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Press Conference to present the “Instrumentum laboris” for the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2 to 27 October 2024)

At 12 noon today, a press conference was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office to present the *Instrumentum laboris* for the Second Session of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2 to 27 October 2024) on the theme: *For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission*.

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

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Mario Grech

During the period between the First and Second Session, the synodal path continued to be characterized by a profound exercise of listening – listening conducted at several levels. It was thus confirmed that the Synod is, before all else, a formidable “gymnasium of listening”.

Besides, it was Pope Francis who affirmed that “A synodal Church is a Church which listens ... the faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit” (*Address for the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015). Previously, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Holy Father wrote: “We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing... Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth” (171).

It is not difficult to recognize the conciliar inspiration of these statements. Vatican Council II tells us about a Church that is simultaneously listening to God and listening to the men and women of her time, with their joys, hopes, sufferings and hardships (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 1). It tells us, in other words, that the Church, before being *Ecclesia docens*, is *Ecclesia audiens* (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 1), and only to the extent that she listens is she able to teach.

The listening of God and the listening of the world are not naturally on the same level. In reality, the Church is always and solely listening to the voice of God, and is not interested in demoscopic surveys. But it is also true, as the same Council teaches echoing the biblical lesson, that God speaks in many ways: certainly, through the Sacred Scripture, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit and to from which the Church must never tire of drawing, but also through the sense of the faith of the People of God, the voice of pastors and the charism of theologians, thanks to whom the same Spirit continues to increase understanding of the revealed Truth (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 12:25; *Dei Verbum*, 8:10), and to open new paths for proclaiming that Truth to the men and women of the various historical ages (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 119-120).

If, then, also in this “inter-session” time, we have listened to the People of God, just like the pastors and theologians who serve that People in a different way, it has been always and solely to research, with the certainly perfectible tools we have at our disposal, what God wants to say to the Church at this hour of her journey.

First of all, after the celebration of the First Session, the Synod “returned” - so to speak - to the local Churches, in accordance with a virtuous dynamism of circularity whereby what is done at the centre, through the work of some, is “returned” to all the others. This is the spirit that animates the document *Towards October 2024*, published on 11 December 2023, which launched a second consultation of the local Churches, asking them to refer to the *Synthesis Report* approved at the end of the First Session.

Despite the time constraints, no less than 108 National Syntheses prepared by the Episcopal Conferences reached the General Secretariat of the Synod, to which must be added nine responses received from the Eastern Catholic Churches, four from the International Meetings of Bishops' Conferences and the Synthesis of the Union of Superiors General and the International Union of Superiors General representing Consecrated Life. This rich material, to which one must add the Observations freely sent by individuals and groups (including even some Faculties of Theology and Canon Law), constitutes the load-bearing framework of the document that is being presented today, because - faithful to that circular movement I mentioned earlier - its purpose is now to submit to the discernment of some - the Members of the Synod, who will meet again in October - what has been said by all - the local Churches in which the People of God live.

Within this People, then, some voices in particular needed to be heard: those of those who, by virtue of the ministry and/or charism received, are in a special way qualified to give expression to the common faith. Theologians are certainly among them: it is in this sense that, on 14 March last, the General Secretariat of the Synod made official the constitution of five Study Groups, composed of 33 experts of different backgrounds and expertise, required to explore some of the basic issues that pervade the Synthesis Report: the missionary synodal face of the local Church (1), of groupings of Churches (2) and of the universal Church (3), as well as the synodal method (4) and the question of “place”, to be understood not only in a geographical sense, but in a cultural and inseparably theological sense (5).

The contributions of these Groups, which were active between the months of April and May, have also flowed into the *Instrumentum laboris* that is being made public today and will form the basis of a *Theological Resource Book* soon to be published, which will offer some lines of theological and canonistic study of the themes contained in the *Instrumentum*, to help the members of the Assembly recognize and understand the roots and implications of what is contained therein.

Those five Groups were joined on the same date by another ten, announced by the Pope in the Chirograph of 16 February 2024 on the collaboration between the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the Secretariat of the Synod, and set up by him on the following 22 February, with the task of exploring the same number of issues

emerging from the Synthesis Report of the First Session. These are issues on which the Synodal Assembly has already reached a significant consensus and which, therefore, seemed sufficiently mature to be able to move on to the phase of drawing up concrete proposals for reform to be submitted to the Holy Father.

