

Instrumentum Laboris (IL)

A Synthesis

Nature of the *Instrumentum Laboris*

As the Latin word suggests, the IL is first and foremost a **working instrument**, a document **for the discernment** of the participants in the work of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. It **does not suggest answers**, but invites a deeper reflection for the work ahead.

The IL comes at the end of a long process of listening to the people of God in the local churches and the various stages of discernment by the Bishops' Conferences and Continental Assemblies. However, the IL **is not a summary** of the journey so far, but **rather the fruit of the experience** of what has been learned about **the nature of the synodal Church**. The IL is also **the fruit of a discernment** on the questions and tensions. These are to be explored so as to lead the Church to a synodal conversion, something that will continue as an ongoing process.

Here again, the question around which the entire document revolves is the same from the beginning of the synodal process, as formulated in no. 2 of the Preparatory Document (PD):

How does this 'journeying together', which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her?

What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?

The IL bears witness to the faith experience of the People of God and the points on which they feel called to take further steps to deepen the practice of the synodal dimension of the Church. The real protagonist is the Holy Spirit, who accompanied and guided the journey and infused the hope and confidence to move forward so that we can grow as a missionary synodal Church proclaiming the Gospel, in fidelity to the task entrusted to the Church by the Lord.

Structure of the document and methodology of the Assembly

The structure of the IL is closely linked to its use during the work of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* consists of **a text and fifteen worksheets**. Together they bring the fruits of the synodal journey in response to the fundamental guiding question (PD, 2).

The IL does not develop a theoretical understanding of the term 'synodality', but brings out a dynamic vision, which articulates the variety of ways in which synodality is experienced and understood in different parts of the world, and which requires further study.

Text and worksheets highlight **the characteristics of the synodal Church**, which have emerged through the experience of the past two years, and **the proceeding way** that has been identified as a key element in becoming more and more a synodal Church (**Section A**); the **three priority issues** that emerge from the entire process and that require further in-depth discernment are then highlighted (**Section B**).

The three priority issues that will be at the center of the work of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023 are linked to the three key words that constitute the theme of the Synod:

1 the question of how to grow in **communion** by welcoming all, and not excluding anyone, in fidelity to the Gospel;

2 the question of concrete ways of exercising co-responsibility, recognizing and valuing the contribution of each baptized person in view of the common **mission**;

3 the identification of structures and dynamics of governance through which to articulate **participation** and authority over time in a missionary synodal Church.

Each of these three priorities is developed by five worksheets: these are five different approaches to the same issue, keeping in mind the diversity of people, their social, cultural and religious contexts, as they emerged during the process to be better appreciated and considered in discernment.

Each worksheet presents, a brief reflection resulting from the discernment carried out throughout the synod process. This is followed by the basic question for discernment to be carried out in the various working sessions. They include points for prayer and preparatory reflection by each member of the assembly. These are, in most cases, genuine questions, but they must always be placed in the perspective of the fundamental question of how to respond to the Spirit's call to grow as a synodal Church.

In fact, the IL re-proposes in a new way the articulation of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which also consists of two parts, different in character and focus, «but is a unified whole» (GS, footnote 1). From this point of view, the Constitution can be an inspiration for the work of the Assembly.

To whom is the document addressed?

The IL is a **working text**, a document for discernment **addressed primarily to the participants** of the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. At the same time, the IL is to be understood as a **preparatory document** *in view* of the assembly, i.e. for the preparation of the participants themselves for the assembly. The IL is also a tool through which the synodal groups, established at the beginning of the synodal process, can continue their reflection and implement initiatives in the Church. In particular, each individual sheet of the second macro-section can be analysed, prayed over and reflected upon separately, although it is always recommended that they be used at least as a whole of the five sheets of the chosen theological-pastoral area.

The publication of the IL, besides responding to the need for transparency as requested and promoted throughout the synodal process, constitutes a real opportunity to weave relationships between synodal groups and the members of the Assembly. The IL is intended to encourage participation in the synodal dynamic at local and regional level, while waiting for the results of the October Assembly to provide further authoritative elements on which the local Churches will be called to pray, reflect, act and make their own contribution.

The content of the IL

PREMISE

The IL begins with a brief foreword recalling the journey made since Pope Francis convened the entire Church in Synod on 10 October 2021. It thus retraces the various stages that the People of God has accomplished thus far.

First of all, the consultation of the People of God of the **Local Stage** of the synodal process that, starting from the diverse contexts and areas, the local Churches around the world have initiated, on the basis of the basic question formulated in no. 2 of the Preparatory Document (PD): «how does this ‘journeying together’, which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?».

The Working Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) was drafted based on the contributions of the local Churches, the Bishops' Conferences and the Oriental Churches. The **Continental Stage** was based on the celebration of seven assemblies attended by the Churches of the same continental regions. This stage made it possible to experience at first hand the catholicity of the Church, which, in the variety of ages, genders and social conditions, manifested an extraordinary wealth of charisms and ecclesial vocations and a treasure trove of differences in languages, cultures, liturgical expressions and theological traditions. This wealth represents the gift that each local Church offers to all the others (cf. LG 13).

Once the first phase was over, it became evident that the synodal method of listening and discernment really allowed to relate and enhance charisms and ecclesial vocations without falling into uniformity. At the same time, it has highlighted certain tensions that can drive to a higher unity (cf. EG 221), become sources of energy and not deteriorate into destructive polarisations. But above all, they renewed the awareness that becoming an increasingly synodal Church represents the identity, vocation and destiny of the Church: walking together, that is, making synod, is the way to truly be disciples and friends of the Master and Lord who said of himself «I am the way» (Jn 14:6).

