



GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD

PATHWAYS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE OF THE SYNOD

2025 - 2028



For a synodal Church

communion | participation | mission

“ we are «**a missionary Church, a Church that builds bridges and encourages dialogue, a Church ever open to welcoming**, like this Square with its open arms, all those who are in need of our charity, our presence, our readiness to dialogue and our love» (Leo XIV)

We are living a time of great spiritual intensity. The passing of Pope Francis has touched us all deeply, and we still pray the Lord to welcome him into his peace and grant him the reward for his service to the Church. At the same time, we give thanks to God for the election of the Holy Father Leo XIV, who from the very beginning has spurred us on in our commitment to the synodal journey, reminding us that we are «**a missionary Church, a Church that builds bridges and encourages dialogue, a Church ever open to welcoming**, like this Square with its open arms, all those who are in need of our charity, our presence, our readiness to dialogue and our love»¹.

This is the same belief that deeply animates the Final Document (FD) of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, "For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission," which was approved at the end of the Second Session of the Synodal Assembly on October 26, 2024. **The synodal form of the Church is at the service of its mission**, and any change in the life of the Church is intended to make it more capable of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and witnessing to the Gospel of the Lord to the men and women of our time. This is the key to faithfully interpreting the FD and, above all, to putting it into practice. We live in a world that is caught up in a spiral of violence and endless war, which increasingly struggles to create opportunities for encounter and dialogue, with a view to the common good and peace. More than ever, it needs a Church that knows how to be «in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race» (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 1; cf. FD, no. 56). In the variety of settings in this world, the Synod «constitutes a further act of reception of the Council, thus deepening its inspiration and reinvigorating its prophetic force for today's world» (FD, no. 5).

It is the urgency of this mission that drives us to implement the Synod, a task for which all the Baptised share responsibility. Many local Churches throughout the world are enthusiastically pursuing this path. We wish to thank them and invite them to continue their journey with generosity: they are carrying out a valuable commitment for the whole Church. This text can offer them a framework for consideration and, above all, it invites them to share their initiatives, contributing to the broader ecclesial discernment. Other Churches are still wondering how to proceed with the implementation phase or are taking their first steps. We encourage them to move forward courageously, facing any resistance and difficulties, whether practical or substantive, with freedom and parrhesia: they too have a valuable contribution to offer, and it would be a loss for the whole Church if their voice remained silent.

¹ LEO XIV, *First apostolic blessing*, 8 May 2025.

The General Secretariat of the Synod remains at the disposal of all of them, to listen to them, accompany them, support their efforts and, above all, contribute to animating dialogue and the exchange of gifts between the Churches, for the benefit of the whole Church and its unity. This is how we intend to carry out the task of accompanying the implementation phase of the Synod entrusted to us by Pope Francis on 11 March last year. Pope Leo XIV confirmed this on 26 June last, during his first meeting with the XVI Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod, encouraging us to continue. The intention is to ensure that the process move forward with a deep concern for the unity of the Church «harmonizing this reception across different ecclesial contexts»², without undermining the responsibility of each local Church. By placing itself «in line with the indications of the *Final Document*, the aim is to **concretely realise the perspective of the exchange of gifts between Churches and within the whole Church** (cf. FD, nos. 120-121) »³.

The *Pathways* proposed here are situated within this perspective of service. We convey them to the entire People of God, who are the subjects of the synodal journey, and in particular to the Bishops and Eparchs, to the members of the synodal teams and to all those who are involved in various ways in the implementation phase. The aim is of making them feel our support and continuing the dialogue that has characterised the entire synodal process. The content of this text is in fact rooted in the feedback received from the Churches over the past few months and in the fruits of the experiences they have shared. **Building on the contributions and questions it will receive from the Churches and on what will appear to be useful, the Secretariat will offer further insights and tools** to accompany and support the common effort, in the hope of collaborating to make the implementation phase of the Synod even more fruitful.

Let us entrust this new step on the synodal journey along which we are proceeding together as the People of God to the intercession of Mary, Queen of Apostles and Mother of the Church, and of Saints Peter and Paul, whose solemnity we celebrate today.

Vatican, 29 June 2025

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul Apostles

Mario Card. Grech

Secretary General

² *Letter on the Accompaniment Process of the Implementation Phase of the Synod*, 15 March 2023, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2025/03/15/0186/00366.html#en>.

³ *Ibid.*

Presentation

These *Pathways*, prepared by the General Secretariat of the Synod with the favourable opinion of its Ordinary Council and approved by the Holy Father Leo XIV, are part of the General Secretariat's service of accompaniment during the implementation phase of the Synod. They have a twofold purpose. On the one hand, they aim to offer local Churches throughout the world a **shared framework** that will make it easier to walk together. On the other hand, they promote the **dialogue** that will lead the whole Church to the Ecclesial Assembly in October 2028, according to the following stages, already communicated in the *Letter* of 15 March last:

- June 2025 – December 2026: implementation activities in local Churches and their groupings;
- first semester of 2027: evaluation Assemblies in Dioceses and Eparchies;
- second semester 2027: evaluation Assemblies in national and international Episcopal Conferences, Eastern hierarchical structures and in other groupings of Churches;
- first four months of 2028: continental evaluation Assemblies;
- October 2028: Ecclesial Assembly in the Vatican.