These Groups are coordinated in a spirit of collaboration by the Secretariat of the Synod and by the curial Dicasteries from time to time competent, as foreseen by the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* (art. 20, § 1) and the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (III, art. 33). These Groups are already operational or, in some cases, will be soon: they will present an initial report of their activities on the occasion of the Second Session, to offer their conclusions to the Bishop of Rome possibly by June 2025.

In addition, a Commission of canonists, which has followed the work of the First Session and has recently met again, has been in operation since 2023. The purpose of this Commission, chaired by the Prefect of the Dicastery for Legislative Texts, is to study a project to reform the canonical norms directly involved in the synodal process. More recently, then, SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar), following up on a recommendation of the Synthesis Report (16q), launched a path of theological and pastoral discernment on the accompaniment of people in polygamous situations. These two bodies will also offer an initial report on their activities next October.

Listening to the theologians and canonists, of course, would not be sufficient on its own. It was necessary to listen again and more, in these months, also to the voice of the pastors. While the Bishops had many tools at their disposal to make their voices heard - the work of synthesis carried out by the Episcopal Conferences, the sending of Representatives to the Synodal Assembly, the *ad Limina* visits, which from this year include a meeting with the General Secretariat of the Synod (since January we have met with 339 bishops, from 26 Episcopal Conferences) -, for some time we had noticed an insufficient involvement of the Presbyters, especially those engaged in pastoral care. From this realization arose - in agreement with four Dicasteries of the Curia - the initiative "Parish Priests for the Synod", which from 28 April to 2 May brought together in Sacrofano (Rome) around 200 priests from 96 countries. On the last day they received from the Holy Father the mandate to become "missionaries of synodality" to their Bishops and Brothers. Their voices also resound in the document that is published today.

Finally, in this last month in which the *Instrumentum laboris* has gradually taken shape, as many as 70 people have been approached and called to give their contribution, in presence or at a distance: bishops and presbyters, consecrated men and women, laymen and laywomen. Among them are biblical scholars, theologians, canonists, and experts in the humanities. After an intense work session - held in Rome between 5 and 13 June, with the participation of 25 experts, including members of the Preparatory Commission for the Synodal Assembly - contacts continued apace until the past few days. In this way, a colourful concert of voices came about, a true polyphony, rich in timbres and accents, of which the *Instrumentum laboris* for the Second Session of the Synod Assembly is the result and the testimony.

This document was unanimously approved by the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod, which met twice between the end of June and the beginning of July. Allow me, in this regard, to point out that since the beginning of the Synodal Way the Council has met - in presence or at a distance - no less than 17 times! Such dense participation has certainly guided the preparation and conduct of this Synod. For this reason, I am very grateful to the brothers who are members of the Council.

I hope that this process of prolonged, differentiated listening will help the Synod Church to discern the Word of Jesus for the men and women of today, a word that has the power to strengthen the messengers of the Gospel, heal the wounds of humanity, and ignite hope in our hearts. Please help us not to lose sight of this goal; your contribution is very important and appreciated.

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

The reports received by the General Secretariat of the Synod are fruits of the work that the local Churches did starting from the question *How to be a synodal Church in mission?* that marked this time between the two sessions and that was discussed in the light of the *Synthesis Report* of the First Session of the XVI Assembly.

All these reports show a living Church and a movement. In fact, what stands out most when reading not only the reports, but also the experiences and good practices that have reached the General Secretariat, is that the synod, the synodal process, has been and still is a time of grace that is already bearing numerous fruits in the life of the Church. From Kenya to Ireland, from Korea to Brazil, reports underline this renewed dynamism that listening offered and received is bringing to communities. Here, for example, is what the synthesis from Panama reports: 'Our Church is living a time of grace, in which we are listening to each other and being listened to. It is a blessing to be able to contribute, starting from our Panamanian ecclesial reality - clergy, married or celibate laity, pastoral workers and young people - and from our experience of faith and of people sent (...) The synodal process promoted by Pope Francis has marked a significant stage in the recent history of our Catholic Church, opening up a space for dialogue and reflection on the contemporary challenges that it has to face'.

