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Press Conference to present the *Instrumentum Laboris* and Methodology of the first session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission” (4 to 29 October 2023)

At 14.30 today, a press conference was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office, Saint Pius X Hall, Via dell’Ospedale 1, to present the *Instrumentum Laboris* and the Methodology of the first session of the 16th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission” (4 to 29 October 2023).

The speakers were: His Eminence Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary general of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops; His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, S.J., archbishop of Luxembourg, rapporteur general of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops; and Fr. Giacomo Costa, S.J., consultor of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

During the meeting, brief testimonies were presented by the following, regarding the preparation of the Members of the October Assembly and the possible use of the *Instrumentum Laboris* by local groups: Helena Jeppesen-Spuhler, *Lenten Action*, Switzerland, member of the Swiss delegation of the Continental Assembly of Prague; Sr. Ester Lucas, member of the Synodal team of SECAM, Theological Committee, who read via remote link the text prepared by Don Rafael Simbine Junior, secretary general of SECAM; and Sr. Nadia Coppa, A.S.C., president of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG).

The following are the interventions:

Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Mario Grech

Good morning. For those of us who are here today, it is truly a good morning. And we are confident that it is for all the Church. Indeed, with this press conference, the *IL* for the first session of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops this coming October is made public. Like every event of grace, this presentation too is a “today” of God, a “today” of the Church, a sign, small as it may be, but a sign, or if you prefer, a seed that can

produce many fruits: “thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold” (*Mk* 4:20). It is up to all of us, you too, dear journalists.

Someone might perceive this image of the seed as rhetoric. In reality, the text we are presenting is the fruit of a synodal process that – we have often repeated – has involved all the Church and everyone in the Church, with a view to the “perfecting” of the Synod of Bishops from event to process, as desired by Pope Francis (cf. *Episcopalis communio*, *EC* art. 4).

The purpose of the first phase was consultation with the People of God (cf. *EC* art. 5). The Synod does not begin next October, as though the process carried out so far were something superfluous or a simple preparatory act. The Synod began on 10 October 2021, with the opening celebration at Saint Peter’s. From then on, the first phase was structured in three phases: the first, in the local Churches, with the consultation of the People of God – the invitation was addressed to everyone, particularly on the peripheries and those who for one reason or another feel “excluded”; the second, in the Episcopal Conferences, with the discernment of the bishops on the contributions of the local Churches; and the third, in the continental Assemblies, with a further level of discernment with a view to the second phase of the Synod.

Necessary listening, because the Synodal Church is, by definition, a “listening Church”: listening to each other, and listening to the Holy Spirit to know what he says to the Churches (cf. Pope Francis, *Address on the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015). Listening to the People of God, first of all, because the People of God, participating in the prophetic function of Christ, is the subject of the *sensus fidei*, that is, that function of the sum of the baptized that is infallible *in credendo* (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 12). I know that many do not understand or underestimate this function, maintaining that the People of God does not have the tools to offer a real contribution to the synodal process. For me, this is a grave insult. And if it is true that within the Holy People of God, there are those who suffer from a sense of inferiority, this is not their fault! In reality, lived experience has demonstrated the opposite: where bishops have initiated and accompanied consultation, the contribution has been lively and profound. The same applies at the level of parishes, congregations of consecrated life or lay associations and movements, where leaders have accompanied and stimulated consultation.

Nor is it to be feared that listening to the People of God has compromised the pastoral function of the bishops. On the contrary, the synod process has restored to the bishops a fruitful ministry, both as pastors of their Churches and as members of the collegial bodies that have been called upon to carry out a careful discernment of the contributions of the consultation, first in the Bishops' Conferences and then in the Continental Assemblies. During these two years I met bishops who were previously sceptical, but as they walked more closely with the People of God entrusted to them, they found an invaluable treasure!

I am not afraid to describe the first phase, which has engaged the Church for two years, as a process of profound circularity between prophecy and discernment: prophecy, because all “have been anointed by the Holy One” (1 *Jn* 2:20); discernment, because inspirations must be scrutinised (cf. 1 *Jn* 4:1). What the Apostle said applies to the synod process: “Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 *Thess* 5:19-21).

