well addressing pastoral and canonical challenges in the context of war and massive migration.

j) We need to establish a joint commission of Eastern and Latin theologians, historians and canonists to address issues requiring further study and formulate proposals pointing a way forward.

k) There needs to be adequate representation of members of the Eastern Catholic Churches in the dicasteries of the Roman Curia to enrich the whole Church with their perspectives, to help address problems as they arise and to enable their participation in dialogue at the various different levels.

l) To foster forms of reception that respect the heritage of the faithful of the Eastern Churches, we need to intensify relations between Eastern clergy in diaspora and Latin clergy to deepen mutual knowledge and recognition of the respective Traditions

a) This session of the Synodal Assembly opened with a profound ecumenical gesture. The "*Together*" prayer vigil saw the presence of numerous other leaders and representatives of different Christian communions alongside Pope Francis, a clear and credible sign of the will to walk together in the spirit of unity of faith and exchange of gifts. This highly significant event also allowed us to recognize that we are in an ecumenical *kairos* and to reaffirm that what unites us is greater than what divides us. For in common we have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, among all and in all" (*Eph.* 4:5-6).

b) Baptism, which is at the root of the principle of synodality, also constitutes the foundation of ecumenism. Through it, all Christians participate in the *sensus fidei* and for this reason they should be listened to carefully, regardless of their tradition, as the Synod Assembly did in its discernment process. There can be no synodality without an ecumenical dimension.

c) Ecumenism is first and foremost a matter of spiritual renewal that also requires processes for repentance and healing of memory. The Assembly was moved to hear testimonies of Christians of different ecclesial traditions who share friendship, prayer and above all a commitment to the service of those experiencing poverty. Dedication to the least of these cements bonds and helps us focus on what already unites all believers in Christ. Therefore, it is important that ecumenism is practised first and foremost in daily life. In theological and institutional dialogue, the patient weaving of mutual understanding continues in an atmosphere of growing trust and openness.

d) In not a few regions of the world there is an “ecumenism of blood”, stemming from Christians of different affiliations who give their lives for faith in Jesus Christ. The testimony of their martyrdom is more eloquent than any words. Unity comes from the Cross of the Lord.

e) Collaboration among all Christians is crucial in addressing the pastoral challenges of our time.

In secularized societies, this enables the voice of the Gospel to have greater force. In contexts of poverty, it impels people to join forces in the service of justice, peace and the dignity of the least. In all instances, it is a resource for healing the culture of hatred, division and war that pits groups, peoples and nations against each other.

f) Marriages between Christians who belong to different Churches or ecclesial communities (inter-church marriages) may constitute realities in which the wisdom of communion can mature, and it is possible to evangelize each other.

Matters for Consideration

g) Our assembly was able to perceive the diverse ways different Christian traditions understand the synodal configuration of the Church. In Orthodox Churches, synodality is understood in a strict sense as an expression of the collegial exercise of authority proper to the bishops alone (the Holy Synod). Broadly, it refers to the active participation of all the faithful in the life and mission of the Church. There were some references to practices in other ecclesial communities, enriching our debates. All this requires further investigation.

h) Another theme to be explored concerns the link between synodality and primacy at the various levels (local, regional, universal) in their mutual interdependence. We need a shared re-reading of history in order to overcome stereotypes and prejudices. Ongoing ecumenical dialogues have provided a better understanding, in light of the practices of the first millennium, of the fact that synodality and primacy are related, complementary and inseparable realities. The clarification of this delicate point has consequences for the way of understanding the Petrine ministry in the service of unity, according to what St. John Paul II wished for in the encyclical *Ut unum sint*.

i) We need to examine the issue of Eucharistic hospitality (*Communicatio in sacris*) from theological, canonical and pastoral perspectives in light of the link between sacramental and ecclesial communion. This issue is of particular importance to inter-church couples. It raises the need for a broader reflection on inter-church marriages.

j) Reflection was also urged on the phenomenon of "non-denominational" communities and Christian-inspired "revival" movements, which are also joined in large numbers by faithful who were originally Catholic.

k) The year 2025 marks the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (325) at which the symbol of the faith that unites all Christians was elaborated. A common commemoration of this event will help us to better understand how in the past controversial questions were discussed and resolved together in Council.

l) In the same year, 2025, providentially, the date of the solemnity of Easter will coincide for all Churches and Christian communities. The Assembly expressed a keen desire to come to a common date for the feast of Easter so that we can celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord, our life and our salvation, on the same day.

m) There is also a desire to continue to involve Christians of other Churches and ecclesial traditions in Catholic synodal processes at all levels and to invite more fraternal delegates to the next session of the Assembly in 2024.

n) A proposal has been put forward by some to convene an ecumenical Synod on common mission in the contemporary world.

o) It was also proposed that we might devise an ecumenical martyrology.

a) Rather than saying that the Church has a mission, we affirm that Church 'is' mission. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21): the Church receives from Christ, the One who is sent by the Father, Her own mission. Supported and guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church announces and witnesses the Gospel to those who do not know it or welcome it. They do this with that preferential option for the poor that is rooted in the mission of Jesus. In this way the Church co-operates in the coming of the Reign of God, of which She is the seed (cf. LG 5).
b) The sacraments of Christian initiation confer on all the disciples of Jesus the responsibility for the mission of the Church. Laymen and laywomen, those in consecrated life, and ordained ministers have equal dignity. They have received different charisms and vocations and exercise different roles and functions, but all are called and nourished by the Holy Spirit to form one body in Christ (*1 Cor.* 4-31). They are all disciples, all missionaries, in the reciprocal vitality of local communities who experience the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing. The exercise of co-responsibility is essential for synodality and is necessary at all levels of the Church. Each Christian is a mission on this earth.
c) The family is the pillar of every Christian community. Parents and grandparents and all those who live and share their faith in the family are the first missionaries. The family, as a community of life and love, is a privileged place of education in faith and Christian practice, one that needs special accompaniment within communities. Support is especially needed for parents who must reconcile work, including within the Church community and in service to its mission, with the demands of family life.
d) If the mission is a grace involving all the Church, the lay faithful contribute in a vital way to advancing that mission in all areas and in the ordinary situations of every day. Above all, it is they who make the Church present and who proclaim the Gospel, for example, in digital culture, which has such a strong impact throughout the world; in youth culture; in the world of work and business, politics, and the arts and culture; in scientific research, education, and training; in the care of our common home; and especially through participation in public life. Wherever they are present, they are called to witness to Jesus Christ in daily life and to explicitly share the faith with others. In a special way, young people, with their gifts and fragilities, growing in friendship with Jesus, become apostles of the Gospel to their peers.
e) The lay faithful are also increasingly present and active in service within Christian communities. Many of them organize and animate pastoral communities, serve as religious educators, theologians and formators, spiritual animators and catechists, and participate in various parish and diocesan bodies. In many regions, the life of Christian communities and the mission of the Church depends upon catechists. In addition, lay people serve in safeguarding and administration. All of these contributions are indispensable to the mission of the Church; for this reason, the acquisition of necessary competences should be provided for.
f) In their immense variety, the charisms of the laity represent distinct gifts to the Church from the Holy Spirit that must be called forth, recognized, and fully appreciated. In some situations, the laity may be called to help make up for the shortage of priests, with the danger that the lay character of their apostolate risks being diminished. In other contexts, it may be that priests do everything themselves and thus the charisms and ministries of the laity are ignored or

underutilized. In all contexts, there is a danger, that was expressed by many at the Assembly, of "clericalizing" the laity, creating a kind of lay elite that perpetuates inequalities and divisions among the People of God.

g) The mission *ad gentes* is mutually enriching for the Churches, because it not only involves the missionaries themselves but the entire community, which in this way is inspired to prayer, the sharing of goods, and witness. Churches lacking clergy should not give up this commitment, while those with more vocations to the ordained ministry benefit from cooperating pastorally in a genuinely evangelical manner. All the missionaries -- laymen and women, those in consecrated life, deacons and priests, and particularly the members of missionary institutes and *fidei donum* missionaries -- are an important resource for creating bonds of knowledge and exchange of gifts.
h) The Church's mission is continually renewed and nourished by the Eucharist, particularly when its communal and missionary nature is fully expressed.