The text of the *Pathways*, which will be followed by others as needed, outlines the implementation phase and answers some fundamental questions that have often been addressed to the Secretariat in recent months. It is structured as follows:

- 1. What is the implementation phase and what are its objectives?**
- 2. Who will participate in the implementation phase? What are their tasks and responsibilities?**
 - 2.1. The responsibility of the diocesan or eparchial Bishop
 - 2.2. The task of the synodal teams and participatory bodies
 - 2.3. The role of the groupings of Churches
 - 2.4. The service of the General Secretariat of the Synod
- 3. How to engage with the FD during the implementation phase?**
 - 3.1. Preserving the overall vision
 - 3.2. Investing in concrete practices
- 4. What method and tools can help shape our path during the implementation phase?**
 - 4.1. Ecclesial discernment
 - 4.2. A synodal approach to designing and accompanying processes



**The implementation phase
aims to examine new practices
and structures that will make
the life of the Church more
synodal**

1. What is the implementation phase and what are its objectives?

This is the last of the three phases of the Synod provided for in Articles 19-21 of the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* (EC, 15 September 2018); it follows the phase of consultation and listening to the People of God (held in 2021-2023), and the celebratory phase, which included the two sessions of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2023 and October 2024) and brought to a conclusion the discernment carried out on the basis of listening to the People of God. As EC explains: «the synodal process not only has its point of departure but also its point of arrival in the People of God, upon whom the gifts of grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit through the gathering of Bishops in Assembly must be poured out» (no. 7).

The implementation phase was opened by Pope Francis with the *Accompanying Note* of 24 November 2024, in which he entrusted the FD to the entire Church. In an unprecedented act in the history of the synodal institution, he declares that **the FD «participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter** (cf. EC 18 § 1; CCC 892) » and asks that it be accepted as such. **It is therefore the FD, in its totality, that is the point of reference for the implementation phase.** At the same time, the *Note* recalls that its application requires various mediations: «The local Churches and groupings of Churches are now called upon to implement, in their different contexts, the authoritative proposals contained in the Document through the processes of discernment and decision-making provided for by law and by the Document itself» (*ibid.*).

The implementation phase aims to examine new practices and structures that will make the life of the Church more synodal, starting from the overall perspective outlined in the FD, with a view to more effectively carrying out the mission of evangelisation. This work includes the necessary theological and canonical study and, above all, a commitment to discern what is most appropriate and potentially fruitful in different local contexts. Concretely, the priority is to offer the People of God new opportunities to walk together and reflect on these experiences in order to reap their fruits for the mission and share them.

Emphasis on the importance of experience does not mean that the implementation phase consists of some sort of exercise or additional task demanded from Rome: it is part of the ordinary life of the Churches and inspires their daily practices. **Every local Church, every parish community will be able to practise synodality within its ordinary pastoral ministry**, improving the way it carries out its mission through the ecclesial discernment that the Holy Spirit asks of us today. The FD invites local Churches to **also identify «formation pathways to bring about a tangible synodal conversion in the various ecclesial contexts»** (FD, no. 9). The implementation phase therefore aims to have a tangible impact on the life of the Church and on the functioning of its structures and institutions. If it were to be limited to the formulation of abstract hypotheses, it would not achieve its purpose and, above all, it would dissipate the enthusiasm and energy that the synodal process has generated so far.

Furthermore, the implementation phase is **an opportunity to preserve that exchange of gifts which fosters the communion of local Churches within the one Church**, manifesting its Catholicity while respecting legitimate diversity. The creativity that inspires new ways of practising synodality and enhances the fruitfulness of mission springs from these differences. For this reason, the fruits of the experiences gained in different contexts need to be shared, nourishing dialogue between the Churches. In the implementation phase, a new process of dialogue therefore begins in each Church and between the Churches, based on the FD.

It should also be emphasised that the implementation phase is not a step backwards, nor does it propose a mere repetition of what has already been experienced: the steps and objectives are quite different. **The point of reference is the FD**, which expresses the consensus reached at the end of the discernment process by the Pastors from all the Churches and which, as part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter, commits the entire People of God by indicating the direction in which to proceed. Rather, the experience of various Churches over the last few months shows how fruitful it is to reconnect with the journey made in the previous phases and with what has been learned through it, in order to give back to the local Church, the fruits of the process that has involved the other Churches and the whole Church.

Growing as a synodal Church requires knowledge that can only be gained through experience and it introduces us to an encounter with the Lord. This is what the participants in the Synodal Assembly experienced first-hand; it is no coincidence that the FD begins by testifying how «we felt His presence in our midst as we lived conversation in the Spirit and listened to one another: the presence of He, who, in bestowing the Holy Spirit, continues to build among His people a unity that establishes harmony amidst differences» (FD, no. 1). This is also the experience that has been and continues to be made in local Churches and in various groupings of Churches.

The implementation phase began shortly before the opening of the Jubilee of Hope. This coincidence has prompted us to schedule an important event in the coming months: the **Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies**, scheduled for 24–26 October 2025, which will be organised by the General Secretariat of the Synod. It will be a grace to be able to experience together a profound moment of spirituality, in union with the whole People of God, and it will also be an opportunity to forge bonds, exchange experiences and attune ourselves better in view of the upcoming events.

2. Who will participate in the implementation phase?

What are their tasks and responsibilities?

The implementation phase is an ecclesial process in the full sense. It involves all the Churches in their role as recipients of the FD, and therefore the entire People of God, women and men, in the wide range of charisms, vocations and ministries by which it is enriched and in the various forms in which its life is concretely lived (small Christian communities or basic ecclesial communities, parishes, associations and movements, communities of consecrated men and women, etc.). Since synodality is «a constitutive dimension of the Church» (FD, no. 28), this cannot be a path limited to a core group of ‘supporters.’ On the contrary, **it is important that this new process contribute concretely «to expand possibilities for participation and for the exercise of differentiated co-responsibility by all the Baptised, men and women»** (FD, no. 36) in a spirit of reciprocity. Moreover, it is crucial that it aims to involve those who have so far remained on the margins of the ecclesial renewal process established by the Synod, such as «between individuals and groups with diverse cultural identities and social conditions. Of particular concern in this regard should be those people made poor and those who are excluded » (*ibid.*). Numerous Churches have launched initiatives aimed at making the commitment to be a listening Church part of their everyday life, and many report that listening to young people is a priority. Furthermore, particular attention should be paid to listening to those who have expressed doubts and resistance to the synodal process: in order to truly walk together, we cannot lose the contribution of their point of view.

