

Final Document Take-aways

Kieran O'Mahony OSA

Pope Francis has written a note to accompany the Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, a text that captures the results of the two-year-long Synod of Bishops on Synodality which Pope Francis called for in October 2021 that concluded in October 2024. Pope Francis then goes on to describe the Document as part of the "ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter" and asks that its authoritative nature be respected as such. "It represents a form of exercising the authentic teaching of the Bishop of Rome", explains the Pope, adding that "it contains elements of novelty but aligns with what I clarified on October 17, 2015, when I stated that synodality is the proper interpretive framework for understanding hierarchical ministry".

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2. KEY PASSAGES FROM THE FD

§ 5. Rooted in the Tradition of the Church, the entire synodal journey took place in the light of the conciliar Magisterium. The Second Vatican Council was indeed like a seed thrown onto the field of the world and the Church. The daily life of believers, the experience of the Churches in every people and culture, the many testimonies of holiness, and the reflection of theologians represented the soil upon which it has taken root and grown. **The Synod 2021-2024 continues to draw upon the energy of that seed and develop its potential, putting into practice what the Council taught about the Church as Mystery and Church as People of God, called to holiness through a continual conversion that comes from listening to the Gospel.** In this sense, the synodal journey constitutes a further act of reception of the Council, thus deepening its inspiration and reinvigorating its prophetic force for today's world.

§ 21. The synodal journey of the Church led us to rediscover the root of the varieties of charisms, vocations and ministries: “we were all baptised into one body [...] and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ” (1 Cor 12:13). Baptism is the foundation of Christian life. This is because it introduces everyone to the greatest gift, which is to be children of God, that is, to share in Jesus' relationship to the Father in the Spirit. **There is nothing higher than this baptismal dignity, equally bestowed upon each person, through which we are invited to clothe ourselves with Christ and be grafted onto Him like branches of the one vine.** The name “Christian”, which we have the honour of being called, contains the grace that is the basis of our life and enables us to walk together as brothers and sisters.

§ 43. Synodality is primarily a spiritual disposition. It permeates the daily life of the Baptised as well as every aspect of the Church's mission. **A synodal spirituality flows from the action of the Holy Spirit and requires listening to the Word of God, contemplation, silence and conversion of heart.** As Pope Francis stated in his opening address of the Second Session, “the Holy Spirit is a sure guide and [...] our first task is to learn how to discern his voice, since he speaks through everyone and in all things” (Address to the First General Congregation of the Second Session of the XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 2 October 2024). A spirituality of synodality also requires asceticism, humility, patience and a willingness to forgive and be forgiven. It welcomes with gratitude and humility the variety of gifts and tasks distributed by the Holy Spirit for the service of the one Lord (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-5). It does so without ambition, envy or desire for domination or control, cultivating the same attitude as Christ who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil 2:7). We recognise the fruits of a spirituality of synodality when the daily life of the Church is marked by unity and harmony in pluriformity. No one can progress along the path of authentic spirituality alone; we need support, including formation and spiritual accompaniment, both as individuals and as a community.

§ 66. Mission involves all the Baptised. The first task of lay women and men is to permeate and transform earthly realities with the spirit of the Gospel (cf. LG 31.33; AA 5-7). At the behest of Pope Francis (cf. Apostolic Letter issued “Motu Proprio” Spiritus Domini, 10 January 2021), the synodal process urged local Churches to respond with creativity and courage to the needs of the mission. This response should involve discernment among the various charisms in order to identify which of these should take a ministerial form and thus be equipped with adequate criteria, tools and procedures. **Not all charisms need to be configured as ministries, nor do all the Baptised need to**

become ministers, nor do all ministries need to be instituted. For a charism to be configured as a ministry, the community must identify a genuine pastoral need. This should be accompanied by a discernment carried out by the pastor, who, together with the community, will make a decision on whether there is a need to create a new ministry. As a result of this process, the competent authority reaches a decision. A missionary synodal Church would encourage more forms of lay ministries, that is, ministries that do not require the sacrament of Holy Orders, and this not only within the liturgical sphere. They can be instituted or not instituted. Further reflection should be given to the most effective way of bestowing lay ministries at a time when people move from one place to another with increasing ease, specifying the times and areas of their exercise.

77. The lay faithful, both men and women, should be given greater opportunities for participation, also exploring new forms of service and ministry in response to the pastoral needs of our time in a spirit of collaboration and differentiated co-responsibility. In particular, some concrete needs have emerged from the synodal process. These ought to be responded to according to the various contexts:

- a) increased participation of laymen and laywomen in Church discernment processes and all phases of decision-making processes (drafting, making and confirming decisions);
- b) greater access of laymen and laywomen to positions of responsibility in dioceses and ecclesiastical institutions, including seminaries, theological institutes and faculties, more fully enacting existing provisions;
- c) greater recognition and support for the lives and charisms of consecrated men and women and their employment in positions of ecclesial responsibility;
- d) a greater number of qualified lay people serving as judges in all canonical processes;
- e) effective recognition of the dignity and respect for the rights of those who are employed in the Church and its institutions.