Matters for Consideration

i) There is a need to continue to deepen the theological understanding of the relationships between charisms and ministries in a missionary key.
j) Vatican II and subsequent magisterial teaching present the distinctive mission of the laity in terms of the sanctification of temporal or secular realities. However, the reality is that pastoral practice at the parish, diocesan and, recently, even universal levels, increasingly entrusts lay people with tasks and ministries within the Church itself. Theological reflection and canonical provisions need to be reconciled with these important developments and to avoid dualisms that could compromise the perception of the unity of the Church's mission.
k) In the promotion of the co-responsibility of all the baptized for mission we recognize the apostolic capacities of persons with disabilities. We want to better value the contribution to evangelisation offered by the immense richness of their humanity. We recognise their experiences of suffering, marginalisation and discrimination, sometimes occurring even within the Christian community.
l) Pastoral structures need to be re-organized so they can readily recognise, call forth, and animate lay charisms and ministries, inserting them into the missionary dynamism of the synodal Church. Under the guidance of their pastors, the communities will be able to send people as well as sustain those they have sent on mission. In this way, these structures will primarily be at the service of the mission that the faithful carry out within society, in the family, and in work life, rather than focusing exclusively on internal matters or organisational concerns.
m) The expression "an all-ministerial Church," used in the *Instrumentum laboris*, can lend itself to misunderstanding. Its meaning will have to be clarified in order to remove any ambiguities.

n) We need more creativity in establishing ministries according to the needs of local churches, with the particular involvement of the young. One can think of further expanding responsibilities assigned to the existing ministry of lector, responsibilities that are already broader than those performed in the liturgy. This could become a fuller ministry of the Word of God, which, in appropriate contexts, could also include preaching. We could also explore the possibility of establishing a ministry assigned to married couples committed to supporting family life and accompanying people preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage.

o) Local churches are invited to consider appropriate means and moments of acknowledgment by the community of lay charisms and ministries. This could happen on the occasion of a liturgical celebration in which the pastoral mandate is bestowed.

Women in the Life and Mission of

a) We are created, male and female, in the image and likeness of God. From the beginning, creation manifests unity and difference, bestowing on women and men a shared nature, calling, and destiny, and two distinct experiences of being human. Sacred Scripture testifies to the complementarity and reciprocity of women and men, and to the covenant between them that lies at the heart of God's design for creation. Jesus considered women his interlocutors: he spoke with them about the Kingdom of God; he welcomed them as disciples, as for example Mary of Bethany. These women, who experienced His power of healing, liberation and recognition, travelled with Him on the road from Galilee to Jerusalem (Lk 8,1-3). He entrusted the announcement of the Resurrection on Easter morning to a woman, Mary Magdalene.
b) In Christ, women and men are clothed with the same baptismal dignity (Gal 3:28) and receive equally the variety of gifts of the Spirit. We are called together into a communion of loving, non-competitive relationships in Christ, and to a co-responsibility to be expressed at every level of the Church's life. We are, as Pope Francis said to us together, "a people convened and called with the strength of the Beatitudes".
c) We have had a very positive experience of the reciprocity between women and men during this Assembly. Together we echo the call made in the previous phases of the synodal process, that the Church adopt a more decisive commitment to understand and accompany women from a pastoral and sacramental point of view. Women desire to share their spiritual experience of journeying towards holiness in the various stages of life: as young women, as mothers, in their friendships and relationships, in family life at all ages, in working life, and in consecrated life. Women cry out for justice in societies still marked by sexual violence, economic inequality and the tendency to treat them as objects. Women are scarred by trafficking, forced migration and war. Pastoral accompaniment and vigorous advocacy for women should go hand in hand.
d) Women make up most of those in our pews and are often the first missionaries of the faith in the family. Consecrated women, both in contemplative and apostolic life, are a fundamental and distinctive gift, sign and witness in our midst. The long history of women missionaries, saints, theologians and mystics is also a powerful source of nourishment and inspiration for women and men today.
e) Mary of Nazareth, woman of faith and Mother of God, remains for all a unique source of theological, ecclesial and spiritual meaning. Mary reminds us of the universal call to listen attentively to God and to remain open to the Holy Spirit. She knew the joy of bearing and nurturing and endured pain and suffering. She gave birth in impoverished conditions, became a refugee and lived the sorrow of her Son's brutal killing, but she also knew the magnificence of his Resurrection and the glory of Pentecost.
f) Many women expressed deep gratitude for the work of priests and bishops. They also spoke of a Church that wounds. Clericalism, a chauvinist mentality and inappropriate expressions of authority continue to scar the face of the Church and damage its communion. A profound spiritual conversion is needed as the foundation for any effective structural change. Sexual abuse and the abuse of power and authority continue to cry out for justice, healing and reconciliation. We asked how the Church can be a place that safeguards all.

g) Where dignity and justice are undermined in relationships between men and women in the Church, we weaken the credibility of our proclamation to the world. Our synodal path shows the need for relational renewal and structural changes. In this way we can better welcome the participation and contribution of all – with lay and consecrated women and men, deacons, priests, and bishops – as co-responsible disciples in the work of mission.
h) The Assembly asks that we avoid repeating the mistake of talking about women as an issue or a problem. Instead, we desire to promote a Church in which men and women dialogue together, in order to understand more deeply the horizon of God's project, that sees them together as protagonists, without subordination, exclusion and competition.

Matters for Consideration

i) Churches all over the world have expressed a clear request that the active contribution of women would be recognised and valued, and that their pastoral leadership increase in all areas of the Church's life and mission. In order to give better expression to the gifts and charisms of all and to be more responsive to pastoral needs, how can the Church include more women in existing roles and ministries? If new ministries are required, who should discern these, at what levels and in what ways?
j) Different positions have been expressed regarding women's access to the diaconal ministry. For some, this step would be unacceptable because they consider it a discontinuity with Tradition. For others, however, opening access for women to the diaconate would restore the practice of the Early Church. Others still, discern it as an appropriate and necessary response to the signs of the times, faithful to the Tradition, and one that would find an echo in the hearts of many who seek new energy and vitality in the Church. Some express concern that the request speaks of a worrying anthropological confusion, which, if granted, would marry the Church to the spirit of the age.
k) Discussion of this question is also related to the wider ongoing reflection on the theology of the diaconate (cf. below Chapter 11).

l) Local churches are encouraged to extend their work of listening, accompaniment and care to the most marginalised women in their social contexts.
m) It is urgent to ensure that women can participate in decision-making processes and assume roles of responsibility in pastoral care and ministry. The Holy Father has significantly increased the number of women in positions of responsibility in the Roman Curia. This should also happen at other levels of Church life, in consecrated life and dioceses. Provision needs to be made in Canon Law accordingly.
n) Theological and pastoral research on the access of women to the diaconate should be continued, benefiting from consideration of the results of the commissions specially established by the Holy Father, and from the theological, historical and exegetical research already undertaken. If possible, the results of this research should be presented to the next Session of the Assembly.
o) Cases of labour injustice and unfair remuneration within the Church need to be addressed especially for women in consecrated life, who are too often treated as cheap labour.
p) Women's access to formation programmes and theological study needs to be considerably expanded. We suggest that women should also be integrated into seminary teaching and training programs to foster better formation for ordained ministry.

q) There is a need to ensure that liturgical texts and Church documents are more attentive to the use of language that takes into equal consideration both men and women, and also includes a range of words, images and narratives that draw more widely on women's experience.
r) We propose that women receive appropriate formation to enable them to be judges in all canonical processes.

