



SECRETARIA GENERALIS  
SYNODI



XVI General Ordinary  
Assembly of the  
Synod of Bishops

[Original text: Italian]

## **XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

**SECOND SESSION  
(Paul VI Hall, 2-27 October 2024)**

### **How we will work together (methodology)**

#### Introduction

The entire process of the 2021-2024 Synod is guided by a fundamental question: "How does this "journeying together," which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?" (*Preparatory Document*, no. 2).

The consultation and listening phase began at the local level in October 2021 and continued up to the Continental Assemblies. This phase allowed the People of God to express their "lived" understanding of what a synodal Church is, and to formulate some priority issues to be submitted to the discernment of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in the two Sessions into which it is divided.

The *Instrumentum laboris* (IL) prepared for the Second Session collects and synthetically presents the fruit of the consultation, promoted by the Document *Towards October 2024*, which focused in particular on the question "How to be a synodal Church in mission?" This consultation was rooted in what emerged in the First Session and was collected in the *Synthesis Report* approved on 28 October 2023. The task of the Second Session is to complete the discernment begun in the First Session, on the basis of the long process of listening and consultation, and to offer the result of this discernment to the Holy Father in the Final Document envisaged by the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* (art. 18).

The IL is the main reference for the Second Session: discussion among the Participants will make it possible to distinguish what would be best incorporated in the *Final Document* from what could be omitted, and then to deepen and amend what is indeed incorporated. Above all, it is the Assembly's task to indicate, relative to the topics proposed by the IL, the steps to be taken to grow as a synodal Church. Of necessity, these steps must be considered with the concreteness and variety of local contexts, and with the richness of synodal voices and experiences already underway, voices which the Assembly conveys.

These pages offer a concise description of the working method of the Second Session, pending the publication of the Rules that will govern it more precisely. Their aim is to facilitate, as of now, the careful preparation of the Participants (Members, Fraternal Delegates, Special Invitees), so that the Assembly can deal fruitfully, in the short time available to it, with the relevant issues submitted to it. More precise indications on the role of the Experts (Theologians and Facilitators) and how they will be able to offer their contribution, based on their different disciplinary and methodological skills, will be provided through other channels.

## The subdivision into Modules

The work of the Synodal Assembly will be divided into **five Modules**, each of which will include Plenary Sessions (called General Congregations) and Working Groups<sup>1</sup>. Each of the first four Modules will have a specific thematic focus, corresponding in content and name to a specific Section of the IL:

- The Introductory Module will be devoted to the subject matter proposed in the *Foundations* Section.
- The following three Modules will respectively address the proposed subject matter in the three Sections named Part 1/*Relations*; Part 2/*Pathways* and Part 3/*Places*.
- The Concluding Module will be devoted to the discussion and approval of the *Final Document* of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

## The relationship between General Congregations and Working Groups

Similar to what was already in the First Session, the work within each Module will alternate between General Congregations and Working Groups. This will make possible to focus on the in-depth study of themes in a numerically smaller group, keeping present the more universal perspective that characterizes the Plenary Assembly. In an atmosphere of prayer and listening, the same themes will therefore be addressed in a variety of ways to make the work more fruitful.

Each of the **first four Modules** will have the following structure:

- a brief presentation of the topic by the General Relator
- two Working Group sessions, dedicated to the in-depth study of the assigned topic, according to the method described below;
- three General Congregations (two for the *Foundations* Module) to address the topic based on what emerged from the Working Groups;
- a Working Group session to draft the *Report* to be approved by each Group and delivered to the General Secretariat.

The work of the **Concluding Module** will begin with the presentation of the *Final Document Draft*, which will be discussed in General Congregation and on which the Working Groups will formulate amendments (or *modi*). The amended text will be submitted to the Plenary Assembly for approval.

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<sup>1</sup> The expression Working Groups translates the traditional Latin expression *Circuli minores*, sometimes rendered as Circles Minor.

## Working Groups

Each Working Group, consisting of 10/12 persons, will be formed by the General Secretariat based on the language preferences indicated by each Participant in online-module they completed. The specific composition of the Working Groups will be in two configurations: one for both the first (*Foundations*) and the concluding Modules, and another for the three central Modules. This will allow each one to interact with a wider number of Participants as well as deepen the discernment carried out between certain Participants over a longer period of time.

As for content, all Working Groups will address the same topic, dealing with the IL Sections one after the other. Within each Module, each Working Group will express the results of their discernment in a written *Report* that will capture the conclusions reached. This *Report* must be approved by the Group before being submitted to the General Secretariat.

In each Module, the work of the Groups will be structured by inspiration from the Conversation in the Spirit method, used in the First Session and suitably adapted to the aims of the Second (cf. sheet on the last page of the IL). In order to facilitate a more fruitful application, a Facilitator will be present in each Working Group, who will help the conversation from a methodological point of view without entering into the contents.

For each Module, the work of the Groups includes *three sessions*:

### *Working Groups-First session*

The first session of the Working Groups will include the first two steps of the Conversation in the Spirit.

Unlike in the First Session, the *first step* ("taking the floor") will be marked in two stages:

- in the first, each Group member takes the floor for a maximum of three minutes, highlighting the points of the IL Section under consideration that he or she believes are particularly valuable and worthy of acceptance in the Final Document;
- in the second each component takes the floor again for a maximum duration of three minutes, indicating the points of the IL Section under consideration that in his or her opinion need to be discussed, deepened, corrected.

**Each Participant is therefore invited to devote time, reflection and prayer as of now to the preparation of these two opening speeches of every Module;**

A third time will be devoted to the *second step* of the conversation in the Spirit ("making space for the Other"): each member, with reference to what he or she has heard in the other Participants' speeches, expresses what has touched him or her most deeply and what he or she feels most strongly challenged by, opening himself or herself to a common listening to the voice of the Spirit.