For this reason, all Churches are invited to **continue searching for appropriate means of listening to the wide variety of contexts in which the Christian community lives and works**, without limiting themselves to the parish environment, as was sometimes the case during the listening phase, but rather involving schools and universities, listening and accommodation centres, hospitals and prisons, the digital environment, etc. At the same time, the implementation phase represents a favourable opportunity to **strengthen relations between the various components of the Christian community**, «in order to bring to life an exchange of gifts at the service of the common mission» (FD, no. 65), which involves communities and apostolic realities linked to Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, as well as associations, movements and new communities. «Their action, together with that of many individuals and informal groups, often brings the Gospel to highly diverse contexts» (FD, no. 118) and the journey of a synodal Church needs this dynamism.

2.1. The responsibility of the diocesan or eparchial Bishop

Precisely because this is an ecclesial process in the fullest sense of the term, **the first person responsible for the implementation phase in each local Church is the diocesan or eparchial Bishop**: it is his responsibility to initiate it, officially indicate its duration, methods and objectives, accompany its progress and conclude it, validating its results. This will be an appropriate opportunity to exercise authority in a synodal way, in line with the

statements of the FD: «He who is ordained Bishop is not charged with prerogatives and tasks that he must perform alone. Rather, he receives the grace and the task of recognising, discerning and bringing together in unity the gifts that the Spirit pours out on individuals and communities, working with Priests and Deacons in a way that reflects their common sacramental bond; they are co-responsible with him for ministerial service in the local Church» (FD, no. 69). Those who receive this gift and carry out this task can authoritatively recognise and confirm the synodal quality of the journey undertaken together by the ecclesial community and the fruits it has produced, thus promoting that unity of the Church which – as St John Paul II had said – «The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities» (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 46, cit. in FD, no. 39), and manifesting the action of the Spirit, the master of harmony. The Holy Spirit works freely, inspiring initiatives among the People of God where he sees fit: the task of authority is also to recognise these gifts, to welcome the invitation to broaden the vision that they always contain, to foster their fruitfulness and to promote diversity, so as to enrich the possibilities for the exchange of gifts that nourishes ecclesial communion.

Being «the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches» (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 23), Bishops are called to encourage and support the participation in the synodal process of all the members of the portion of the People of God entrusted to them. In fact, in every Diocese and Eparchy, there are some who have a lively desire to participate, which should be listened to: they are willing to commit themselves enthusiastically and can also offer valuable suggestions. Others, instead, need help to open themselves to the action of the Spirit, first of all by listening to their own resistance. In order to carry out this task effectively, in addition to the coadjutor Bishop and any auxiliary Bishops who may be present, diocesan or eparchial bishops should involve:

- a) the **Priests** and the **Deacons**. It is their task to collaborate with the Bishop « in discerning charisms and in accompanying and guiding the local Church with particular regard to the matter of safeguarding unity » (FD, no. 72). As the FD recalls, « The experience of the Synod can be a response to this reality, helping Bishops, Priests and Deacons to rediscover co-responsibility in the exercise of ministry» (FD, no. 74) and the synodal dimension of their ministry. Furthermore, in this manner, it will also be possible to promote greater involvement of Priests;
- b) the **participatory bodies at the diocesan level** (Presbyteral Council, Pastoral Council, and Finance Council), which, each in their own way, are involved in the processes of ecclesial discernment and in the elaboration of decisions that the implementation of the Synod inevitably entails. As the FD reminds us, «the structure and operations of these bodies need to be addressed. It is necessary to start by adopting a synodal working method» (FD, no. 105);
- c) the **diocesan or eparchial synodal team**, which is particularly responsible for animating the process (see the following paragraph).

In many places, experience has shown that the adoption of synodal procedures for ecclesial discernment and the elaboration of decisions in a synodal way, based on nos. 87-94 of the FD, does not undermine, but rather consolidates the authority of the Bishop and facilitates the acceptance and implementation of the decisions made.

2.2. The task of the synodal teams and participatory bodies

The consultation phase showed how valuable the work of the synodal teams has been: appointed and supported by the Bishop, they are essential tools for the ordinary animation of the synodal life of the local Churches. Their contribution will be essential in the implementation phase as well: for this reason, existing teams should be valued and, where necessary, renewed; those that have been suspended should be reactivated and appropriately integrated; and new teams should be formed where they have not been established previously.

The criteria for their composition remain those already outlined during the consultation and listening phase: **Laymen and Laywomen, Priests and Deacons, Consecrated men and women of different ages and from different cultures and formation background, representing the diverse ministries and charisms of the Church.** For this reason, it is not possible to define universally valid rules for their composition. Drawing on the experience gained so far, however, a few suggestions may be offered for consideration:

- a) to facilitate connection with the life and pastoral activity of the diocese, it would be good for some of the diocesan leaders to be part of the team;
- b) to ensure missionary orientation and avoid the risk of self-referential attitudes, - just as recommended for participatory bodies (cf. FD, no. 106) - , it would also be important to include in the synodal teams also people actively engaged in witness and apostolic service in everyday life and social contexts;
- c) it might also be worth considering inviting representatives of other Christian Churches and communities or other religions as observers;
- d) Nothing stands in the way of the Bishop being part of the synodal team; if this is not the case, he should be regularly informed about its work and meet with it when appropriate.