The *IL* is the fruit of this listening process, the point of arrival of a “journey together” that also offers itself as a starting point for the second phase of the Synod, that of the dual Assembly in October 2023 and October 2024.

I insist on this point, responding to those who fear that the Synod’s conclusions have already been written. The greatest concern of the Synod Secretariat and mine personally was to always respect what emerged from the stages of the synod process. We did this right from the *Preparatory Document*, when we asked what steps the Spirit invites us to take to grow as a synodal Church. We did it with the *Document for the Continental Stage*, when we gathered the voice of the Churches. We are doing it now, with the *IL*, which reports the entire listening of the first phase through the discernment of the Continental Assemblies. It is about respecting the Holy Spirit who - Pope Francis often repeats it - is the protagonist of the synodal process. To presume to write the conclusions first would be tantamount to blaspheming the Spirit (cf. *Mt* 12:31)!

You will not find in the text a theoretical systematisation of synodality, but the fruit of a Church experience, of a journey in which we have all learned more, by the fact of walking together and questioning ourselves on the meaning of this experience. I can say that the *IL* is a text in which no one's voice is missing: that of the Holy People of God; of the Pastors, who have ensured ecclesial discernment with their participation; of the Pope, who has always accompanied us, supported us, encouraged us to move forward. The *IL* is also an opportunity for all God's people to continue the journey they have started, and an opportunity to involve those who have not been involved so far.

Therefore, I like to conclude that the *IL* is not a document of the Holy See, but of the entire Church. It is not a document written at desk. It is a document in which everyone is a co-author, each person for the role he or she is called to carry out in the Church, in docility to the Spirit. And it is the Holy Spirit we invoke, that he may sustain us in the forthcoming phases of the synodal process, so that we can continue "with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:1-2).

Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, S.J.

It is a great honor and joy for me to present you the Instrumentum Laboris for the Synod of Bishops. Let me first give you an information what the document is not meant to be: it is no document which after several amendments by the Synod participants should lead to a final version to be voted on at the end of the Synod. It is not a tentative answer to all questions about Synodality. It is rather the result of the synodal process on all levels, a result which leads to many questions which could receive answers by the participants of the Synod of Bishops. The text structure and the structural dynamics of the Synod Assembly are intimately connected.

The text first gives a narration of the synodal process the Church has undertaken. The text is based on a myriad of personal and communitarian experiences. The Church is in Synod: by trying to walk together we experienced a new art of walking led by the Spirit. In this Church experience the method of conversation in the Spirit was fundamental: the same conversation in the Spirit will be our main tool for discernment!

The text leads us to a matter of discernment, a discernment about concretization of communion, mission and participation.

How can we grow in communion, welcoming everybody without exclusion while remaining faithful to the Gospel?

Which acknowledging each baptized person's contribution to our common mission?

How can we identify governance structures and dynamics for participation in a missionary Synodal Church?

Mission is an important aspect present as much in communion and participation.

Each of these three priorities is linked to five working sheets: these five different approaches take into consideration the diversity of persons as well as the diversity of the different social, cultural and religious contexts we have experienced during the synodal process.

This text is extremely short: in the English version 24 pages for the two parts:

For a Synodal Church. An integral experience and Communion, participation, mission. Three priority issues for the synodal Church.

Pages 25 to 60 reflect the Working Sheets. An introduction and a guide for use introduce us to the Working Sheets.

Each working sheet gives us a short reflection, fruit of the discernment during the synodal process and is followed by a fundamental question for the discernment in the different working sessions of the Synod of Bishops. Each participant also finds different points for prayer and preparatory reflection. These questions have to be put in the general framework of how answering the call of the Spirit and how growing as a synodal Church. The Holy Spirit is the real protagonist of the Synod.

Let me give you some titles of the working sheets and the questions for discernment:

A communion that radiates.

How does the service of charity and commitment to justice and care for our common home nourish communion in a synodal Church?

Walking together means not leading anyone behind and remaining alongside those who struggle the most.