Finally, the reports unanimously testify, without hiding the struggles and difficulties of synodal conversion, also a feeling of joy and gratitude, as reported by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: "Gratitude for this synodal journey is profound. Much has been done to move forward along the synodal path as partners in the Church in the United States"; in some cases even giving rise to new hope for the future of local communities. Here is what the Episcopal Conference of the Pacific writes about it: "Some diocesan reports mention the satisfaction of the participants in the synod process: they have learned that there is a real joy in walking together and also a sense of freedom.

The reports also tell, very concretely, what happened after the First Session of the 16th Assembly. Clearly, this intersessional time was marked by great diversity in the way the Churches carried out this second consultation: I would say with greater freedom and creativity in the way they took ownership of the process and, almost all of them, took the initiative to share the experience of the first session and the *Synthesis Report*. In fact, the reports tell of the many meetings to present not only the aforementioned document, but first and foremost the personal experience of the participants. The *Synthesis Report* itself has been translated into many local languages. In India, for example, it has been translated into as many as 12 regional languages and considerable efforts have been made to make this document and others, accessible to all, through the media, including social networks.

Another particularly interesting element was the widespread adoption of 'Conversation in the Spirit': this synodal method was introduced in the meetings of various church structures. In Japan, for example, a national assembly on synodality was organised precisely to practise this method. In India, "at the national level, the CCBI implemented the synodal method of Conversation in the Spirit for its strategic planning, consulting groups and individuals throughout the country, and found the method to be effective, Spirit-filled and fruitful. The success of the method lies in 'intentional speaking' and 'intensive listening', punctuated by 'inner silence'". The COL (Local Organising Committee) of the Archdiocese of Seoul itself has been using it since its first meetings to organise the next WYD.

Finally, I would like to mention the numerous formation initiatives on synodality: a theme that had already emerged strongly during the First Session. Training programmes on synodality have been implemented in many places (seminaries, theology faculties), by dioceses, associations, religious movements and congregations,... In Vietnam, for example, training courses were organised in the main seminaries and also for religious life. In French-speaking Africa, Sister Anne-Béatrice Faye, an expert at the Synod, has launched a school of synodality that is very popular. At the international level, let us recall the MOOC of Boston College that has seen the collaboration of many Synod experts, or the university course proposed by the *Evangelii Gaudium* Centre of Sophia University here in Italy.

Finally, I would like to share some fruits that the synodal path has so far brought. It is not for me to say or define them as such: it is the reports themselves. And I believe that this is already a first fruit of the journey because it allows us to appreciate a certain maturation in the synodal journey of the local Churches, especially if we compare these second reports to those at the beginning of the process. If the first ones emphasised more the

resistance and opposition to the synodal process, these reports emphasise more the weariness and fatigue of a path of conversion that is not immediate. This leads me to define a second fruit of this process: the *parresia* that the contributions reveal. Indeed, the summaries were written with great freedom and frankness of expression. Moreover, the fact that it was the local Churches themselves that identified the fruits of their journey through a rereading of their experience, of their path, leads me to identify another fruit: this capacity for rereading and self-assessment, which I am sure will help a great deal to make the need for transparency, accountability and evaluation as expressed in the *Instrumentum Laboris* more and more concrete.

This practice of re-reading has allowed local churches to highlight aspects of their culture that contain seeds of synodality or elements that hinder it. For example, Papua New Guinea points out that 'Synodality is embedded in the culture of the Melanesian people and, therefore, is a "lived" experience of our daily lives. ... We propose to deepen synodality by integrating our cultural values of goodness and beauty with the Gospel. Our values of life, community, relationships, justice and care for the environment guide our ways of relating, designing structures and processes of discernment and decision-making'. This greater openness to local culture and inculturation has led the Church in Lesotho, for example, to re-examine its relationship with traditional Sotho culture and changed the way it views various traditional cultural practices and its attitude towards the people who live them.