As for the requirements of individual members, knowledge of the FD is certainly essential, together with direct experience of synodal dynamics, particularly those experienced during the consultation and listening phase. In recent years, schools and training initiatives on synodality have been established at national and international level, which can also be used to strengthen the preparation of synodal team members.

Synodal teams with an appropriately diverse composition will more easily become laboratories of synodality, internally experimenting within themselves the dynamics they are called to promote among the People of God.

Their role in the implementation phase is first and foremost to promote and facilitate the growth of synodal dynamism within the concrete contexts in which each local Church lives; to identify appropriate tools and methodologies, including those for formation; and to carry out the necessary initiatives to ensure that the necessary steps are taken. Synodal teams are usually formed at the diocesan or eparchial level, but where possible, their presence at the deanery or parish level is also desirable. In various ecclesial contexts, interesting experiences are already developing, showing how these teams, when appropriately connected with one another, can contribute to making the synodal process more widespread and participatory. Furthermore, it is part of the task of animation to promote the availability and formation of facilitators and to coordinate their work.

The mandate of the synodal teams does not duplicate that of the participatory bodies, but is instead coordinated with it, in a spirit of seeking synergies. The synodal teams are established to serve the synodal animation and formation of the Diocese or Eparchy. Participatory bodies are called to carry out the proactive and consultative tasks assigned to them by Canon Law. It is therefore their task to contribute to the elaboration of the decisions required for the implementation of the Synod, with discernment of pastoral priorities or the renewal of structures and decision-making processes. Regular coordination and timely circulation of information will make everyone's work more fluid.

Ultimately, the synodal teams will have the task of **helping to gather the fruits of the implementation processes**, also in view of the evaluation phase and the Assemblies scheduled to begin in 2027. Here too, it will be up to the Bishop to recognise and confirm the validity of the reports in relation to the journey undertaken together by the diocesan community.

2.3. The role of the groupings of Churches

The FD, it too also rooted in the Council, is careful to emphasise that **local Churches are not isolated entities**, rather they are part of the bonds of communion that unite them, particularly through the communion of Bishops among themselves and with the Roman Pontiff.

In many cases, these bonds are informal, the result of a shared history, geographical proximity, partnerships, migration, perhaps chance encounters between people, and now increasingly through digital media, etc. In our highly connected society, no Diocese or Eparchy can think of living in isolation, without being affected, for better or for worse, by what happens in other places. These spontaneous and informal ties, which are not the result of deliberate planning, are a consequence of the times in which we live, but above all they constitute a treasure and a resource that we should become aware of in order to foster an increasingly articulated experience of our ecclesial identity.

In other cases, these bonds take on a structural form, governed by law, giving rise to institutions such as ecclesiastical metropolitan sees or provinces and, above all, Episcopal Conferences (national and regional) and Synods of Churches *sui iuris*, as well as International Meetings of Episcopal Conferences. These structures also play a role in the implementation phase, which the FD summarises as follows: «We suggest to the Episcopal Conferences and Synods of the Churches *sui iuris* to allocate personnel and resources to accompany the pathway of growth as a synodal Church in mission and to maintain contact with the General Secretariat of the Synod» (FD, no. 9).



In our highly connected society, no Diocese or Eparchy can think of living in isolation

Thus, they have two roles. Firstly, they are asked to: **support the processes** underway at the local level, especially where they are still in their initial stages, by stimulating the local Churches; **favour coordination** and networking among diocesan synodal teams; offer formation, taking into account the proposals of schools and initiatives for formation in synodality present in the various territories (in particular for team members and those most directly involved in encouraging the implementation process); **promote theological and pastoral reflection**, particularly with a view of an improved inculturation in the local context of the resources prepared by the General Secretariat. Carrying out these tasks at the local level would be more burdensome and would involve double the efforts: for this reason, in a spirit of subsidiarity, they can be better carried out at the level of groupings of Churches, without this diminishing the role of local Churches.

The second line of action concerns **communication with the General Secretariat of the Synod**, which at times will become increasingly important, for example when there will be a need to collect the contributions of the local Churches, organising them into national reports. More practical information will be provided as the details and deadlines for this phase become clearer. The Episcopal Conferences can, however, rely on the General Secretariat readiness to assist in overcoming any obstacles that may arise along the way.

In order to carry out this twofold task, it **will be important to reactivate and renew the national and continental synodal teams**, along the lines of what has already been said for the local ones. It will be up to them to carry out the concrete work.

In addition, there is a third task: the FD recognises the Episcopal Conferences as an instrument for expressing and realising episcopal collegiality and promoting communion between the Churches. Synodality therefore also involves rethinking the concrete modalities of their functioning. In no. 125 of the FD there are some specific indications in this regard, which clearly cannot be taken up by individual local Churches. It will therefore be important for groupings of Churches to engage in reflection and **experimentation on synodal ways of proceeding at their level**, the results of which will contribute to the evaluation phase.

2.4. The service of the General Secretariat of the Synod

The General Secretariat of the Synod was initially entrusted by Pope Francis, and then by Pope Leo XIV, with the role of animation and coordination through a process of accompaniment during the four-year period 2025-2028.