How are we building a synodal Church capable of promoting the belonging and participation of the least within the Church and in society?

How can a synodal Church make credible the promise that “love and truth will meet” (Ps 85.11)?

How can the Church of our time better fulfill its mission through greater recognition and promotion of the baptismal dignity of women?

How can we properly value ordained Ministry in the relationship with baptismal Ministries in a missionary perspective?

How do we understand the vocation and mission of the Bishop in a synodal missionary perspective? What renewal of the vision and exercise of episcopal ministry is needed for a synodal Church characterized by co-responsibility?

You see by these examples that the text of the Instrumentum Laboris has no pretense to be a theological treaty about synodality. The text does not give answers but merely put questions.

The bishops as those called to be those who perfect the discernment started in the worldwide synodal process have to fulfill their episcopal mission and try to give some answers.

Allow me a trivial comparison: the text is like a cooking book. The chef cooks receive that book together with some ingredients: their mission is to put the different ingredients together in order to please the different palates? An impossible task, you might think... if in the background the Holy Spirit is not guiding to find a new food harmony.

Harmony-Consensus-lead by the Spirit: those are words which describe the way this text has to be used.

Intervention of Fr. Giacomo Costa, S.I.

The methodology of the Synodal Assembly

My task now is to present to you the working method that we shall follow during the Synodal Assembly in October 2023.

The reference framework for the conduct of the Assembly obviously remains the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* (C), in particular articles 13-18. The proposed methodology is therefore in continuity with that of the most recent Assemblies, with some variations. These are partly due to practical reasons, linked to the increase in the number of members. There is an increase in the number of bishops: some twenty more than at the last Ordinary General Assembly, in 2018, given the growth in the number of bishops in the world. And non-bishops are increasing, following the participatory extension approved by Pope Francis in April. A total of about 370 Assembly Members, excluding experts, are expected, while in 2018 there were 267 Synod Fathers, plus about 50 auditors.

But the changes are above all necessary to take into account the not insignificant changes in the synodal process, and in particular the fact that we arrive at the Synodal Assembly after a long phase of consultation and listening, which allowed the seven continental Assemblies to express a series of priorities.

Among these, the desire to continue to use for listening and discernment in common the method of conversation in the Spirit, which has profoundly marked the consultative phase of the synod path, emerged in a surprisingly clear way.

The method of conversation in the Spirit

The conversation in the Spirit can be described as a shared prayer with a view to common discernment, for which the participants prepare through reflection and personal meditation. They will give each other a thoughtful word nourished by prayer, not an opinion improvised on the spot. However, the conversation is dulled if the different voices are not articulated and the fruits of the encounter are not gathered, in a missionary dynamism that points to action. Conversation in the Spirit is more fruitful, the more all participants engage in it with conviction, sharing experiences, charisms and ministries in the service of the Gospel. Based on these contributions, discernment will help to identify the concrete steps that the Holy Spirit invites the Church to take in order to grow in communion, mission and participation.

The experience of the consultation phase shows how conversation in the Spirit opens up “spaces” in which to address even controversial issues together, those on which in society and in the Church there is more frequent confrontation, in person or through social media, than exchange. In other words, conversation in the Spirit offers us a viable alternative to polarization.

The dynamic of conversation in the Spirit articulates three basic steps, to be interpreted in different situations. The first is devoted to each person taking the floor, starting from his or her own experience reread in prayer during the time of preparation. The second passage aims to build bonds: each person takes the floor to express what touched him or her most profoundly during the listening and when he or she heard the Holy Spirit make the voice resound. This is possible the more each person cultivates familiarity with the Lord, through meditation on the Word and sacramental life, thus growing in the ability to recognize His voice. Finally, in the third step, again under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the key points that emerged during the conversation are identified and the fruits of the common work are gathered, in view of the move to action; in particular, the aim is to reach an inclusive consensus, in which each person can feel represented, without neglecting marginal points of view or neglecting the points in which dissent emerges, which should not be eliminated but subjected to discernment.