10. Consecrated Life and Lay

a) The Church has always benefitted from the gift of charisms, be it from the most extraordinary to the simplest. Through them the Holy Spirit rejuvenates and renews the Church with joy and gratitude. The Holy People of God recognise in these charisms the providential help with which God sustains, directs and illuminates His mission.
b) The Church's charismatic dimension is made manifest in the rich and varied forms of consecrated life. This testimony has contributed to renewing the life of the ecclesial community in every age and provides an antidote to the perennial temptation towards worldliness. The diverse families that compose religious life demonstrate the beauty of discipleship and holiness in Christ, whether in their distinctive forms of prayer, their service among the people, whether through forms of community life, the solitude of the contemplative life or at the frontier of new cultures. Those in consecrated life have often been the first to sense important historical changes and to heed the promptings of the Spirit. Today, too, the Church needs their prophetic voice and action. The Christian community also recognises and wishes to be attentive to the practices of synodal life and discernment that have been tried and tested in communities of consecrated life, maturing over the centuries. We know that we can learn from them wisdom in how to walk the synodal path. Many Congregations and Institutes practice conversation in the Spirit or similar forms of discernment in the conduct of provincial and general chapters, in order to renew structures, rethink lifestyles, and activate innovative forms of service and proximity to the poorest. In other cases, however, we find the persistence of an authoritarian style, which makes no room for dialogue.
c) With equal gratitude, the People of God recognize the seeds of renewal in communities with a long history that has blossomed into new ecclesial communities. Lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities are a precious sign of the maturation of the co-responsibility of all the baptized. They hold particular value because of their experience in promoting communion among different vocations, the impetus with which they proclaim the Gospel, their proximity to those on the margins economically and socially and through their promotion of the common good. They are often models of synodal communion and of participation for mission.
d) Cases of abuse of various kinds experienced by those in religious life and members of lay associations, especially of women, signal a problem in the exercise of authority and demand decisive and appropriate interventions.

Matters for Consideration

e) The Church's magisterium has a well-developed body of teaching on the importance of both hierarchical and charismatic gifts in the life and mission of the Church. This calls for growth in ecclesial understanding and in theological reflection. It is therefore worth considering anew the

ecclesiological significance and concrete pastoral implications of this teaching.

f) The variety of charismatic expressions in the Church underscores the People of God's commitment to being a prophetic presence in proximity to the least of our sisters and brothers, and to providing contemporary culture with a deeper sense of the spiritual aspects of life. There is a need to develop a more profound understanding of how consecrated life, as well as lay associations, ecclesial movements, and new communities, place their charisms at the service of communion and mission in local churches, augmenting existing paths towards holiness with a presence that is prophetic.

g) We believe the time has come for a revision of the 1978 document *Mutuae relationes*, regarding the relationships between bishops and religious in the Church. We propose that this revision be completed in a synodal manner, consulting all involved.

h) To the same end, it is necessary to put in place, in a synodal spirit, means and instruments for promoting encounters and forms of collaboration between Episcopal Conferences and the Conferences of Superiors and Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

i) At the level of both individual local churches and groupings of Churches, the promotion of missionary synodality requires the establishment and configuration of councils and advisory bodies at which representatives of lay associations and ecclesial movements and new communities can meet in order to foster enduring relationships between their life and work and that of the local churches.

j) In theological formation at all levels, above all in the formation of ordained ministers, the prominence given to the Church's charismatic dimension should be monitored and strengthened where necessary.

a) Priests are the principal collaborators of the bishop, forming with him one presbyterate (cf LG 28). Deacons are ordained for the ministry of serving the People of God in the *diakonia* of the Word, in the liturgy, but above all in the exercise of charity (cf LG 29). The Synodal Assembly wishes, first and foremost, to express to priests and deacons a deep sense of gratitude. Aware that they may experience loneliness and isolation, it encourages Christian communities to support them with prayer, friendship, and collaboration.

b) Deacons and priests engage in ministry in a wide variety of pastoral settings: in parishes, in evangelisation, among those living in poverty and who are marginalized, in the world of culture and education, as well as in the mission *ad gentes*, in theological research, at retreat centres and places of spiritual renewal, and many others. In a synodal Church, ordained ministers are called to live their service to the People of God in a disposition of proximity to people, welcoming and listening to all, while cultivating a deep personal spirituality and a life of prayer. Above all, they are required to reconsider the exercise of authority, modelling it upon Jesus, who, "though he was in the form of God, [...] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:6-7). The Assembly acknowledges that through their dedication many priests and deacons make Christ, the Good Shepherd and the Servant, present.

c) One obstacle to ministry and mission is clericalism. Clericalism stems from a misunderstanding of the divine call, viewing it more as a privilege than a service, and manifesting itself in the exercise of power in a worldly manner that refuses to allow itself to be accountable. This distortion of the priestly vocation needs to be challenged from the earliest stages of formation by ensuring close contact with the People of God and through concrete service-learning experiences among those most in need. The exercise of priestly ministry today cannot be conceived of except in harmony with the bishop and the presbyterate, and in profound communion with other ministries and charisms. Unfortunately, clericalism is a disposition that can manifest itself not only among ministers but also among the laity.

d) In order to exercise ordained ministry in a context of co-responsibility, it is necessary to be aware of one's own capacities and limitations. For this reason, it is important to ensure that a realistic approach to human formation is integrated with the cultural and spiritual dimensions of formation, as well as formation for discipleship. In this regard, the contribution of families of origin, and the Christian community, within which a young man's vocation is fostered, as well as that of other families that accompany his growth, cannot be underestimated.

Matters for Consideration

e) Within the context of the formation of all the baptised for service in a synodal Church, the formation of deacons and priests requires special attention. The request has been widely expressed at this Assembly that seminaries and other programmes of priestly formation remain connected to the daily life of the community. We need to avoid the risks of formalism and ideology that lead to authoritarian attitudes, and impede genuine vocational growth. Revision to programmes of formation requires extensive discussion and consideration.

f) Different opinions have been expressed about priestly celibacy. Its value is appreciated by all as richly prophetic and a profound witness to Christ; some ask, however, whether its appropriateness, theologically, for priestly ministry should necessarily translate into a disciplinary obligation in the Latin Church, above all in ecclesial and cultural contexts that make it more difficult. This discussion is not new but requires further consideration.

g) In the Latin Churches the permanent diaconate has been implemented in differing ways in different ecclesial contexts. Some local churches have not introduced it at all; in others, there is concern that deacons are perceived as a kind of substitute for the shortage of priests. Sometimes, their ministry finds expression in the liturgy rather than in service to those living in poverty and who are needy in the community. We therefore recommend an assessment of how the diaconal ministry has been implemented since Vatican II.

h) From the theological point of view, there is a need to understand the diaconate first and foremost in itself and not only as a stage of access to the presbyterate. Qualifying the primary form of the diaconate as "permanent," to distinguish it from the "transitional" form, is itself an indication of a change of perspective that has not yet been adequately realized.