Then, of course, broader and more diverse participation with greater involvement of lay people, youth, women and marginalised groups. In Zimbabwe, for example, for the first time, the bishops opened their plenary assembly to more people from the entire people of God and created a national ad hoc office for people with disabilities. As many as eight dioceses decided to include at least one young person in each diocesan pastoral council.

I could go on for much longer. I have preferred to dwell on the fruits rather than on the demands emerging from the reports of the local churches, such as the strongly expressed desire for a Church of relationships, not bureaucratic or of structures, to show you that the Synod is already changing our way of being and living the Church regardless of the October Assembly. You will find the requests in the *Instrumentum Laboris* in the form of proposals (*propositiones*). These fruits, these developments clearly show the dynamism of conversion and reform underway. Synod is already having a significant and multidimensional impact on local churches, stimulating spiritual, structural and pastoral changes. Thank you.

Intervention of the Reverend Msgr. Riccardo Battocchio and Fr. Giacomo Costa, S.J.

Good morning to all of you present here, and those connected online. It goes without saying that the *Instrumentum laboris* (IL) is NOT a final document, but is at the service of the preparation and conduct of the Second Session of the Synodal Assembly. It serves as a basis for discussion, but is not a draft of the final document to be amended nor a complete compendium of synodal ecclesiology. It frames the theme of the Assembly and delves into some of the issues that will actually be addressed by the Assembly, whose work it is not meant to steal. That is why it would be wrong for it to offer answers.

Now, together with Don Riccardo Battocchio, we will present the structure and main contents of the document, which consists of an Introduction and four parts.

Introduction (Fr. Giacomo Costa)

The IL Introduction opens with a famous passage from the prophet Isaiah (25:6-8): the vision of the banquet to which the Lord invites all peoples. We are thus placed within the horizon of a salvation offered to all and within a missionary framework: as disciples of Jesus, we are required to proclaim the Good News to all and to share the joy of the Gospel. Only from this perspective does it make sense to deepen the theme of synodality.

Unlike previous documents, the expression “missionary synodality” appears only a couple of times. We have not changed our minds, but we take for granted the intrinsic link between synodality and mission. Instead of repeating it, we have highlighted in the Introduction how mission shapes all the contents that follow. After three years of journeying, to suggest that this journey is self-referential is bad faith. We respond together to Jesus’ call: in Him we are a people, in Him together we are a sacrament of union with God and with all mankind (Don Riccardo will explain this better in a moment).

By addressing the missionary impulse, the question of the Church in the world is touched upon. The vision of the banquet is in stark contrast with the reality of a world in crisis, whose wounds deeply touch the heart of the Lord and therefore of His disciples. Growing as a synodal Church, where we try to walk together despite tensions and even conflicts, is a prophetic vocation and commitment. We are called to be *pilgrims of hope*: the synodal journey is deeply connected with the upcoming Jubilee.

The missionary framework is followed by the presentation of the journey of the last three years, marked by a readiness to listen and to allow ourselves to be questioned. For what we have experienced, the text expresses immense gratitude: the joy of meeting and sharing, the discovery of the method of conversation in the Spirit, the beauty of the Church that we have been able to contemplate, the riches that each local Church can share with the others. As one African Bishops’ Conference put it: “After this experience, one can no longer consider and treat the local Churches simply as recipients of the proclamation of the Gospel, who have little or nothing to contribute”.

Certainly, there were and are tensions and conflicts. Accepting the fact that the Church is not homogeneous but harmonious, and that this harmony is not taken for granted but a gift of the Spirit: this is a fruit of the synodal journey. With this in mind, it would be good if everyone, starting with us here today, managed increasingly to put this harmony first, rather than ideas, ideologies or interests, which eventually come to destroy what they claim to want to preserve.

I will not present all the stages of the synodal process. However, I will only emphasize the intertwining between this *Instrumentum laboris* and the ten study groups set up by the Holy Father presented a short while ago by Cardinal Grech. The text contains punctual references to each of these groups: one can thus see that the themes that the groups deal with, while not being the explicit object of discussion, are structurally part of the work of the Assembly.