It is thus clear that the Synodal Assembly is called to live a spiritual process of seeking the will of God, and not the dynamism of parliamentary bodies, in which confrontation concludes with a vote that divides the majority from the minority. It offers an opportunity to listen to brothers and sisters in Christ, and through them, the Spirit, who as Pope Francis repeats, is the authentic protagonist. Those who have never had this experience struggle to understand this dynamism, which is a qualifying point of the working methodology.

The different steps of the Assembly

The work of the Assembly will be structured in five segments, in accordance with the development of the *IL* (cf. figures 1 and 2), with the introduction, compared to the past, of some moments of common prayer and some liturgical celebrations, in addition to the prayer with which each session opens and closes.

In the first segment of the proceedings, the Assembly will address Section A of the *IL*, which is entitled “For a Synodal Church. An integral experience” and expresses the lived understanding of synodality gained during the consultation phase. The aim will be to further focus on the fundamental characteristics and the way forward of a synodal Church.

The fruit of this work will constitute the horizon within which to address the three priority issues that emerged from the consultation phase and are presented in Section B of the *IL*, which expresses them by linking them to the three key terms of the Synod: communion, mission and participation.

As explained at no. 44 of the *IL*, the change in the order in which the three terms appear, with mission in the central place, is rooted in the awareness of the links that unite them, which developed during the first phase. In particular, communion and mission intertwine and mirror each other. We are driven to overcome a dualist conception, in which the relationships within the church community are the domain of communion, while mission is about the *ad extra* impetus. Finally, participation can only be understood in its relationship with communion and mission. On the one hand, it represents an instance of concreteness that makes communion and mission more solid, on the other hand, it finds in the first two a finalistic orientation that prevents it from turning into the frenzy of individual rights claims.

Each priority issue (B1-B2-B3) will be developed in a specific segment of the Assembly, thanks to the work on the Fact Sheets just presented by Cardinal Hollerich.

The Work Sheets - five for each priority issue - constitute the second part of the *IL*. They are designed as a practical aid to facilitate the work of the groups (*circuli minores*). Each worksheet offers a question for discernment, preceded by a contextualisation based mainly on the final documents of the Synodal Assemblies, and followed by a series of cues for prayer, personal reflection and group work. These cues articulate different perspectives and dimensions of the life of the Church, while maintaining the link with the experience of the People of God gathered in the listening phase. Thus, the worksheets are not treatises on a theme, nor chapters of a book to be read in succession. Each one is a kind of gateway to deal with the priority issue with which it is associated and can also be dealt with without having to consider the others.

The aim of the work on Section B is to identify concrete steps that the Holy Spirit is calling us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church, and to develop proposals at different levels, from the local to the universal.

The organization of the work in segments does not eliminate the connection between the two sections. The synodal experience of the People of God addressed in Section A represents the horizon within which we place the treatment of the priority questions posed in Section B. It is necessary to maintain the tension between the overview and the identification of the steps to be taken. The latter give incisiveness and concreteness to the overview, while the overview helps us to maintain cohesion and avoid getting lost in the details.

The fruits of the assembly work

The last segment of the work will be devoted to gathering the fruits and formulating them into a text that makes them communicable and, in the case of the more concrete proposals, also implementable in the time span between the two sessions (2023 and 2024). Voting will make it possible to grasp the consensus that this formulation elicits.

This is not a conclusion. Between the two sessions we will continue to walk together in the Churches and between the Churches, to re-read this experience of the People of God and to promote the necessary further exploration, particularly from the theological, canonical and pastoral point of view. The aim of the two sessions remains to present the Holy Father with concrete proposals for growing as a synodal Church. To this end, it is important to identify which barriers stand in the way and to deepen the issues on which sufficient consensus has not yet matured. The year between the two sessions will be of crucial importance in order to test how to deal with them and offer further elements for discernment at the assembly in October 2024.