i) The uncertainties surrounding the theology of the diaconate are related to the fact that it has only been restored to a distinct and permanent hierarchical ministry in the Latin Church since the Second Vatican Council. Deeper study will shed light on the question of the access of women to the diaconate.

j) A thorough review of formation for ordained ministry in view of the missionary and synodal dimensions of the Church is called for. This means also reviewing the *Ratio fundamentalis* that

determines how formation is structured. We also recommend at the same time ensuring the adoption of a synodal style when it comes to the ongoing formation of priests and deacons.

k) Transparency and a culture of accountability are of crucial importance for us to move forward in building a synodal Church. We ask local churches to identify processes and structures that allow for a regular audit of how priests and deacons are carrying out roles of responsibility in the exercise of their ministry. Existing institutions, such as participatory bodies or pastoral visits, can be the starting point for this work, taking care to involve the community. Such forms must be adapted to local contexts and diverse cultures, so as not to be a hindrance or a bureaucratic burden. The discernment of the kind of process required could be considered at the regional or continental level.

l) On a case-by-case basis, and in accordance with the context, the possibility should be considered of re-inserting priests who have left the ministry in pastoral services that recognise their formation and experience.

a) According to Vatican II, bishops, as successors of the Apostles, are placed at the service of the communion that is realised in the local Church, among the Churches and with the entire Church. The figure of the bishop can therefore adequately be understood only in the web of relations that is woven from the portion of the People of God entrusted to him, the presbyterate and the deacons, consecrated persons, and the other bishops, and the Bishop of Rome, and taking account of a constant orientation toward mission.

b) The bishop is, in his Church, the one primarily responsible for proclaiming the Gospel and for the liturgy. He guides the Christian community and promotes pastoral care of those experiencing poverty and defence of the most vulnerable. As the visible principle of unity, he has, in particular, the task of discerning and coordinating the different charisms and ministries sent forth by the Spirit for the proclamation of the Gospel and the common good of the community. This ministry is realized in a synodal manner when governance is accompanied by co-responsibility, preaching by listening to the faithful People of God, and sanctification and celebration of the liturgy by humility and conversion.

c) The bishop has an indispensable role in vivifying and animating the synodal process in the local Church, promoting the mutuality between "all, some and one". The “one” Episcopal ministry values the participation of "all" the faithful, through the contribution of "some" who are more directly involved in discernment and decision-making processes. The conviction with which the bishop himself adopts a synodal approach and the style by which he exercises authority will influence decisively how priests and deacons, lay men and women, and those in consecrated life, participate in the synodal process. The bishop is called to be an example of synodality for all.

d) In contexts where the Church is perceived as the family of God, the bishop is regarded as a father to all; there is, however, a crisis in regard to how his authority is experienced in secularised societies. It is important not to lose sight of the sacramental nature of the Episcopate, lest the figure of the bishop be assimilated into that of a civil authority figure.

e) Expectations of bishops are often very high, and many bishops spoke of feeling overburdened with administrative and legal commitments, which makes it difficult for them to fully realize their mission. The bishop also must come to terms with his own frailty and limitations and

sometimes lacks the support he needs, whether human or spiritual. A certain sense of loneliness is not uncommon. That is why it is important, on the one hand, to refocus on elements that are essential to the mission of the bishop, and, on the other hand, to cultivate authentic fraternity among bishops themselves and among bishops and their priests.

Matters for Consideration

f) On the theological level, the significance of the reciprocal relationship between the bishop and the local Church needs to be significantly deepened. He is called, both to guide his local Church, and, at the same time, to recognise and preserve the richness of its history, traditions and charisms.

g) The question of the relationship between the Sacrament of Holy Orders and jurisdiction needs to be studied in greater depth. In dialogue with *Lumen Gentium* and more recent teachings such as the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, the aim of such a study would be to clarify the theological and canonical criteria underlying the principle of the shared responsibility of the bishop and to determine the scope, forms and implications of co-responsibility.

h) Some bishops express discomfort when they are asked to speak on matters of faith and morals where full agreement within the Episcopate is lacking. Further reflection is needed on the relationship between episcopal collegiality and diversity of theological and pastoral views.

i) Integral to a synodal Church is ensuring a culture of transparency and respect for the procedures established for the protection of minors and vulnerable people. It is necessary to develop further structures dedicated to the prevention of abuse. The sensitive issue of handling abuse places many bishops in the difficult situation of having to reconcile the role of father with that of judge. The appropriateness of assigning the judicial task to another body, to be specified canonically, should be explored.

j) It is necessary to implement, in forms legally yet to be defined, structures and processes for regular review of the bishop's performance, with reference to the style of his authority, the economic administration of the diocese's assets, and the functioning of participatory bodies, and safeguarding against all possible kinds of abuse. A culture of accountability is an integral part of a synodal Church that promotes co-responsibility, as well as safeguarding against abuses.

k) There are calls to make the Episcopal Council (can. 473 §4), the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Eparchial Pastoral Council (CIC can. 511, CCEO can 272) mandatory, and to make the diocesan bodies exercising co-responsibility more operational, including in legal terms.

l) The Assembly calls for a review of the criteria for selecting candidates for the episcopate, balancing the authority of the Apostolic Nuncio with participation of Episcopal Conferences. There are also requests to expand consultation with the faithful People of God, and to involve a greater number of lay people and consecrated persons in the consultation process, taking care to avoid being put under any undue pressure in the selection process.

m) Many bishops express the need to rethink the functioning and strengthen the structure of the metropolitan sees (ecclesiastical provinces) and regions, so that they can become concrete expressions of collegiality in a territory and, through fraternity, mutual support, transparency and a wider consultation, become commonplace practices among bishops.

13. The Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops

a) The synodal dynamic also sheds new light on the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. Indeed, synodality articulates symphonically the communal ("all"), collegial ("some") and personal ("one") dimensions of the Church at the local, regional and universal levels. In such a vision, the Petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome is intrinsic to the synodal dynamic, as are the communal aspect that includes the whole People of God and the collegial dimension of the exercise of Episcopal ministry. Therefore, synodality, collegiality, and primacy refer to each other: primacy presupposes the exercise of synodality and of collegiality, just as both of them imply the exercise of primacy.

b) Promoting the unity of all Christians is an essential aspect of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. The ecumenical journey has deepened understanding of the ministry of the Successor of Peter and must continue to do so in the future. Responses to the invitation made by St. John Paul II in the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, as well as the conclusions of ecumenical dialogues, can help the Catholic understanding of primacy, collegiality, synodality, and their mutual relationships.

c) The reform of the Roman Curia is an important aspect of the Catholic Church's synodal journey. The Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate evangelium* insists that "the Roman Curia does not stand between the Pope and the Bishops, rather it places itself at the service of both in ways that are proper to the nature of each" (EP I.8). It promotes reform based on a "life of communion" (EP I.4) and "healthy decentralization" (EP II.2). The fact that many members of the Roman dicasteries are diocesan Bishops expresses the catholicity of the Church and should foster the relationship between the Curia and local churches. The effective implementation of *Predicate evangelium* may foster greater synodality within the Curia both among the different dicasteries and within each of them.