Within this framework, one of the primary tasks of the General Secretariat is to **foster communion** in the spirit of the exchange of gifts and with a view to the «conversion of bonds» (FD, Part IV) among Churches. Important tools for this purpose include listening to the experiences carried out in different ecclesial contexts and promoting shared reflection on them, so that together we can recognise the voice of the Spirit and direct our steps in the direction He indicates. The General Secretariat is called to foster ongoing dialogue among the Churches, facilitating communication and mutual exchange, above all through groupings of Churches, particularly at the continental level. With this aim, it will listen to the local Churches and gather their feedback, on the basis of which it will prepare notes and resources and circulate information and suggestions. In addition, it will propose meetings

that foster mutual listening, sharing of the journey and its fruits, and the communal expression of gratitude to the Lord.

The first of these events is the upcoming Jubilee of the Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies (24-26 October 2025). More detailed information on how other events will be organised and the feedback collected will be sent out as the process moves forward. For the time being, in order to ensure an orderly flow of communication and more effective coordination, it is essential that each Diocese or Eparchy register its synodal team in the database of the General Secretariat of the Synod⁴. We kindly ask each Bishop and Eparch to verify that this has been done.

A second task of the Secretariat is to **accompany diocesan and eparchial Bishops and synodal teams**, mainly through dialogue with the appropriate structures set up by groupings of Churches, particularly at the continental level. However, as much as possible, the General Secretariat is also available to accompany individual local Churches, as well as Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, associations, movements and new communities, or other ecclesial institutions that may request it, giving priority to Churches with fewer resources. **The General Secretariat is committed to “keeping the door open”⁵**, to listen to the needs, insights and proposals coming from local Churches, and to facilitate their work by seeking to respond to requests regarding the content and methodologies of the implementation phase.

A particularly important point is that of **encouraging the Churches to carry out their journey with a synodal approach**. The experience of those who have already begun the implementation phase confirms that content and decisions are important, but so are the ways in which they are addressed. Adequate structures and norms are indispensable, but they are not enough. The perspective and beauty of being a synodal Church have been understood in all their greatness by communities that have had direct experience of listening and participating in processes of discernment and decision-making. It is to this concrete and shared experience, under the guidance of the Pastors, often marked by the joy of the Gospel, that the Secretariat intends to continue to offer its attentive and timely service.

A third task consists in continuing **to coordinate the Study Groups**, in collaboration with the competent departments of the Roman Curia, in which pastors and experts from all continents also participate. Pope Leo XIV confirmed this task and also the addition of two new Study Groups (respectively on “The Liturgy in a Synodal Perspective” and “The Statute of Episcopal Conferences, Ecclesial Assemblies, and Particular Councils”). It is also the Secretariat's responsibility to ensure that the Pope's decisions, developed also on the basis of the findings of these groups, will then be harmoniously integrated into the ongoing synodal journey. With a view to further exploring the issues that have emerged during the synodal process, the Secretariat will also promote conferences and study seminars, encouraging opportunities for shared reflection and theological and pastoral reflection.

Finally, it will be particularly relevant the task to **accompany the organisation of the continental evaluation Assemblies (first four months of 2028) and to organise the**

⁴ Synodal teams can register in the database of the General Secretariat of the Synod by requesting a link at synodus@synod.va. This registration is not the same as the registration for the Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies.

⁵ The email address to write to is: synodus@synod.va.

Ecclesial Assembly in October 2028. In view of these events, it is useful to reiterate that evaluation is not a form of judgement or control, rather **an opportunity to ask ourselves what point we have reached in the process of implementation and conversion, highlighting the progress made and identifying areas for improvement** (cf. FD, no. 100): the Ecclesial Assemblies planned for 2027-2028 at various levels should be viewed in this light and will serve as opportunities to celebrate the gifts received, so that we may continue to grow together as a synodal Church committed to carrying out the mission received from Christ in the concrete circumstances of our time; they will also be an opportunity to put into practice concrete ways of combining synodality, collegiality and primacy in a faithful and creative manner, with a view to differentiated co-responsibility.

More precise details regarding the procedures and the themes to be covered in these Assemblies will emerge from the preceding dialogue process, as well as from the findings of the new Study Group whose task include also reflecting on them. What may already be anticipated is that they will be an opportunity to share experiences of renewal of practices and structures in a synodal perspective that the individual Churches consider sufficiently consolidated to be submitted to the Holy Father for final validation. They will also offer an opportunity to begin to address together the questions that will inevitably arise along the way.

“ a reading of the FD should be supported and sustained by both communal and personal prayer, centred on Christ, the Master of listening and dialogue (cf. FD, no. 51) and open to the action of the Spirit

3. How to engage with the FD during the implementation phase?

The FD is the point of reference for the implementation phase: therefore, this is why it is cited so extensively here. Consequently, it is essential to promote its knowledge, particularly among the members of synodal teams and those who, at various levels, are called upon to animate the implementation process. Since the FD is a rich and comprehensive text, it will be appropriate to provide (at the local, national or regional level) opportunities and/or tools for training, support and guidance in reading, which will enable people to grasp the inspiration that animates it and not just to get an idea of the issues addressed.

First of all, **a reading of the FD should be supported and sustained by both communal and personal prayer, centred on Christ, the Master of listening and dialogue** (cf. FD, no. 51) **and open to the action of the Spirit**: an abstract analysis of the text will not suffice. The FD proposes to the whole Church and to every baptised person the prospect of a journey of conversion: « the call to mission is, at the same time, the call to the conversion of each local Church and of the whole Church » (FD, no. 11). Like every journey of conversion, it involves a process of deepening insight and inner purification, which on a personal level is likely to lead to changes in choices, behaviour and lifestyles. On a community level, the renewal of categories of thought and culture in a synodal sense will be the ground on which new practices and renewed structures can develop.

