

ELEMENTS OF LANGUAGE - MESSAGES

On the Instrumentum laboris

- Although it is not a summary document, the IL was drafted **on the basis of all the material gathered during the phase of listening to the People of God** - which began in October 2021 -, and in particular the Final Documents of the Continental Assemblies. Therefore, with its publication, the first phase of the Synod 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission' closes, and the second - the celebratory one - of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops divided into two sessions (October 2023 and 2024) opens.
- The **IL can be considered a point of arrival that closes the first phase of the synod**. However, the closing of the first phase **does not mean the conclusion of the process of listening and discernment** of the people of God.
- The **IL is not a manual of ecclesiology**. What was written for the Working Document for the Continental Stage applies also here: "it is not a document of the Magisterium of the Church, nor the report of a sociological survey; it does not offer the formulation of operational indications, of goals and objectives, nor the complete elaboration of a theological vision". Rather, the IL is the fruit of an experience: the experience of sincere and cordial encounters between brothers and sisters in the faith that has been a source of joy. On the other hand, as Pope Francis recalled, "The theme of synodality is not a chapter in a treatise on ecclesiology, much less a fashion, a slogan or the new term to be used or instrumentalised in our meetings. No! Synodality expresses the nature of the Church, its form, its style, its mission" (*Address to the faithful of the diocese of Rome*, 18 September 2021).
- **The IL does not suggest answers, nor can it be understood as a first draft of the final document of the October Assembly to be corrected or amended**. In fact, the purpose of the synodal process "is not to produce documents, but to open horizons of hope for the fulfilment of the Church's mission" (DCS, n. 6).
- **The IL is a tool for discernment**. It is conceived as a practical tool at the service of the conduct of the Synodal Assembly of October 2023 and the preparation of the participants in the assembly, thus for its preparation. For this reason, it articulates some of the priorities that emerged from listening to the People of God in a series of questions for the reflection and discernment of the Assembly, with the aim of identifying some concrete steps to be taken to deepen the learning of the synodal method and style in the Church in our time.
- **The reference point of the IL is the local Church, as the theological place where the baptised concretely experience walking together**. The questions that the IL poses are an expression of the richness of the local realities and situations of life from which they were drawn up: they are loaded with the names and concrete faces of those who took part, they bear witness to the experience of faith of the People of God and thus bear the imprint of a transcendent meaning.

What the Instrumentum laboris testifies to

- **An experience of living Church**: the experience of sincere and cordial encounters between brothers and sisters in the faith that has been a source of joy; it has made us touch with our own hands the catholicity of the Church, which, in the variety of ages, genders and social conditions manifests an extraordinary wealth of charisms and ecclesial vocations and preserves a treasure trove of differences in languages, cultures, liturgical expressions and theological traditions.

- **The acquired awareness** that becoming an increasingly synodal Church represents our identity and our vocation: walking together, that is, making synod, is the way to truly be disciples and friends of that Master and Lord who said of himself "I am the way" (Jn 14:6). Today it also constitutes a deep desire: "having experienced it as a grace, we want to continue to do so.
- **One cannot understand a synodal Church if not within the horizon of communion, which is always also a mission** to proclaim and incarnate the Gospel in every dimension of human existence. Communion and mission are nourished first of all in the common participation in the Eucharist, but also through institutions, structures and procedures as spaces in which the common baptismal dignity and co-responsibility in the mission are not only affirmed but also exercised and practised.
- **The importance of being an open and restless Church in our time.** Pope Francis reminded us: If a Christian does not feel this *inner restlessness*, if he does not live it, something is missing; and this *inner restlessness* arises from one's faith and invites us to consider what is best to do, what should be kept or changed. History teaches us that standing still cannot be a good condition for the Church (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 23). And movement is a consequence of docility to the Holy Spirit, who is the director of this story in which everyone is a restless protagonist, never standing still. (*Address to the faithful of the diocese of Rome*, 18 September 2021)
- **The importance of the ecumenical journey:** it is a call for a creative and renewed ecumenism and to stimulate ecumenical dialogue. As Pope Francis recalled in his address to His Holiness Mar Awa III Catholic-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, "The path of synodality, which the Catholic Church is walking, is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical path is synodal."
- **The peculiarities of the situations the Church experiences in the different regions of the world:** from the too many wars that stain our planet with blood and call for a renewed commitment to building a just peace, to the threat represented by climate change with the consequent priority of caring for the common home; from an economic system that produces exploitation, inequality and 'waste' to the homologating pressure of cultural colonialism that crushes minorities; from the experience of suffering persecution to the point of martyrdom to an emigration that progressively empties communities, threatening their very survival; from the growing cultural pluralism that now marks the entire planet, to the experience of Christian communities that represent scattered minorities within the country in which they live, to the experience of coming to terms with an ever more driven, and at times aggressive, secularisation that seems to consider religious experience irrelevant, but does not stop thirsting for the Good News of the Gospel. In many regions the Churches are deeply affected by the crisis of abuses: sexual, power and conscience, economic and institutional. These are open wounds, the consequences of which have not yet been fully addressed. In addition to asking the victims of the suffering it has caused for forgiveness, the Church must join the growing commitment to conversion and reform in order to prevent similar situations from happening again in the future.
- The importance of the synodal methodology for a synodal style and dynamism, centred on listening also through conversation in the Spirit. And the training in this method, particularly of facilitators capable of accompanying communities to practise and live the dynamic tension of synodality with creativity.
- The ability to face and manage tensions in order to embrace diversity as a way to unity
- The integration of plurality in the Church, also of charisms and ministries, beyond uniformity, fragmentation and polarisation: "synodal dynamism is a way to relate them and enhance them without crushing them in uniformity".

- A Church capable of embracing vulnerability and incompleteness.
- The importance of looking beyond the present, to the eschatological dimension
- The need for a liturgical renewal that is compatible with the aspirations of young people and preserves both its essence and its symbols. This need stems from the awareness that the liturgy is at the centre of the Church's life with, first and foremost, the Eucharist as the "source and summit" of Christian life.
- The need to manage the tension between truth and mercy, between wanting to be inclusive while being authentic and faithful to the teachings of the Church.

On the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

- Its objective will be to relaunch the process and to incarnate it in the ordinary life of the Church, identifying on which lines the Spirit invites us to walk more decisively. It is the dynamism of the Church's walk together, in fidelity to the mission that the Lord has entrusted to it, that is the fruit we ask for the next Assembly. Indeed, the purpose of the synodal process "is not to produce documents, but to open horizons of hope for the fulfilment of the Church's mission" (DCS, no. 6).
- The Synodal Assembly of October 2023 will also be asked to listen deeply to the situations in which the Church lives and carries out its mission.

On synodality in brief

- Synodality is a learning process
- Synodality begins with taking into account our "situationality": the starting points are different for each of us
- Synodality is a gradual process: it is a step-by-step conversion
- Synodality is learning by doing
- Synodality is a creative and open path
- Synodality is a spiritual experience that puts the Holy Spirit at the centre
- Synodality is the art of valuing, welcoming and knowing how to articulate all the gifts and charisms that the Lord has made available to his Church.
- This synod is a process of empowerment of the baptised
- This synod is a process of recognising the other/other through listening
- This synod is a way of advancing the reception of the Second Vatican Council