Matters for Consideration

d) There is a need for more insight into how a renewed understanding of the Episcopate within a synodal Church affects the ministry of the Bishop of Rome and the role of the Roman Curia. This issue has significant implications for the way co-responsibility in Church governance is lived out. At the universal level, the Code of *Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* offer provisions for a more collegial exercise of papal ministry. These could be further developed in practice and strengthened in a future update of both texts

e) Synodality can shed light on ways in which Cardinals can collaborate in the Petrine ministry and the ways in which their collegial discernment can be promoted in ordinary and extraordinary consistories.

f) It is important for the good of the Church to study the most appropriate ways to foster mutual acquaintance and bonds of communion among the members of the College of Cardinals, taking into account also their diversity of origin and culture.

g) The Visits *ad limina Apostolorum* are the highest moment of the relationships of the pastors of the local churches with the Bishop of Rome and his closest collaborators in the Roman Curia. It is necessary to review the form in which they are carried out so that they become always more

the occasion for open and mutual exchange that fosters communion and a true exercise of collegiality and synodality.

h) In light of the synodal configuration of the Church, it is necessary for the dicasteries of the Roman Curia to enhance the consultation of bishops, for greater attention to the diversity of situations and a more attentive listening to the voices of local churches.

i) It seems appropriate to establish forms of evaluation of the work of the Pontifical Representatives by the local churches in the countries where they carry out their mission to facilitate and perfect their service.

j) It is proposed to enhance and strengthen the experience of the Council of Cardinals (C-9) as a synodal council at the service of the Petrine ministry.

k) In the light of the teaching of Vatican II, it is necessary to carefully evaluate whether it is opportune to ordain the prelates of the Roman Curia as bishops.

14. A synodal approach to formation

a) Every baptised person is called to take care of their own formation as a response to the gifts of the Lord, making use of the talents they have received in order that they bear fruit and put them at the service of all. The time the Lord has dedicated to the formation of His disciples reveals the importance of this ecclesial formation. This often happens in the background yet it is decisive for mission. We would like to express a word of thanks and encouragement to all those who are engaged in this work and invite them to welcome the new orientations in regard to formation emerging from the Church's synodal journey.

b) The way in which Jesus formed the disciples constitutes the model we need to follow. He did not merely impart teaching but he shared his life with them. Through the example of his own prayer He drew from them the request: 'Teach us to pray'. By feeding the crowds He taught them not to dismiss the needy. By walking to Jerusalem He showed the way to the Cross. From the Gospel we learn that formation is not only or primarily a strengthening of one's own abilities; it is a conversion to the 'logic' of the Kingdom that can render even defeats and failures fruitful.

c) The Holy People of God is not only the object but is first and foremost the co-responsible subject of formation. The first formation, in fact, takes place in the family. It is here that we usually receive the first proclamation of the faith in the language – indeed in the dialect – of our parents and grandparents. Those who carry out a ministry in the Church must therefore intertwine their contribution with the wisdom of all the faithful People of God in a cooperation that is indispensable to the community. This is the first sign of a formation understood in a synodal sense.

d) In Christian initiation we find guidance in how to navigate our formation path. At the heart of Christian formation is a deepening of the *kerygma,* that is, the encounter with Jesus Christ that offers us the gift of a new life. Catechumenal logic reminds us that we are all sinners called to holiness. This is why we engage in a journey towards personal conversion that the Sacrament of Reconciliation brings to fulfilment. This is also why we nourish the desire for holiness, supported by a large number of witnesses.

e) The areas in which the formation of the People of God takes places are many. In addition to theological formation, the Assembly requested training in specific skills: the exercise of co-responsibility, listening, and discernment; conducting ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, service to the poorest and care for our common home; engagement as "digital missionaries", facilitation of discernment processes, Conversation in the Spirit, consensus-building and conflict resolution. Particular attention should also be given to catechetical formation of children and young people, which should involve the active participation of the community.

f) Formation for a synodal Church needs to be undertaken *synodally*: the entire People of God being formed together as they journey together. There is a need to overcome the 'delegation' mindset found in so many areas of pastoral ministry. Formation in a synodal key is meant to enable the People of God to live out their baptismal vocation fully, in the family, in the workplace, in ecclesial, social, and intellectual spheres. It is meant to enable each person to participate actively in the Church's mission according to his or her own charisms and vocation.

Matters for Consideration

g) We recommend undertaking work on relationship and sexual education to accompany young people as they mature in their personal and sexual identities and to support the maturation of those called to celibacy and consecrated chastity. Formation in these areas is a necessary aid at all stages of life.
h) It is important to deepen the dialogue between the human sciences, especially psychology and theology, for an understanding of human experience that does not merely situate these approaches by side by side but integrates them into a more mature synthesis.
i) The People of God need to be widely represented in formation programmes for ordained ministry, as already requested by previous Synods. We need, therefore, a thorough review of formation programmes, with particular attention to how we can foster the contribution of women and families to them.
j) Episcopal Conferences are encouraged to work together at the regional level to create a culture of lifelong formation and learning, using all available resources, including the development of digital options.

k) In the light of synodality, we propose that priority should be given to providing programmes designed and intended for the joint formation of the entire People of God (laity, consecrated and ordained ministers). Dioceses should endeavour to encourage these projects within the local churches. We encourage Episcopal Conferences to work together at regional level to create a culture of ongoing formation, using all available resources, including the development of digital options.
l) A range of members of the People of God should be represented in formation programs for ordained ministries, as already requested by previous Synods. The involvement of women is of particular importance.
m) Adequate standards and processes for selecting candidates for ordained ministry need to be applied to ensure that requirements for the propaedeutic programme for seminarians are met.
n) Formation for ordained ministers should be designed in a way that is consistent with a synodal Church in the different local contexts. Before embarking on specific paths candidates should have a significant, albeit initial, experience of life in a Christian community. Formation should not create an artificial environment separate from the ordinary life of the faithful. By safeguarding the requirements of formation for ministry, we can foster an authentic spirit of service to the People of God in preaching, celebrating the sacraments and enacting charity. This may require a revision of the *Ratio fundamentalis* for priests and permanent deacons.
o) In preparation for the next session of the Assembly, a consultation of those responsible for the initial and ongoing formation of priests should be undertaken to assess how the synodal process is being received and to propose changes that will promote the exercise of authority in a style appropriate to a synodal Church.

a) The experience of Conversation in the Spirit was enriching for all who took part. Our style of communication, privileging freedom in expressing one's views and listening to each other, was

greatly appreciated. It avoided us moving too quickly to a debate based on the reiteration of our own positions without listening first to the reasoning that supports the position of others.

b) This basic approach creates a context that enables careful consideration of matters that are controversial within the Church, such as the anthropological effects of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, non-violence and legitimate self-defence, issues related to ministry, and issues related to sexuality and “bodiliness”, among others.

c) To develop authentic ecclesial discernment in these and other areas, it is necessary to approach these questions in the light of the Word of God and Church teaching, properly informed and reflected upon. In order to avoid repeating vacuous formulas, we need to provide an opportunity for a dialogue involving the human and social sciences, as well as philosophical and theological reflection.

d) At the heart of many of these controversial matters lies the question of the relationship between love and truth and the impact this has on many controversial matters. This relationship, before being considered a challenge, is actually to be considered as a grace revealed in Christ. For Jesus brought to fulfilment the promise found in the psalms: "Love and truth shall meet, justice and peace shall embrace. Truth will sprout from the earth and justice will come forth from heaven" (Ps 85:11-12).

e) Several Gospel passages reveal that Jesus meets people in the uniqueness of their personal story and situation. He never begins from the perspective of prejudices or labels, but from the authenticity of relationship to which he commits himself wholeheartedly, even at the cost of experiencing misunderstanding and rejection. Jesus always listens to the cry for help of those in need, even in situations in which it remains unexpressed. He engages in gestures that communicate love and restore confidence; he makes new life possible with his presence: those who meet him come away transformed. This happens because the truth of which Jesus is the bearer is not an idea, but the very presence of God in our midst; and the love with which he acts is not just a feeling, but the justice of the Kingdom that changes history.