The FD is a comprehensive document, animated by its own internal dynamism, which is the fruit of a long process of listening, discussion and discernment. It cannot therefore be considered a collection of guidelines on a variety of issues that can be taken out of the context in which they were envisioned. This would prevent grasping their meaning and therefore being correctly implemented. This is evident from its very structure.

In fact, *Part I* expresses the shared understanding of synodality, which is the result of the journey made, and outlines its theological and spiritual foundations, rooted in the Second Vatican Council. At the opposite extreme, *Part V* takes up the overall perspective and recalls that growing as a synodal missionary Church requires caring for the formation of all the members of the People of God. The Conclusion then recalls an eschatological perspective that guides the common mission to which all members of the People of God are called to collaborate.

Within this meaningful framework, *Parts II, III and IV* focus on certain concrete aspects of the life of the Church, formulating proposals for its renewal. In particular: *Part II*, « is dedicated to the conversion of the relationships that are formed in the intertwining of vocations, charisms and ministries » (FD, no. 11); *Part III* identifies three crucial practices to launch processes of “missionary transformation” (ecclesial discernment, decision-making processes, a culture of transparency, accountability and evaluation) and highlights the urgent need for renewal of participatory bodies; *Part IV* « outlines how we can cultivate new forms of the exchange of gifts and renew the intertwining of the bonds that unite us in the Church at a time when the experience of being rooted in a place is changing profoundly » (*ibid.*), reflecting upon the role of Episcopal Conferences and Ecclesial Assemblies and on the service of the Bishop of Rome.

3.1. Preserving the overall vision

Rather than offering a summary of the main contents of the FD, which may well prove to be an obstacle to accessing the text in its entirety, it seems preferable here to highlight **some of the key points** that are found throughout it, providing it with coherence and forming the criteria to direct and evaluate the decisions to be made. It is in this perspective that the concrete steps to implement the FD's recommendations should be rooted:

- a) firstly, the FD proposes a **precise ecclesiological perspective to refer to, rooted in the Second Vatican Council**: the synodal journey is in fact « 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» (FD, no. 5), in the awareness that each of its members, man or woman, has received the gift of the Holy Spirit;
- b) the **mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God**, inaugurated by Jesus and to which all the Baptised are called, each with the specificity of their own charisms, vocation and ministry, constitutes the backbone of the text and its ultimate goal. Reflections on the tools to be adopted or the reforms to be implemented should always be placed within the perspective of the mission, which is the fundamental criterion for all discernment in this regard. In particular, **the FD firmly promotes a Church that is increasingly courageous in its outreach**, to the extent that it asks communities to see themselves as « primarily devoted to the service of a mission that the faithful carry out within society, in family and working life. They will, therefore, not remain focused exclusively on the activities that take place within their own communities and upon their own organisational needs» (FD, no. 59);
- c) the **relational perspective** and the **logic of the exchange of gifts** as an expression of Catholicity are two other leading lines that run through the entire FD and therefore help guide its understanding and implementation. This can clearly be seen in the presentation of the figures of ordained ministers, in an integrated relationship with one another and with the entire People of God (cf. FD, nos. 69-74), or in the description of the bonds between local Churches through the communion between Bishops;
- d) the **ecumenical impulse** represents the development of the relational perspective and the logic of the exchange of gifts. It is therefore not an optional addition, rather a requirement that can be used to assess the dynamism of our journey together;
- e) lastly, the FD embraces the conciliar vision of a Church in the world, in **dialogue with everyone, with other religious traditions** (cf. FD, no. 41) **and with the entire community** (cf. FD, no. 42). Growing as a synodal Church capable of dialogue has a prophetic value that includes a commitment to social justice and integral ecology. These dimensions cannot be neglected in the implementation phase, leading to the creation of opportunities for dialogue based on the concrete needs of the territories and societies in which we live.

In addition to the leading lines mentioned above, the dynamism that animates the FD, and which the implementation phase is called to take on, derives from the **continuous articulation of certain polarities and tensions** that structure the life of the Church and the way in which ecclesiological categories express it. Here are some of these polarities: the whole Church and the local Church; the Church as the People of God, as the Body of Christ

and as the Temple of the Spirit; the participation of all and the authority of some; synodality, collegiality and primacy; the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood; ministry (ordained and instituted ministries) and participation in the mission by virtue of baptismal vocation without a ministerial form. Implementation of the FD requires addressing and discerning these tensions as they arise in the circumstances in which each local Church exists. The path to advance is not to seek an impossible arrangement that eliminates tension in favour of one of the sides. Rather, in the here and now of each local Church, it will be necessary to discern which of the possible balances allows for a more dynamic service of the mission. It is likely that different decisions will be reached in different places. For this reason, in many areas, **the FD opens up some spaces for local experimentation**, for example regarding ministries (cf. FD, nos. 66, 76, 78), decision-making processes (cf. FD, no. 94), accountability and evaluation (cf. FD, no. 101), and participatory bodies (cf. FD, no. 104). The individual Churches are invited to make use of them.

In the current social and cultural circumstances, one of these tensions seems to be taking on particularly new forms and requiring an effort of awareness. For this reason, the FD devotes an entire paragraph to it, significantly entitled «**Firmly rooted yet pilgrims**» (cf. FD, nos. 110-119). Traditionally, it is the bond with a place, understood in a spatial and geographical sense, that defines local Churches as portions of the People of God and constitutes the basis of people's sense of belonging. Phenomena such as urbanisation, increasing mobility and migration, and the spread of digital culture are profoundly changing the way people experience belonging: this now refers to networks of relationships rather than spatial settings, even though the human need for community ties remains unchanged. Indeed, their weakening renders **an effort of missionary creativity** even more urgent, enabling the Church to reach people and create bonds with them where they are (cf. FD, nos. 110-119).

