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**PRESENTATION OF THE REPORTS OF THE 10 WORKING GROUPS
ESTABLISHED BY POPE FRANCIS**

Group 8

The Role of Papal Representatives in a Missionary Synodal Perspective (SR 13)

The Assignment

The First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2023) brought to the fore the need to establish a Study Group to address the topic of “The Role of Papal Representatives in a Missionary Synodal Perspective.” The description of the tasks assigned considers the need for a reflection in particular in light of the synod’s proposed culture of transparency and accountability as “an integral part of a synodal Church that promotes co-responsibility, as well as a possible safeguard against abuses”. In this context “the Assembly considers it opportune to envisage forms of evaluation of the work of the Papal Representatives by the local Churches of the countries where they carry out their mission, in order to facilitate and perfect their service”. The task assigned highlights that the Nuncios not only play a vital role in the process of choosing bishops (this topic is assigned to Study Group 7), and are responsible for the diplomatic relations with civil authorities, their ministry also concerns the interplay between the local churches and the church universal and thus it must be attuned to the local churches as being synodal. The question thus arises as to how they can serve the unfolding of synodality and collegiality in entities that connect local churches when “ecclesiastical provinces or the *metropolia*” are to be strengthened as “a place of communion of the local Churches of a territory” (SR 19i). How can their ministry unfold in relation to the decisive role of Episcopal Conferences (SR 19d), whose prerogatives and competences need to be rethought in a synodal key.” How can their ministry be understood in face of a growing abundance of bodies that connect local churches also in continental entities. How can Papal Representatives help to consolidate the bonds of communion between the local Churches and the Pope, enabling him to know better their needs and aspirations?

The Methodology

The Study Group will conduct its task in a synodal way: listen to the Papal Representatives as well as other officials in the Nunciatures, to presidents of Episcopal Conferences and parallel structures in the Eastern Churches, presidents of Conferences of Major Superiors, to presidents of Continental Structures as well as of Lay Movements, other entities in which in particular ordinary lay persons are active, such a number of diocesan pastoral councils, and to

experienced Church and Civil diplomats. The purpose of these “listening” sessions will be to determine the scope of the problem and listen to possible solutions coming from those concerned. The method of engaging in this synodal conversation will be on the one hand sending out some questionnaires as well as extending open invitations to respond and on the other hand personal engaging in conversations also during the current session of the Synod in 2024. Having listened to the input from different groups during the synod, the Study Group will identify further steps by Christmas 2024.

When taking up its task, the Study Group was delighted to learn that in the first phase of listening to the local churches in preparation for what was going to be the Frascati document for the Continental Stage (2021-2022), more than half of the Papal Representatives (54 from about 104) had responded to the invitation to express their views on being a synodal church. They not only reported that their response was the fruit of a synodal discernment process in their Nunciatures involving all who work with them, but their responses also show how they are eager to participate in reflecting about their own synodal way of decision making in “walking with the local churches”, as well as assisting the people of God to become an ever more synodal church enabling them to be truly missionary. An initial analysis of the responses of the Papal Representatives shows that the topics they identified are in line with the reports from the local churches submitted by the episcopal conferences throughout the synodal process (2021-2024). Hence, the Papal Representatives themselves see the need and are eager to deepen the understanding of their ministry in light of being a synodal missionary church.

Among the topics raised are the procedures for episcopal appointments and the involvement of lay persons therein, a necessary consideration for culture and context when the Holy See issues documents or renders decisions otherwise, and the need for accountability and transparency. There is a strong call for both initial as well as ongoing formation of those working in the ministry of the nunciatures, including the proposal to use new technologies. The Study Group will attend to the current curriculum as offered by the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy and opportunities for ongoing formation with regard to topics such as synodality, new developments in society and technology, intercultural skills, models for implementing transparency and accountability, etc.

Furthermore, the Study Group has also collected all submissions from the different reports submitted by episcopal conferences and continental gatherings throughout the synodal process including those arising from the October 2023 Assembly. The purpose is to identify the challenges and questions that are raised concerning the task and ministry of the Papal Representatives. These different reports together with the responses by the Papal Representatives themselves will be the basis for engaging in a deeper listening to the aforementioned groups.

The listening phase shall be followed by a discernment phase in which in dialogue with different stakeholders further steps are identified to see how transparency and accountability might unfold with regard to the description of the tasks assigned to the Papal Representatives and how they can assist the church in becoming more synodal.

The Study Group has learned that the Papal Representatives as well as other Staff members at the Nunciatures are invited for meetings in Rome every three years. The Study Group will investigate the feasibility of organizing synodal gatherings of Papal Representatives as well as Staff members to discuss the topics that arise from this project.

So far the Study Group has convened three times. Two meetings were online and one was held in person. It intends to meet in person whenever possible, otherwise online meetings will be held.