The place

One last word concerns the place where the Synodal Assembly will take place. It is in the Vatican, of course, but it is the Paul VI Hall. It is large enough to accommodate all the participants, whereas in the New Synod Hall there would barely be space for the members, let alone the experts. But above all, the Paul VI Hall can be arranged with tables at which groups of a dozen or so can sit, making the transition between plenary sessions and group work quicker and above all facilitating the dynamic of conversation in the Spirit. Thus, those who are familiar with the images of previous Synod Assemblies, prepare to be surprised when they see those of October 2023.

Heartfelt thanks

I cannot conclude without beginning to express my gratitude for the work you are doing and will be doing in October: the Synod will address issues of great importance for the future of the Church, the effort to build a working methodology that will allow for constructive and fruitful work has been enormous (even if only to draft documents from an unprecedented amount of material). But to bear fruit, this effort needs to be communicated, to be circulated. Thanks therefore to the Dicastery for Communication and the Press Office for their support - we will continue to take advantage of it! - as well as to Thierry Bonaventura and his collaborators in the Synod Secretariat and in different parts of the world. And thanks also to all of you for your work.

Intervention of Helena Jeppesen-Spuhler

Thank you very much for the invitation to the press conference and in a special way many thanks to the Synod Secretariat for the very creative and participative organization of the worldwide "Synodal Process" so far. This process has brought a new momentum and hope for a renewal process to the Church. I myself have participated in the process at various levels in Switzerland, and most recently in Prague, where I also worked on the continental phase of the synodal process at the European level.

I can witness that in all the phases so far, the following is particularly noteworthy: Our concerns and needs are being heard. We are not simply Christians who are expected to receive and accept rules and prescriptions. How we as faithful understand the Christian faith in our specific context is now of interest. And in the respective texts, in which the results of the listening and discerning processes were summarized, our concerns are really taken up. They are testimonies that we are on the way to a synodal church, it means journeying together and learning from and with each other!

The synodal process opens the chance to discover how in the different local churches and bishops' conferences worldwide the message of the Gospel is understood and proclaimed. For us as Catholic Christians in Switzerland, it is important to enter into a dialogue with the delegates from the various countries and continents at the next phase in Rome in October and to learn how - through the work of the Holy Spirit - new ways of

synodal participation have already been developed and can be further developed.

How we in Switzerland are preparing for this phase *can only be understood* if we take note of the fact that several synodal elements have already been developed in our country since the Second Vatican Council. This testifies to the fact that we have already had good experiences with a more synodal church, entirely in the sense of the early church principle: "What touches all should be considered and approved by all".

For such a church, everyone bears responsibility, that is, the entire people of God as a whole and not just the bishops and the clergy.

For example:

- It will surprise many that, in the financial-administrative area in many parts of the church in Switzerland really all bear responsibility, have a say and are involved in the decision-taking. At the parish level there are parish assemblies, the parishes send delegates to the cantonal assemblies which are called "synods" and the cantonal level sends delegates to the national level of decision-making and -taking. This structure was developed according to our Swiss cultural and political context and it does not look the same in all parts of Switzerland.
- After the Council, the question of a shared pastoral responsibility was also raised. In the pastoral councils elected by the people of God as a whole, the upcoming consultations on pastoral priorities and necessities, at the parish level are made together and the implementation is carried out accordingly.
- Such participatory processes are also particularly significant for the catholic youth and the catholic women's organizations, who not only have their own sphere of formation and responsibility in their associations, but also have an impact on the parishes and communities and on the Church at the parish, cantonal, diocesan and national levels.
- From this synodal context, the Church in Switzerland has already had an impact for the Universal Church also in the liturgical field: after the Council, it developed four Mass Canons, approved by Rome and they are available today to the Church as a whole.

These few testimonies prove that the Church in Switzerland is already on a synodal journey. It is therefore natural for us that the IL is being discussed by many in preparation of the Synod in October. The young people for example will hold an assembly, a kind of small national "pre-synod" in September also in order to prepare their stay in Rome in October. The IL will also be discussed by the women's organizations, some diocesan councils, with the delegates of Prague, with the national and the diocesan synodal groups and within the bishops' conference. The feedbacks of the different discussions will be summarized for our delegates so that they can testify our synodal process in October.