§ 84. The steps of ecclesial discernment will differ depending on the various places and their traditions. **Based on the synodal experience, we have identified some elements of discernment which should be included:**

- a) clearly setting out the object of discernment and disseminating information and the means for adequately understanding it;
- b) giving sufficient time for prayerful preparation, for listening to the Word of God and for reflection on the question;
- c) an inner disposition of freedom regarding one's own interests, both personal and as a group, and a commitment to the pursuit of the common good;
- d) listening attentively and respectfully to each person's voice;
- e) searching for the widest possible consensus which will emerge when our hearts burn within us (cf. Lk 24:32), without hiding conflicts or searching for the lowest common denominator;
- f) the leaders of the process formulate the consensus in such a way that allows the participants to say whether they recognise themselves in it or not. The discernment process should lead to a mature acceptance by all of the decision, even by those whose individual opinions are not accepted. The process should also provide for a period for reception by the community that will lead to further review and assessment.

§ 88. The community of disciples convoked and sent by the Lord is neither uniform nor shapeless. It is His Body composed of diverse members, a community with a history within which the Reign of God is present as a “seed and beginning” at the service of His coming amongst the whole human family (cf. LG 5). The Fathers of the Church reflect on the communal nature of the mission of the People of God with a triple “nothing without”: “nothing without the Bishop” (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Trallians* 2,2) “nothing without your advice [of Presbyters and Deacons] and the consent of the People” (St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Letter to the Brothers Presbyters and Deacons*, 14,4). **When this logic of “nothing without” is disregarded, the identity of the Church is obscured, and its mission is hindered.**

§ 121. **The Church, both at the local level and by virtue of its Catholic unity, aspires to be a network of relationships which prophetically propagates and promotes a culture of encounter, social justice, inclusion of the marginalised, communion among peoples and care for the earth, our common home.** The concrete realisation of this requires each Church to share its own resources in a spirit of solidarity, without paternalism or subordination, with respect for diversity and promoting healthy reciprocity. This includes, where necessary, a commitment to healing the wounds of memory and to walking the path of reconciliation. The exchange of gifts and the sharing of resources among local Churches belonging to different regions fosters the unity of the Church, creating bonds between the Christian communities involved. There is a need to focus on the conditions necessary to ensure that Priests who come to the aid of Churches needing clergy are not providing merely a functional solution but represent a resource for the growth both of the Church that sends them and the Church that receives them. Similarly, it is necessary to ensure that economic aid does not degenerate into the mere provision of welfare, but also promotes authentic evangelical solidarity and is managed transparently and reliably.

§ 142. The formation of missionary disciples begins with and is rooted in Christian Initiation. In each person’s journey of faith, there is an encounter with many people, groups and small communities that have helped foster their relationship with the Lord and introduce them in the communion of the Church: parents and family members, godparents, catechists and educators, liturgical leaders and those providing charitable services, Deacons, Priests and the Bishop himself. **Sometimes, once the journey of Initiation is over, the bond with the community weakens, and formation becomes neglected. However, becoming missionary disciples of the Lord is not something achieved once and for all. It demands continuous conversion, growing in love “to the measure of the full stature of Christ”** (Eph 4:13) and being open to the gifts of the Spirit for a living and joyful witness of faith. This is why it is important to rediscover how the Sunday Eucharist is formative for Christians: “The full extent of our formation is our conformation to Christ [...]: it does not have to do with an abstract mental process, but with becoming Him” (DD 41). For many of the faithful, the Sunday Eucharist is their only contact with the Church: ensuring it is celebrated in the best possible manner, with particular regard to the homily and to the “active participation” (SC 14) of everyone, is decisive for synodality. In the Mass, we experience synodality coming to life in the Church as a grace received from above. This precedes the synodality that comes about as the result of our own efforts. Under the presidency of one and thanks to the ministry of a few, all can participate at the twofold table of the Word and the Bread. The gift of communion, mission and participation - the three cornerstones of synodality - is realised and renewed in every Eucharist.

§ 147. Shared synodal formation for all the Baptised constitutes the horizon within which to understand and practise the specific formation required for individual ministries and vocations. **For this to happen, it must be implemented as an exchange of gifts between different vocations (communion), in the perspective of a service to be performed (mission) and in a style of involvement and education in differentiated co-responsibility (participation).** This request, which emerged strongly from the synodal process, often requires a demanding change of mentality and a renewed approach to both formation contexts and processes. Above all, it implies an inner readiness to be enriched by the encounter with brothers and sisters in the faith, overcoming prejudices and partisan views. The ecumenical dimension of formation cannot but facilitate this change in mentality.