During the evaluation phase, it will be important to gather the fruits of the experiences of local Churches in living polarities and tensions, and the results of missionary creativity efforts, with a view to exchanging good practices.

3.2. Investing in concrete practices

With attentive listening to the Holy Spirit, and within the ecclesiological vision that the FD receives from the Second Vatican Council, the specific objective of the implementation phase is to discern the steps of conversion of culture, relationships and ecclesial practices, and consequently of reform of structures and institutions. This is a crucial point in the entire process: «Without concrete changes in the short term, the vision of a synodal Church will not be credible, and this will alienate those members of the People of God who have drawn strength and hope from the synodal journey» (FD, no. 94).

The FD repeatedly emphasises that «**Local Churches need to find ways to implement these changes** » (*ibid.*), and in fact, this is the task to be addressed during the implementation phase. It is therefore not possible to indicate among the FD's many areas of attention those that are to be considered universally priority. Local circumstances may quite legitimately make it important and urgent to address a particular issue that does not have the same priority elsewhere: this may be the case of relations between the Latin Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches in some areas, or of ecumenical momentum or inter-religious

dialogue in others, which will require giving a specific form, including a structural and institutionalised one, to the commitment to walk together.

At the same time – and here we are referring to the polarity between the whole Church and the local Church mentioned above – **there is also a pressing need to move forward together as the Church as a whole**. Indeed, this is the main reason for launching the process of accompaniment and evaluation.

In this context, and considering the responsibility of each local Church in implementing the FD guidelines in its own context, it is already possible to foresee that, based on the 2021-2024 Synod process, local Churches will be called upon to share the steps taken in specific areas, in the manner and form deemed most appropriate. These areas include:

- a) the promotion of **synodal spirituality** (cf. FD, nos. 43-46);
- b) effective **access to positions of responsibility** and leadership roles that do not require the Sacrament of Holy Orders for women and men who are not ordained, whether lay or consecrated (cf. FD, no. 60);
- c) exploring and developing **forms of service and ministry** that respond to pastoral needs in different contexts (cf. FD, nos. 75-77);
- d) the practice of **ecclesial discernment** (cf. FD, nos. 81-86);
- e) the activation of **decision-making processes in a synodal way** (cf. FD, nos. 93-94);
- f) exploring and developing **appropriate forms of transparency, accountability and evaluation** (cf. FD, nos. 95-102);
- g) the obligation in dioceses and parishes to have **participatory bodies** provided for by law, and the renewal of their operating methods in a synodal key (cf. FD, nos. 103-106);
- h) holding regular **local and regional ecclesial Assemblies** (cf. FD, no. 107);
- i) the promotion of the **diocesan Synod** and the **eparchial Assembly** (cf. FD, no. 108);
- j) the renewal of **parishes** in a synodal and missionary spirit (cf. FD, no. 117);
- k) verifying the synodal character of the **journeys of Christian Initiation** (cf. FD, no. 142) and, in general, of the **formative programmes** and institutions dedicated to them (cf. FD, nos. 143-151).

This is certainly not an exhaustive list and will be further developed along the way, based on feedback from local Churches.

4. What method and tools can help shape our path during the implementation phase?

The journey of the entire synodal process has shown how crucial it is to have a method that is appropriate to the issues to be addressed. Indeed, to build a synodal Church, content and method very often coincide: meeting and dialoguing as brothers and sisters in Christ on how to better live the synodal dimension of the Church is an experience of synodal Church that opens up a better understanding of the theme. Therefore, **the synodal method is not reduced to a series of techniques for managing meetings, but it is a spiritual and ecclesial experience that involves growing in a new way of being Church**, rooted in the faith that the Spirit bestows on all the Baptised with His gifts, beginning with the *sensus fidei* (cf. FD, no. 81). Since it is not a technique, the methodology does not guarantee the desired result, because this depends on the openness to listening of those who take part in the journey and on their willingness to let themselves be transformed by the Spirit of Christ in communion with their brothers and sisters. This is another dimension of synodal conversion to which the FD invites the whole Church.

4.1. Ecclesial discernment

Numbers 81- 86 of the FD outline, in a concise but incisive manner, the profile of ecclesial discernment, that is, the method proper to a synodal Church. It will be necessary to refer to them, in the awareness that «the Church enjoys a wide variety of approaches to and well-established methods of discernment» (FD, no. 86). In this regard, it is worth recalling that conversation in the Spirit, which has undoubtedly been a distinctive feature and a factor of success in the synodal process, should be valued—even though it is not the only synodal method and, above all, is not synonymous with ecclesial discernment, to which it serves as a tool and preparation.

As mentioned in no. 85 of the FD, **ecclesial discernment requires the contribution of various types of expertise** for a more in-depth reading of the context and a clearer identification of what is at stake. It is not easy for these contributions to find an adequate place in the dynamic of conversation in the Spirit, which is first and foremost an instrument of encounter, of growth in relationship and of passage from the “I” to the “we”. Finally, since the implementation phase will require concrete decisions to be made with a view to renewing practices and structures, **the decision-making processes should be fully ecclesial, recognising the specific role of authority**, especially that of diocesan or eparchial Bishops, who are primarily responsible for communion in the Churches entrusted to them and among the Churches.

In practical terms, among the requirements for a good discernment process, a clear definition of its objectives is essential, ensuring that they are realistic and proportionate to the time available, the spaces that can be used, and the number of participants involved. Furthermore, the initial dispositions cannot be overlooked: it is crucial that each participant arrives adequately prepared and that the context foster a climate of prayer and an inner openness to listening and dialogue. In this perspective, it is worth recalling how experience

highlights the importance and fruitfulness of synodal processes being supported by **appropriate forms of facilitation**, involving prepared people who safeguard and adapt the method appropriately, avoiding abrupt disruptions and allowing participants to focus more decisively on the issues under discernment.