It is important for us that the participants of the synod don't only represent themselves but before going to Rome listen carefully to the voices of the portion of the people of God to whom they belong.

For the accompaniment of the Swiss delegates in October in Rome we are still preparing how to do this in the best way.

It is important for us to share our experience and to listen how the IL is being taken up in other countries from their various contexts and cultures and how together - listening to the Holy Spirit - we can give the Church in its worldwide diversity a real synodal face: for all the baptized have a responsibility to proclaim the Gospel. The gospel for the good of the whole family of humankind and the creation. This responsibility has to be realized in word and deed and in strengthening the commitment of the universal church for our common home.

Intervention of Don Rafael Simbine Junior

The text will be read by Sr. Ester Lucas (in Portuguese), member of the Synod Team of SECAM, Theological Committee.

SHARING THE AFRICAN PREPARATION PLAN FOR THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY

The African Synodal Continental Assembly marked a significant milestone in the journey of the Church in Africa towards embracing synodality. It provided an inclusive platform for delegates from across Africa and its islands to engage in a spiritual synodal journey, guided by the Document for the Continental Stage (DCS). In preparation for the Synod on Synodality in Rome, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), in collaboration with the African Synodality Initiative (ASI), has planned a seminar to prepare SECAM's delegates.

Through this seminar, we hope to help SECAM delegates achieve many things. First, to acquire a deep knowledge and clear understanding of the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synodal Assembly and its implications for the Church in Africa. Second, to deepen the use of the Conversation in the Spirit, drawing on the experiences from the African Synodal Continental Assembly, in order to foster meaningful and inclusive conversations, and active listening and dialogue as essential elements of synodality. Third, to review and reflect on the African Synodal Document, which was adopted as the official document for the African Church during the Continental Assembly, in order to deepen delegates' familiarity with its content and recommendations and to ensure its integration into their contributions and conversations during the Synodal Assembly. Finally, to reflect on critical and important African issues to be shared during the Synod, including unique challenges, aspirations and contributions of the Church in Africa, thus enabling the African delegation to speak with a united voice and effectively address the concerns of the Church in the African context.

We hope that an enhanced understanding of the *Instrumentum Laboris* by SECAM delegates will enable them to actively contribute to conversations during the Synodal Assembly. Also, the African delegation will be equipped to identify and articulate with clarity and depth key African issues, ensuring that the concerns, challenges and aspirations of the Church in Africa are well represented during the Synodal Assembly.

During this seminar, ASI and SECAM will equip the African delegation with the necessary knowledge, skills and perspectives to actively contribute to the Synodal Assembly in Rome. This seminar will reinforce the spirit of synodality and ensure that the Church in Africa speaks with one voice on the issues that concern it in order to shape the future of the Church and address the specific challenges and opportunities in the African ecclesial context.

Intervento di Sr. Nadia Coppa, A.S.C.

We know that the word "synodality" comes from the Greek words "syn" (together) and "hodos" (road, path). This is, according to John Chrysostom, the definition of the Church (cf. *CFI* 55, 493): it is entering into this journey together with the whole people of God, born of baptism and with the anointing of the Spirit: this is the path that God expects from the Church in the Third Millennium and this is a road that is travelled together guided by the Spirit that is realized through the communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist, the fraternity of communion and the co-responsibility and participation of the entire people of God, at various levels and in the distinction of the different ministries and roles.

The experience of synodality is first and foremost an experience of the Spirit, it is an open path, not mapped out in advance, which is woven through encounter, dialogue and sharing that comes to broaden and change everyone's vision.

To be a synodal Church, we read in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, is to recognize the common dignity deriving from Baptism, which makes those who receive it sons and daughters of God, members of his family, and therefore brothers and sisters in Christ and sent to fulfil a common mission (no. 20). It is to be a Church of listening, which marks and transforms all the relationships that the community establishes with its members, with other faith communities and with society as a whole (no. 22).