f) We can only support others if we ourselves are undergoing conversion, both personal and communal. The difficulty we encounter in translating Jesus’ clear evangelical vision into pastoral choices is a sign of our struggle to live up to the Gospel. If we use doctrine harshly and with a judgmental attitude, we betray the Gospel; if we practise mercy ‘on the cheap’, we do not convey God's love. The unity of truth and love implies bearing the difficulties of others, even making them our own, as happens between brothers and sisters. This unity can only be achieved, however, by patiently following the path of accompaniment.

g) Certain issues, such as those relating to matters of identity and sexuality, the end of life, complicated marital situations, and ethical issues related to artificial intelligence, are controversial not only in society, but also in the Church, because they raise new questions. Sometimes the anthropological categories we have developed are not able to grasp the complexity of the elements emerging from experience or knowledge in the sciences and require greater precision and further study. It is important to take the time required for this reflection and to invest our best energies in it, without giving in to simplistic judgements that hurt individuals and the Body of the Church. Church teaching already provides a sense of direction on many of these matters, but this teaching evidently still requires translation into pastoral practice. Even where further clarification is required, Jesus’ actions, assimilated in prayer and conversion of heart, show us the way forward.

Matters for Consideration

h) It is necessary to continue ecclesial reflection on the original interweaving of love and truth flowing from Christological revelation, with a view to an ecclesial practice faithful to these origins.

i) We encourage experts in different fields to bring together their knowledge with their personal spirituality so that what they offer is a real ecclesial service. What synodality means in this context is a readiness to think together in the service of mission and in diverse settings, but with a shared sense of purpose.

j) We identified a need for reflection on the conditions that enable theological and cultural research that takes as its starting point the daily experience of God's Holy People and places itself at its service.

k) We propose that initiatives enabling shared discernment on controversial doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues should be developed, in the light of the Word of God, Church teaching, theological reflection and an appreciation of the synodal experience. This can be accomplished through in-depth discussions among experts with diverse skills and backgrounds, in an institutional setting that protects confidentiality and promotes frank discussion. When appropriate it should also involve people directly affected by the matters under consideration. Such initiatives should be set in motion before the next Session of the Assembly.

a) During the first two years of the synodal journey, including during our Assembly, listening is the word that best expresses our experience. This is listening given and received. Listening is a deeply human reality, a dynamic of reciprocity in which each makes a contribution to the other's journey while receiving a contribution to one's own.

b) Many of those who participated in the synodal process at the local level, and especially those who have suffered forms of marginalization in the Church or in society were greatly surprised by the invitation to speak and be heard in the Church and by the Church. Being deeply listened to is an experience of affirmation and recognition of dignity, and is a powerful way of engaging people and communities.

c) Placing Jesus at the centre of our lives requires some degree of self-emptying. In this perspective, providing a listening ear means being willing to 'decentre' oneself in order to leave space for the other. We have experienced this in the dynamic of conversations in the Spirit. It is a demanding ascetical exercise that obliges each person to recognize his or her own limitations and the partiality of his or her point of view. Because of this, it opens the possibility of listening to the voice of the Spirit of God that speaks to those beyond the borders of the ecclesial community, and can initiate a journey of change and conversion.

d) Listening has a Christological significance; it means adopting Jesus' attitude toward the people he encountered (cf. Phil. 2:6-11). It also has an ecclesial value, since it is the Church that is

listening through the actions of the baptised who act not simply in their own name but in the name of the community.

e) The Church encountered many people and groups along the synodal process asking to be listened to and accompanied. We mention first and foremost young people, whose request for listening and accompaniment resonated strongly in the Synod dedicated to them (2018) and in this Assembly, confirming the need for a preferential option for young people.

f) The Church needs to listen with special attention and sensitivity to the voices of victims and survivors of sexual, spiritual, economic, institutional, power and conscience abuse by clergy members or persons with Church appointments. Authentic listening is a fundamental element of the path to healing, repentance, justice and reconciliation.

g) The Assembly expresses its closeness to and support for all those who accept being alone as a choice made in fidelity to the Church's Tradition and Magisterium on marriage and sexual ethics, which they recognise as source of life. Christian communities are invited to be close to them, listen to them and accompany them in their commitment.

h) In different ways, people who feel marginalized or excluded from the Church because of their marriage status, identity or sexuality also ask to be heard and accompanied. There was a deep sense of love, mercy and compassion felt in the Assembly for those who are or feel hurt or neglected by the Church, who want a place to call "home" where they can feel safe, be heard and respected, without fear of feeling judged. Listening is a prerequisite for walking together in search of God's will. The Assembly reiterates that Christians must always show respect for the dignity of every person.

i) People who suffer the many different forms of poverty, exclusion and marginalization within our unequal societies also turn to the Church in search of love, listening and accompaniment. This listening allows the Church to understand the realities of poverty and marginalisation, and to draw close in friendship to those who suffer. Crucially it also enables the Church to be evangelised by those who suffer. Listening to them allows the Church to understand their point of view and to place itself concretely at their side, and to be evangelised by them. We thank and encourage all those who are engaged in the service of listening to and accompanying those who are in prison. They, in particular, need to experience the merciful love of the Lord and to not feel isolated from the community. On behalf of the Church, they realise the Lord's words "I was in prison and you visited me" (Mt 25:36).

j) Many people experience a condition of loneliness that is often close to abandonment. The elderly and the sick ill are often invisible in society. We encourage parishes and Christian communities to be close to them and listen to them. Works of mercy inspired by the Gospel words "I was sick and you visited me" (Mt 25:39) have a profound significance for the people involved and for fostering the wider bonds of community.

k) Finally, the Church wants to listen to everyone, not just those who can most easily make their voices heard. In some regions, for cultural and social reasons, members of certain groups, such as young people, women, and minorities, may find it more difficult to express themselves freely in public or ecclesial spaces. Living under oppressive and dictatorial regimes also erode this freedom. The same can happen when the exercise of authority within the Christian community becomes oppressive rather than liberating.

Matters for Consideration

l) Listening requires unconditional acceptance. It does not mean compromising proclamation of the Gospel or endorsing any opinion or position proposed. Jesus opened up new horizons and

pathways for the people to whom he listened unconditionally, and in order to share the Good News of salvation with those we encounter we are called to do likewise.

m) Widespread in many parts of the world, small Christian communities foster listening practices of, and amongst, the baptised. We are called to enhance their potential, in particular, by exploring how they can be adapted to urban contexts.

n) What would need to change in order for those who feel excluded to experience the Church as more welcoming? Listening and accompaniment are a form of ecclesial action, not just the actions of individuals. They must therefore find a place within the ordinary pastoral planning and operational structuring of Christian communities at different levels, making full use of spiritual accompaniment. A synodal Church needs to be a listening Church and this commitment has to be translated into practice.

o) We do not start this work from scratch. Numerous institutions and structures carry out the valuable task of listening, including the accompaniment work of Caritas amongst the poorest, and among migrants and refugees, and the many other contexts of accompaniment linked to consecrated life or lay associations. Connecting their work in a more integral way with the local Church community enables this work to be seen as part of the life of the whole community, not a delegated task.

p) Those performing the service of listening and accompaniment, in its various forms, need adequate formation, taking into account the experiences of those they come into contact with. They also need to feel supported by the community. For their part, communities should become fully aware of the meaning of this service exercised on their behalf and to receive the fruits of this listening. We propose establishment of a ministry of listening and accompaniment in order to give greater prominence to this service. It should be grounded in baptism and adapted to different contexts. The way this ministry is conferred should promote the involvement of the community.