Foundations (Riccardo Battocchio)

The first section of the text is dedicated to the fundamentals that govern the path of conversion and reform that the People of God intends to follow in order to be more and more what it is by vocation: the Church summoned “from every tribe, language, people, nation”. It gathers the fruits of the journey begun in October 2021 (but which has more distant roots) and will allow the Assembly to verify the existence of a consensus on some decisive aspects of the Church: her being the People of God, her being “in Christ as sacrament”, her being “synodal”, in the plurality of faces and experiences, united not by an ideology but by the action of the Holy Spirit who makes harmony possible in differences. The first difference is that between men and women, called to promote relationships of reciprocity, of mutual recognition, through a change of mentality and practices. The contributions gathered from all the stages of the synod process highlighted the need to give greater recognition to the charisms, vocation and role of women in all areas of the life of the Church. There are possibilities for participation that often remain unexpressed. Further ministerial and pastoral forms should also be explored. The Episcopal Conferences indicated some concrete requests to be submitted for consideration at the second session (No. 16).

The *Instrumentum laboris* recognizes that theological reflection on women's access to the diaconal ministry should continue. This will also be done through the work of Study Group No. 5, dedicated to some theological and canonical issues around specific ministerial forms. This Group will take into consideration the results of the

two Commissions that have dealt with this issue in the past.

On this, as on other points, the first change to be made is that of mindset: a conversion of outlook, capable of recognizing and valuing the interdependence and reciprocity, in difference, of men and women.

These “foundations” outline the horizon that guides the journey of the People of God, indicated by the three perspectives in the *second section*.

Relationships (Don Riccardo Battocchio)

The first perspective is that of **relationships**: the founding relationship with God the Father, in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, sacramentally expressed in the journey of Christian initiation (IN Christ, IN the Holy Spirit); the relationship between the Baptized, to whom the Holy Spirit bestows the capacity to act, in the most diverse ways, for the good of all (charisms and ministries: FOR the People of God); the relationships that preserve and promote harmony, communion with the apostolic witness and among the Baptized (WITH the ordained ministers); the relationships BETWEEN the Churches.

The topics on which the Assembly will be called to give indications on some aspects of this relational dynamic: becoming a Christian (Christian initiation), charisms and ministries (baptismal ministries, some of which are “instituted” - there is also a proposal to establish a new ministry, that of listening and accompanying -, “ordained” ministries), relations between bishop, presbyters and deacons in the local Church, relations between the local Churches, in an “exchange of gifts” that is also open to other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and other religious and cultural traditions.

Pathways (Fr. Giacomo Costa)

A synodal Church is a relational Church: it emerges from the contributions received and is the desire of many, especially young people. After all, if we are here, it is precisely because the Holy Father heard their cry during the 2018 Synod.

To say relationships is to say movement, dynamics, processes. The Church, people of God and sacrament of unity, does not stand still: it is on the move. Only by walking is it possible to harmonize the constituent tensions of our faith. Therefore, we are invited to take care of relationships and keep them moving. This dynamism has a source, a support and a horizon: the Eucharist, that is, the gratuitousness of the Father's love that is made perceptible through the Son's gift of self in the Spirit.

This part thus focuses on four distinct but deeply connected areas: first of all, formation, especially in listening (to the Word of God, to the brothers and sisters, and to the voice of the Spirit). The need for formation is by far the most felt throughout the world. Many people sense in the synodal perspective something beautiful to which the Lord invites us, but they also feel inadequate: they lack the words and the ways to move forward. They thus call for a formation that moves and challenges mentalities and cultures, an integral formation, with common and shared moments between laity, consecrated persons and priests.

The need for training in personal, community and ecclesial discernment is perceived in a particular way: the perception of the difference between pastoral planning and letting oneself be led by the Spirit is at stake here. Gradually the term “discernment” is becoming more familiar. It is important that it does not remain a label but that its depths are discovered. Discernment requires first of all listening to the Word of God, stepping out of our comfort zone; if we are not constantly listening, we too easily mistake our will for His. The method of conversation in the Spirit, duly adapted and integrated, is considered of great help (remembering that the

method is not a technique).