In order to enter into the style and practice of synodality, we need to cultivate the spiritual aptitudes of encounter and dialogue, of the hospitality that embraces and includes all, of the humility that prompts us to ask for forgiveness and to learn from everyone. We need to feel that we are a Church in dialogue, ready to promote the passage from “I” to “we”, willing to seek the truth and not let ourselves be crushed by tensions. The need to stand beside one another in planning and working for the building of the Kingdom emerges strongly. We need a style of co-participation devoid of any form of supremacy, in favour of circularity and co-responsibility.

Entering into synodality means accepting to set out on a journey, to live as pilgrims in a pilgrim Church; it is a dance together in which all, pastors and faithful, thanks to a living dialogue and a sharing in trust, move in relationship with one another, in mutual and common listening to the music of the Spirit. Synodality is an experience of incarnation that demands that we listen to the real, to the cry of the poor and to the needs of the world.

And the experience of the renewal of a Church that increasingly becomes a relational, inclusive, dialoguing and generative Church, that is to say, a Church that allows itself to be formed and reborn, in the dynamism of the Spirit and thanks to those who bring it to life.

Synodality is not a path marked out from the start and requires opening up to the unexpectedness of God who, through listening to others, comes to touch us, to shake us, to shape us inwardly; it is a path of discernment in common of an assembly rooted in the Eucharist that becomes aware of itself and sets out together. It is fundamentally a call to conversion in order to develop and produce a missionary communion at the service of the world.

The five UISG delegates of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) will embark, with all the other participants in the synod, on a journey that aims to “energise the life and evangelising mission of the Church”. The *Instrumentum Laboris* will serve as an itinerary for profound personal and collective discernment. The proposed worksheets, in fact, are very useful for a discernment in the spirit, as they offer *an outline for prayer and personal reflection in preparation for the exchange in groups or in plenary*, and focus on the three fundamental themes: *Communion that radiates – “How to be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of unity of the human race?”*; *Co-responsible in mission – “How to share gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?”*; *Participation, responsibility and authority. - What processes, structures and institutions in a missionary synodal Church?”*.

The document will be read attentively by every sister who will be present at the Synod, and then shared together as a group with the method of spiritual conversation. Through prayer and personal and group reflection, it will be possible to discern together how and where the Spirit is calling the Church in today’s reality.

The UISG (a world organization of almost 2000 leaders of female religious congregations) intends to present the document to its members in the coming days through an online webinar translated into various languages.

We will also try to involve women religious from around the world, their co-workers and those among whom they live, inviting them to begin a process of reflection and discernment so that they too can offer insights and reflections from different contexts and cultures. We will share some of the questions indicated in the cards in order to welcome the wisdom of the other sisters and offer it to the participants as a contribution.

For the UISG, this is the beginning of a long process - a long journey of change and transformation in which we feel called to engage. We know from lived experience that synodality is not only a theology, but also a spiritual practice, it is a *modus vivendi et operandi* that must be cultivated and lived.

Both on a personal and community level, synodality calls us to a dynamic of following and bearing witness to the Lord who is in our midst and is inviting us to learn how we must walk together and with the whole Church in a new way. We are open to the newness of God. Pope Francis reminded us that synodality is not a chapter in an ecclesiastical manual, much less a fashion or a slogan to be flaunted in our meetings. Synodality is an expression of the nature of the Church, its form, its style and its mission. He goes on to say that we must not *hold* a synod, but *be* a synod.

As sisters ministering in the governance of women's religious congregations, we feel called to develop a way of living and governing that manifests itself and is marked by the three interconnected pillars of the synodal Church: *Communion; Co-responsibility in mission; Participation, responsibility and authority.*

We will study how the document calls us to live these three key elements by promoting ongoing formation on synodality, aimed at deepening the insights that the worksheets offer. They are very useful because they develop these key elements by touching on different and important perspectives (theological, pastoral, canonical...). It will be important for us to promote a style of governance that develops participatory structures and processes in which members can discern together a new vision for the Church and for the mission of each individual Congregation. The *Instrumentum Laboris, which is very rich and articulate, because of the variety of what was gathered from the consultation,* offers us a clear and effective means of inviting all members to embrace a process of renewal and transformation that we all desire for the good of the *Missio Dei*.