q) SECAM (Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) is encouraged to promote a theological and pastoral discernment on question of polygamy and the accompaniment of people in polygamous unions who are coming to faith.

a) Digital culture represents a fundamental change in the way we conceive of reality and consequently relate to ourselves, one another, our surroundings, and even to God. The digital environment changes our learning processes as well as our perception of time, space, our bodies, interpersonal relationships and, indeed, much of our way of thinking. The dualism between real and virtual does not adequately describe the reality and experience of people, especially the youngest, the so-called "digital natives."

b) Digital culture, then, is not so much a distinct area of mission as a crucial dimension of the Church's witness in contemporary culture. This is why it holds special significance in a synodal Church.

c) Missionaries have always gone with Christ to new frontiers, while the Holy Spirit pushed and preceded them. It is up to us to reach today's culture in all spaces where people seek meaning and love, including the spaces they enter through their cell phones and tablets.

d) We cannot evangelize digital culture without first understanding it. Young people, and among them, seminarians, young priests, and young consecrated men and women, who often have profound and direct experience of it, are best suited to carry out the Church's mission in the digital environment, as well as to accompany the rest of the community, including pastors, in becoming more familiar with its dynamics.

e) Within the synodal process, the initiatives of the "Digital Synod" ("The Church Listens to You" Project) show the potential of the digital environment approached in a missionary key, the creativity and generosity of those who engage in it, and the importance of providing them with training, accompaniment and opportunities for peer-to-peer discussion and collaboration.

Matters for Consideration

f) The Internet is increasingly present in the lives of children and families. While it has great potential to improve people's lives, it can also cause harm and injury, such as through intimidation, disinformation, sexual exploitation, and addiction. There is an urgent need to consider how the Christian community can support families in ensuring that the online space is not only safe but also spiritually life-giving.

g) There are many valuable and useful Church-related online initiatives that provide excellent catechesis and faith formation. Unfortunately, there are also sites where faith-related issues are addressed in a superficial, polarized and even hate-filled manner. As a Church and as individual digital missionaries, we have a duty to ask ourselves how we can ensure that our online presence constitutes an experience of growth for those with whom we communicate.

h) Online apostolic initiatives have a reach and scope that extends beyond traditionally understood territorial boundaries. This raises important questions about how they can be regulated and which ecclesiastical authority should be responsible for supervision.

i) We must also consider the implications of the new digital missionary frontier for the renewal of existing parish and diocesan structures. In an increasingly digital world, how do we avoid being trapped within a mindset that seeks only to conserve what we are already doing and instead unleash new energies for new forms of mission?

j) The COVID-19 pandemic stimulated a range of creative online pastoral initiatives that reduced the effects of the experience of isolation and loneliness experienced particularly by elderly and vulnerable community members. Catholic educational institutions also used online platforms effectively to continue offering formation and catechesis during lockdowns. We need to assess what this experience has taught us and what the lasting benefits might be for the Church's mission in the digital environment.

k) While young people do seek beauty, many young people have abandoned the physical spaces of Church into which we continue to try to invite them, favouring instead online spaces. This has implications for how we try to engage them and seek to offer them formation and catechesis. This is something to consider from a pastoral perspective.

l) We need to provide opportunities for recognising, forming, and accompanying those already working as digital missionaries, while also facilitating networking amongst them.

m) It is important to create collaborative networks of influencers that include people of other religions or indeed who may profess no faith, but who wish to collaborate on common causes to promote human dignity, justice, and care for our common home.

18. Structures for Participation

a) As members of the faithful People of God, all the baptised are co-responsible for mission, each according to his or her vocation, competence and experience. Therefore, all contribute to imagining and discerning steps to reform Christian communities and the Church as a whole. In this way, the Church experiences "the sweet and comforting joy of evangelising." The purpose of synodality, in the composition and functioning of the bodies in which it takes shape, is mission. Co-responsibility is for mission: this attests that we are truly gathered in the name of Jesus, this frees the bodies of participation from bureaucratic limitations and worldly logics of power, and makes gathering fruitful.

b) In the light of the recent teaching of the Church (in particular, *Lumen gentium* and *Evangelii gaudium*), this co-responsibility of all in mission must be the criterion underlying the structuring of Christian communities and the entire local church with all its services, in all its institutions, in each of its pastoral bodies (cf 1 Cor 12:4-31). The proper recognition of the laity for mission in the world cannot become a pretext for assigning the care of the Christian community to bishops and priests alone.

c) The authority par excellence is that of the Word of God, which must inspire every meeting of participatory bodies, every consultation and every decision-making process. For this to happen, it is necessary that, at every level, the gathering draws meaning and strength from the Eucharist and takes place in the light of the Word heard and shared in prayer.

d) The composition of the various councils for the discernment and decision-making of a synodal missionary community must provide for the presence of men and women who have an apostolic disposition, distinguished not by their frequent presence in church, but by a genuine evangelical witness in ordinary life. The People of God are all the more missionary when they can make the voices of those already living the mission by inhabiting the world and its peripheries resonate within themselves, including in participatory bodies.

Matters for Consideration

e) In light of what we have shared, it is important to ask how we can promote participation in the various councils when many feel they are not up to the task. Synodality grows when each member is involved in processes and decision-making for the mission of the Church. In this sense, we are encouraged by many small Christian communities in the emerging Churches, who live the closeness of the day-to-day, around the Word of God and the Eucharist.

f) In *Amoris Laetitia,* Pope Francis entrusted the Church to make changes to the composition of participatory bodies, this task cannot be further delayed. The participation of baptised men and women living in complex situations of loving relationship "can be expressed in different ecclesial

services, which necessarily requires discerning which of the various forms of exclusion currently practised in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional framework, can be surmounted" (299). This discernment also concerns their exclusion from parish and diocesan community participation bodies as experienced in some local churches.

g) From the perspective of the uniqueness of ecclesial communion: how can we interweave the consultative and deliberative aspects of synodality? Given the variety of charismatic and ministerial gifts of the People of God, how do we integrate the tasks of advising, discerning, and deciding in the various participatory bodies.

h) Based on the understanding of the People of God as the active subject of the mission of evangelisation, we suggest legislating for the obligatory nature of Pastoral Councils in Christian communities and local churches. It would also be desirable to strengthen the bodies of participation, with a proper presence of the laity, recognising the role they can play in discerning decisions by virtue of their baptism.

i) Participatory bodies represent the first instance in which to experience the accountability of those who exercise responsibility. While we warmly welcome and support their commitment, in turn, they are invited to practice the culture of accountability to the community of which they are an expression.

19. Groupings of Churches in the Communion of the

a) The Holy Spirit abundantly distributes His gifts for the common good, and so we are convinced that each Church, in the communion of the entire Church, has much to offer. When we view the Church as the Body of Christ, we understand more easily that the various members are interdependent and share the same life: "if one member suffers, all the members suffer together with it; and if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor 12:26). We therefore want to develop the spiritual attitudes that arise from this outlook: humility and generosity, respect and sharing. Also important are the willingness to grow in mutual knowledge and to prepare the necessary structures so that the exchange of spiritual riches, missionary discipleship and material goods can become a concrete reality.

b) The question of groupings of local churches proved to be fundamental to the full exercise of synodality in the Church. In responding to the question of how to configure instances of synodality and collegiality involving groupings of local churches, the Assembly agreed on the importance of ecclesial discernment carried out by the Episcopal Conferences and Continental Assemblies for the proper conduct of the first phase of the synodal process.

c) The synodal process has shown how the bodies provided by the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches* exercise their function more effectively when these bodies are understood from the local churches. The fact that the Church (*Ecclesia tota*) is a communion of Churches requires each bishop in a more direct and binding way to exercise his duty of care for all the Churches (*sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum*) as a constitutive aspect of his ministry as pastor of a Church.

d) Episcopal Conferences played a decisive role in the first phase of the synodal process. The process brought out the need for synodality and collegiality at the continental level. Bodies

operating at these levels contribute to the exercise of synodality, respecting local realities and processes of inculturation. The Assembly expressed confidence that by these means, the risk of uniformity and centralization in the government of the Church will be overcome.