Discernment is intrinsically linked to decision-making. This opens up an essential issue for a synodal Church: how to develop participatory modes of decision-making while respecting the different roles, in the circularity of dialogue (between all the members of the People of God that does not devalue consultation, set it against deliberation or turn it into a claim. The decision-making competence of the authority (the bishop, the Episcopal College, the Roman Pontiff) is inalienable, but not unconditional. Many good practices show how important progress is made on this point where mutual trust can grow: sharing them with a view to exchanging gifts can bring great wealth into circulation. The question of participatory bodies and their revitalization in a synodal key is set in this context.

The last chapter of this section picks up on a point that the First Session had already insisted on: the call for transparency, accountability and an evaluation that, in a circular manner, relaunches discernment for mission. It is not a question of giving in to a fashion of our times, but of re-engaging with the tradition of the original community. Transparency and accountability are not limited to the area of sexual and financial abuse. It must also concern pastoral plans, methods of evangelization and the ways in which the Church respects the dignity of the human person, for instance with regard to working conditions within its institutions. And also the initiatives taken in the area of safeguarding (protection of minors and vulnerable persons) and promoting women's access to positions of authority and their participation in decision-making processes.

Places (Don Riccardo Battocchio)

The third perspective, closely connected to the others, is that of places. Here the *Instrumentum laboris* presents the concrete contexts in which relationships and paths are embodied. Acknowledging the variety and plurality of ecclesial experiences, it invites us to overcome a static vision of places and not to stop at a pyramid image of relations between “ecclesial places”. The synodal path has made us more aware of the fact that today the lived experience of territorial rootedness has changed compared to even just a few decades ago (recall phenomena such as urbanization, human mobility, the culture of the digital environment). Place is no longer defined only geographically: it recalls a web of relationships and calls for a rethinking of certain aspects of the Church's territorial articulation, enhancing the circular and dynamic relationship (the “mute interiority” that now exists between parish, diocese or eparchy, ecclesiastical province, and universal Church).

Instruments and processes must be identified that avoid both closure in the particular and the flight into an abstract universalism.

In the perspective of “places”, the Assembly is called to address issues such as the promotion of participatory bodies in the local Church, the relations between the Churches and their bishops (Episcopal Conferences, Particular Councils), and the service to the unity of the Bishop of Rome in a missionary synodal Church. Over the years, reflection on the developments that the Synod of Bishops (the place where the relationship between synodality, collegiality and primacy is manifested) as well as reflection on the forms of exercise of the pope's ministry open to the 'new situation' of the ecumenical path, towards the visible unity of Christians, has embarked on an irreversible path that is anything but optional.

Conclusions (Fr. Giacomo Costa)

In the first phase of the synod process and during the First Session we were confronted with the question “Synodal Church, what do you say about yourself?”. Thus, we gained a deeper awareness of the “characteristic signs of a synodal Church” and the dynamics of communion, mission and participation that structure it. In this phase and then during the Second Session, we address the question of *how*: how can the identity of a synodal

People of God in mission take concrete form in the relationships, paths and places in which the life of the Church unfolds?

The working methodology of the Second Session will be the subject of a specific presentation later on. Moreover, it would have been impossible to finalize it without having the definitive text of the *Instrumentum laboris*. Certainly, we can already say that there will be four modules, corresponding to the four sections of the IL. We will also continue to use the Conversation in the Spirit, with the necessary adaptations to a text that does not contain notes and questions like the IL of the first Session. There will be no lack of prayer times, starting with the initial retreat: we have seen that they change the quality of being together and dialogue. At the beginning, we will also present the fruits of the “Parish Priests for the Synod” meeting, the progress of the work of the ten Study Groups and that set up by SECAM on discerning the theological and pastoral implications of polygamy for the Church in Africa. This time we will not end with a synthesis Report, but with a final Document at the conclusion of both Sessions: we will face its approval with a congruous time of prayer on the text, so that we can make an effective discernment.

This will bring to an end the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, and also the office of General Rapporteur and Special Secretaries. On the other hand, the synodal process, which, in the configuration given to it by the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio*, also includes the implementation phase, will not end. The floor will then return in the first place to the Holy Father, to whom the Assembly will offer its conclusions, and then again to the whole People of God, who in each local Church will be called to put into practice the call to grow as a missionary synodal people.