### *Working Groups-Second Session*

For each Module, the second session of the Working Groups will be devoted to the third round of the Conversation in the Spirit method ("building together"). Taking particular care to take up and deepen what was heard and shared in the first session, the Group will identify the most significant points and, above all, the issues on which it believes it is important for the Assembly to discuss and give its opinion. Taking particular care to capture and deepen what was heard and shared in the first session, the group will identify the main points and, above all, the issues on which it feels it is important for the Assembly to debate and express its views. On the basis of what emerged in the work previously carried out, the Group will agree on the list of points to be addressed and the time to be devoted to each one. The objective of the discussion on each point is to deepen consonances and divergences of opinion, in order to discern together, in a theologically founded dialogue, orientations

and proposals that will contribute to the advancement of the work of the Assembly. Compared to the first session, in this second one the work will be carried out in a more flexible and interactive manner, always preserving an atmosphere of prayerful listening and taking care that all the members of the Group express their point of view.

#### *Working Groups-Third Session*

For each Module, the third session of the Working Groups is scheduled after the General Congregations, with the aim of preparing the Report to be approved and handed over to the General Secretariat (see the indications on this below).

#### A new step: Language Tables and the preparation of an agenda for the Assembly

At the conclusion of the Conversation in the Spirit, representatives from the 36 Working Groups will meet, dividing into five Language Tables: two in English, one in Italian, one in French, one in Spanish and one in Portuguese. Representing their Working Group will be the appointed Rapporteur, who may delegate the Secretary if he or she deems it appropriate (he or she must, in any case, be a Member of the Synodal Assembly). Each of the five Language Tables will elect a Coordinator, will be animated by a Facilitator and will benefit from the presence of an Expert-Theologian.

The task of each Language Table will be to prepare a brief summary report of their work, to be presented at the next General Congregation. Based on the input from the Working Groups of origin, this summary report will identify the main issues to be discerned in the subsequent General Congregations, indicating the various reasons for their choices and highlighting important terms.

Subsequently, the Coordinators of the five Language Tables will meet with the General Relator, the General Secretary, the Special Secretaries and the President Delegate on duty, to draw up a proposed order of topics to be dealt with in subsequent General Congregations, under the responsibility of the General Relator. This list, which will be communicated to the Participants as quickly as possible, in both hard and soft-copy, will be submitted to a vote of the Assembly before the discussion begins.

#### In-depth discussion in the General Congregations

The General Congregations will hear the reports of the Language Tables and vote on the order in which the themes, presented by the General Relator, will be handled. The themes will be discussed one after another in the approved order.

In the discernment process conducted by the Assembly, the General Congregations most represent and render palpable the Church's universality and catholicity, within which the perspectives emerging from local contexts are called to place themselves and enter into dialogue. The President Delegate on duty will ensure that the discussion remains focused on the themes identified on the agenda to avoid the risk of dispersion. In the final General Congregation of each of Modules 2-3-4, time will be set aside for free interventions on the entire Section of the IL being discussed. At this time, more general reflections can also be expressed.

To assist the drawing up of the *Final Document Draft*, those who speak during a General Congregation are asked to forward the text of their intervention to the General Secretariat. Texts of interventions that, for various reasons, could not be delivered during the General Congregation may also be sent to the General Secretariat.

The General Congregations receive and listen to the contributions of the Working Groups through the Reports of the Language Tables and contribute to the discernment through free interventions. In this way they allow the Working Groups to re-read and possibly modify their

conclusions in light of the many other perspectives that have emerged from the conversation held in plenary. Finally, it is in the General Congregation that the first discussion and subsequent the approval of the *Final Document Draft* takes place.

The *Final Document* does not constitute the concluding point of the synodal process, but gathers the Assembly's orientation on the issues addressed, which is transmitted to the Holy Father, who is responsible for deciding how to relaunch it to the whole Church, opening the phase that the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* calls "implementation" (cf. EC par. 7 and Art. 4).

## The Working Group Report

Listening to the Reports of the Language Tables and the free interventions in the General Congregation allows each Participant to bring together, in an atmosphere of prayer, the perspective of their Group with all the others. On this basis, each Working Group, in the third session scheduled for each Module, will draw up a Report, reread and amended together, offering a complete account of the work carried out. It will then record the proposals that have emerged, along with their reasons, indicating any divergences in position. The group members will be asked to express their consensus not on whether they agree with each individual point, but on whether the report represents the work done together. After approval, the report will be delivered to the General Secretariat with an indication of the number of votes for and against and any abstentions.

## Drafting of the Final Document

The drafting of the *Final Document* takes place under the responsibility of the General Relator and the Special Secretaries, who, for this purpose, avail themselves of a dedicated group of Experts, with different editorial and linguistic skills. The drafting is carried out on the basis of all the materials produced during the two Sessions of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, taking particular account of the fruit of the discernment of the Second Session (Reports of the Working Groups, Reports of the Language Tables, amendments of the Working Groups, but also free interventions during the General Congregations, individual amendments and other interventions). In the appropriate manner, the official documents that marked the stages of the synod process will also be taken into account. The contribution of the Experts will be fundamental to order, analyse and synthesise all these materials, on the basis of Scripture and the living Tradition of the Church. In order to promptly begin the work of drafting, a draft Outline will be submitted to the Commission for the drafting of the Final Document for discussion and approval. On the basis of this Outline, the drafts of the various Parties will be submitted to the Commission on a step-by-step basis, gathering their evaluations and suggestions.