Matters for Consideration

e) Before creating new ecclesial structures, we need to strengthen and revitalize those that exist. There is also a need for ecclesiological and canonical study of the implications of the reform related to groupings of Churches, so that they may assume a more fully synodal character.

f) Considering the synodal practices of the Church of the first millennium, we suggest a study exploring how ancient institutions can be recovered in the current canonical order, and harmonising them with newly created ones, such as Episcopal Conferences.

g) The doctrinal and juridical nature of Episcopal Conferences needs further study, recognising the possibility of collegial action, including questions of doctrine that arise locally, thus reopening reflection on the Motu Proprio *Apostolos suos*.

h) Could the canons referring to particular councils (plenary and provincial) be revised in order to increase the participation of the People of God, following the example of the dispensation obtained in the recent Plenary Council of Australia?

i) Among the structures already provided for in the Code, the ecclesiastical province or metropolitan see should be recovered and strengthened as a place of communion for the local churches within their territory.

j) Relevant authorities should implement synodality at regional, national, and continental levels in accordance with the insights that have emerged in regard to Church groupings.

k) Where necessary, we suggest creating international ecclesiastical provinces to benefit bishops who do not belong to any Episcopal Conference and to promote communion among Churches across national borders.

l) In Latin Rite countries in which there is also a hierarchy of Eastern Catholic Churches, we recommend including Eastern Bishops in national Episcopal Conferences, leaving intact their governmental autonomy established by their own Code.

m) A canonical configuration of the Continental Assemblies should be worked out that, while respecting the particularity of each continent, takes due account of the participation of the Episcopal Conferences and that of the Churches, with their own delegates who make present the variety of the People of God.

20. The Synod of

a) Even when the experience of “walking together” has been tiring, the Assembly sensed the evangelical joy of being the People of God. The new experiences involved in this stage of the synodal journey were generally welcomed. The most obvious ones include the shift of the celebration of the Synod from an event to a process (as indicated by the apostolic constitution *Episcopalis communio*); the presence of other members, women and men, alongside the bishops; the active presence of fraternal delegates; the spiritual retreat in preparation for the

Assembly; the celebration of the Eucharist at St. Peter's; the atmosphere of prayer and the method Conversation in the Spirit; and the very arrangement of the Assembly in the Paul VI Hall.

b) The Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, while preserving its eminently Episcopal character, made tangible on this occasion the intrinsic link between the synodal dimension of the life of the Church (the participation of all), the collegial dimension (the care of the bishops for the whole Church), and the primatial dimension (the service of the Bishop of Rome, guarantor of communion).

c) The synodal process was and is a time of grace which encourages us. God is offering us the opportunity to experience a new culture of synodality, capable of guiding the life and mission of the Church. We recalled, however, that it is not enough to create structures of co-responsibility if personal conversion to a missionary synodality is lacking. Synodal processes do not diminish the personal responsibility of those called to participate in it at every level of the Church by virtue of their ministry and charisms, but rather solicit it all the more.

Matters for Consideration

d) The presence of members other than bishops as witnesses to the synodal journey was appreciated. However, the question remains open about the effect of their presence as full members on the episcopal character of the Assembly. Some see the risk that the specific task of the bishops will not be adequately understood. The criteria by which non-bishop members are called to be part of the Assembly will also need to be clarified.

e) Experiences such as the first Latin-American and Caribbean Ecclesial Assembly of November 2021, the Organisms of the People of God in Brazil, and the Australian Plenary Council were reported. It remains to identify and deepen how to integrate synodality and collegiality in the future, distinguishing (without undue separation) the contribution of all members of the People of God to the elaboration of decisions and the specific task of the bishops. The articulation of synodality, collegiality, and primacy should not be interpreted in a static or linear form but according to a dynamic circularity, in a differentiated co-responsibility.

f) While at the regional level, it is possible to think of successive steps (an ecclesial Assembly followed by an Episcopal Assembly), it is considered appropriate to clarify how this might be proposed with reference to the Catholic Church as a whole. Some believe that the formula adopted in this Assembly responds to this need; others propose that an Episcopal Assembly follow an Ecclesial Assembly to conclude the discernment. Still, others prefer to reserve the role of members of the Synodal Assembly to the Bishops.

g) The contribution to the Assembly's work and the synodal Church's processes, made by experts from different disciplines, particularly theologians and canonists, also has something to offer.

h) It will also be necessary to reflect on the interaction between the synodal process and Internet and media communication.

i) The synodal processes at all levels of the Church should be evaluated.

j) The fruits of the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops should be evaluated.

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God,
or what parable will we use for it”? (Mk 4:30)

The Word of the Lord takes precedence over words of the Church. The words of disciples, even those of a Synod, are only an echo of what the Lord Himself says.

Jesus chose to speak in parables in order to announce the Reign of God. He found images to speak of the mystery of God in the ordinary experiences of human life: the natural world, the work-place, elements of the everyday. In this way, he let us know that the Reign of God transcends us yet is not distant from us. Either we see God’s Reign in the things of this world, or we will never see it.

Jesus saw his own destiny represented in a seed falling to the earth, something of no value or significance destined to decay, yet possessing the dynamism of life, a dynamism that is unstoppable, unpredictable, Paschal. This is a dynamism destined to give life; to become bread for many; bread destined to become the Eucharist.

Today, in a culture where people struggle against one another for dominance and become obsessed with what is visible, the Church is called to echo the words of Jesus, to bring them to life again in all their potency.

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?” Our Lord’s question throws light on the work that now lies ahead of us. It is not a matter of dispersing ourselves over several fronts, reducing everything to a logic of efficiency and proceduralism. Rather, it is a matter of grasping, among the many words and proposals of this Report, what appears as a small seed, yet one that bears the future, and of imagining how to bring it to the soil that will enable it to grow and mature for the benefit of many. "How will this happen?", Mary asked herself in Nazareth (Lk 1:34) after hearing the Word. There is only one answer: remain in the shadow of the Spirit and allow yourself to be enveloped by his power.

As we look ahead to the period between now and the Second Session, let us thank the Lord for the journey thus far and for the graces with which He has blessed it. We entrust the next phase to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a sign of sure hope and consolation to the faithful People of God as they continue their journey, and to that of the Holy Apostles Simon and Jude, whose Feast we celebrate today. We are all invited to welcome the small seed that this Synthesis Report represents.

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus!

Rome, 28 October 2023, Feast of Ss. Simon and Jude, Apostles

1. Synodality: Experience and Understanding
2. Gathered and Sent by the Trinity
3. Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation
4. People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Church's Journey
5. A Church "out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation"
6. The Eastern Churches and Latin Church Traditions
7. On the Road Towards Christian Unity

8. Church is Mission
9. Women in the Life and Mission of the Church
10. Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements: a Charismatic Sign
11. Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church
12. The Bishop in Ecclesial Communion
13. The Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops

14. A Synodal Approach to Formation
15. Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions
16. Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church
17. Mission in the Digital Environment
18. Structures for Participation
19. Groupings of Churches within the Communion of the Whole Church
20. The Synod of Bishops and Ecclesial Assemblies