4.2. A synodal approach to designing and accompanying processes

These methodological guidelines can be applied in a variety of situations and processes, characterised by different objectives, but united by the fact that they are carried out in a synodal way. In order to implement them while avoiding the risk of improvisation and dispersion, it is advisable to invest in the design and accompaniment of these processes. Here are a few examples, *without claiming to be in any way exhaustive*:

- a) **processes of ecclesial discernment**, both to identify the priorities of the mission and to identify forms and procedures of *governance* appropriate to a synodal Church. Each of these two elements has specific requirements that will need to be taken into account in planning the journey forward. The design and accompaniment of these processes will require the availability of experienced people who are capable of helping to implement the guidelines outlined above;
- b) **processes of training courses on synodality** according to the suggestions of *Part V* of the FD, also with regard to the variety of formation needs to be addressed and, consequently, making an effort to clarify the specific objectives of each path. Often, the most effective formation methodology is sharing and reflection in an atmosphere of prayer on the experiences lived as synodal Church, allowing their strengths and weaknesses to emerge. For this reason, reflection on ecclesial discernment processes, on synodal decision-making processes or on the functioning of participatory bodies can have a stronger formative value than a course organised according to traditional models. Here too, it will be crucial to have expert facilitators. It will therefore also be necessary to provide training for these figures;
- c) **processes and experiences of listening and dialogue in communities**, at a local and at a regional level. Experience has shown that digital tools can also be an important resource for this purpose. In the spirit already mentioned, it is important to carry out these experiences in a climate of prayer and to allow time for shared reflection so that their fruits can be appreciated;
- d) **celebrations, encounters and exchanges of experiences** between communities within a diocese or between dioceses in the same region. Here too, digital tools can be helpful, but we should not underestimate the potential of events linked to popular piety, such as pilgrimages to shrines, which often bring together large numbers of people. How can these events be animated in such a way that they take on a more explicit synodal character and foster encounter and dialogue among people?
- e) **communication processes and activities**, aimed both at Christian communities and at the societies in which they live, using the most appropriate means for each context. It will also be useful to explore the potential of new digital communication channels, which today constitute for some, especially young people, genuine environments in which to live and build relationships, in which the proclamation of the Gospel can be appropriately echoed. The experience of a digital Synod is a resource in this regard;

- f) **paths for renewing pastoral action** in a concrete area or on a theme relevant to each local Church (e.g., promoting more lively participation in the Sunday celebration, catechetical programmes, ecumenical dialogue, integration of migrants, commitment to caring for our common home, etc.), implementing initiatives that make the impact of a synodal approach tangible and verifying their results. This can help translate the horizon of synodality into the concrete life of communities;
- g) **theological, pastoral and canonical research paths** at the service of the implementation of the Synod in the specific aspects of the local context and in dialogue between the Churches. With this important service, theologians «help the People of God to develop an understanding of reality enlightened by Revelation and to develop suitable responses and the appropriate language for mission» (FD, no. 67). This also generates a particular responsibility on the part of theological institutions to accompany the Church in living the synodal dimension ever more fully.

The synodal method allowed us to be surprised by the Holy Spirit and to reap unexpected fruits during the consultation and listening phase, as well as during the sessions of the Synodal Assembly, inspiring the amazement and enthusiasm of many participants, as evidenced by the many summaries and documents received: **communion** among the faithful, among pastors and among churches was nourished by **participation** in synodal processes and events, renewing the momentum and sense of shared responsibility for the common **mission**. This **gives us confidence as we look ahead to the journey that awaits us** in the coming years, beginning with the Jubilee of the Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies. We are already working to organise it in the best way possible, so that the opportunity to walk physically together towards the Holy Door may become an opportunity to exchange gifts and celebrate that hope which does not disappoint, the only hope capable of nourishing our commitment to carry forward, as a synodal Church, the mission entrusted by the Lord Jesus to His disciples.

The Synodal Process towards 2028

PROCESS OF LISTENING,
ENCOUNTERING, DIALOGUING, DISCERNING



9-10 OCTOBER 2021

Worldwide Opening of the Synodal Process



17 OCTOBER 2021

Local Opening of the Synodal Process



PHASE 1 - The Consultation of the people of God

**LOCAL - NATIONAL
CONSULTATION**



CONTINENTAL STAGE

DIALOGUE AMONG THE CHURCHES OF A SPECIFIC REGION



PHASE 2 - The discernment of the Pastors

4-29 OCTOBER 2023

1ST SESSION XVI General Ordinary
Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

2-27 OCTOBER 2024

2ND SESSION XVI General Ordinary
Assembly of the Synod of Bishops



PHASE 3 - The implementation *For a Synodal Church*

2025

MARCH Announcement of the accompaniment and evaluation process

JULY Publication of the *Pathways for the implementation phase*

24-26 OCTOBER Jubilee of Synodal Teams and
participatory bodies

2025 JUNE - 2026 DECEMBER
Implementation paths in local Churches and
their groupings

2027

FIRST HALF

Evaluation Assemblies in Dioceses and Eparchies

SECOND HALF

Evaluation Assemblies in National and
International Episcopal Conferences, Eastern
hierarchical structures, and other groupings of
Churches.

2028

FIRST QUARTER

Continental **Evaluation Assemblies**

OCTOBER

**Celebration of the Ecclesial
Assembly** in the Vatican