The foreword continues emphasizing the structure and function of the IL in relation to the dynamics of the Assembly.

The IL is first and foremost **an instrument for discernment** at the service of the proceedings of the Synodal Assembly and its preparation. Thus, the structure of the IL is modelled on the dynamics of its work. Works will be divided into four modules, within which there will be both working groups (*circuli minores*) and plenary sessions. Each of the four modules will have as its theme one of the sections of this IL.

FIRST PART OF THE IL - FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH

The first macro-section of the IL is dedicated to the synodal church, as it is understood and, above all, as it is lived in the experience of the synodal process.

An integral experience

Experience is the interpretive key to the synodal process. To understand the style of the synodal Church, one must start from the awareness that the true protagonist of the entire process is the Holy Spirit.

Those who took part in the synod process recognised and experienced it as an opportunity for brothers and sisters to meet in faith, who, through listening to each other, were able to listen

to the Spirit, growing in their bond with the Lord and in their love for the Church. The synodal experience opened up a horizon of hope for the Church, a clear sign of the presence and action of the Spirit who guides her through history on her journey towards the Kingdom. The synodal process has shown how the synodal style constitutes the space within which the evangelical way of dealing with issues that are often posed in a vindictive way or for which the life of the Church today lacks a place of acceptance, and discernment becomes practicable.

The synodal process has allowed - precisely through the experience of synodality - a better understanding of what synodality is.

A term as abstract or theoretical as 'synodality' has thus begun to **be embodied in concrete experience**. From listening to the People of God emerges a progressive understanding of synodality 'from within'. This does not derive from a principle, theory or formula, but arises from a readiness to enter into a dynamic process of constructive, respectful and prayerful speaking, listening and dialogue.

The signs of the synodal Church

The experience of synodality as experienced in the process makes it possible to identify some elements that can be perceived as constitutive of the synodal Church.

- **A synodal Church is founded on the recognition of a common dignity deriving from Baptism**, which makes all who receive it sons and daughters of God, members of the family of God, and therefore brothers and sisters in Christ, inhabited by the one Spirit and sent to fulfil a common mission. **A synodal Church cannot be understood except within the horizon of communion, which is always a mission** to proclaim and incarnate the Gospel in every dimension of human existence. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a space - to be understood **as institutions, structures and procedures** - in which the common baptismal dignity and co-responsibility in the mission **are not only affirmed but exercised and practiced**.
- **A synodal Church is a Church that listens and a Church of listening**: it is a listening to the Spirit through listening to the Word and listening to each other as individuals and among ecclesial communities. Listening given and received has a theological and ecclesial depth and is not only functional; it is exemplified in the way Jesus listened to the people he met. This style of listening is called upon to mark and transform all the relationships that the Christian community establishes among its members as well as with other faith communities and with society as a whole, especially with those whose voices are most often ignored.
- **A synodal Church is a Church that desires to be humble, and knows that she has much to learn**, that acknowledges the mistakes she has made (crises linked to sexual, economic, power and conscience abuse). It is an invitation to a journey of repentance and conversion that opens paths of reconciliation, healing and justice.
- **A synodal Church is a Church of encounter and dialogue, which is not afraid of its diversity, but rather values it without forcing it into uniformity**. The synodal process has highlighted the importance not only of fostering a **relational anthropology** (a vision of human beings that recognizes that man and women are social creatures who exist in constant relationship with others) that facilitates and

promotes the passage from 'I' to 'we', but also of encounter and dialogue with other Christian confessions, with believers of other religions, and with the cultures and societies in which the Church is embedded.

A synodal Church is a Church that is open, welcoming and embraces all: she is an outgoing Church, in the knowledge that there is no border that this movement of the Spirit does not feel compelled to cross, to draw all into its dynamism.

A synodal Church is a Church willing and able to handle tensions without being crushed by them. In particular, it is about facing honestly and fearlessly the call to a deeper understanding of the relationship between love and truth. **Synodality is a privileged way of conversion, because it reconstitutes the Church in unity:** she heals her wounds and reconciles her memory, welcomes her differences and redeems her from festering divisions, thus enabling her to embody more fully her vocation to be «in Christ as 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» (LG, n. 1).

A synodal Church is a restless Church because she is aware that she is vulnerable and incomplete. This is not a problem to be solved, but an inexhaustible and holy mystery of God for which we must remain open to his surprises as we walk through history towards the Kingdom. It is a gift to be cultivated. This also applies to the questions that the synodal process has brought to light. As a first step they require listening and attention, without rushing to offer immediate solutions. Carrying the weight of these questions is not a personal burden, but a task for the entire community, whose relational and sacramental life is the most effective immediate response.

A synodal Church is also a Church of discernment, in the wealth of meanings that this term takes on within the different spiritual traditions. Being a Church of discernment means creating the space for the action of the Spirit, who invites us to grow in the ability to recognise its signs.

Conversation in the Spirit

The synodal process has enabled the identification of a synodal method of discernment: conversation in the Spirit.

The first phase allowed the people of God to begin to experience the taste of discernment through the practice of the conversation in the Spirit, a method referred to in some documents as 'spiritual conversation' or 'synodal method'. This method, as it took shape through its practice in the various synod groups, was experienced as a Pentecostal moment, as an opportunity to experience being Church and to move from listening to our brothers and sisters in Christ to listening to the Spirit, who is the authentic protagonist of the synod process. In fact, gradually the conversation between brothers and sisters in faith opens the space for a 'hearing together', that is, a listening together to the voice of the Spirit.

This spiritual method is part of the long tradition of ecclesial discernment, which is expressed in a plurality of methods and approaches. Its exquisitely missionary value should be emphasised. This spiritual practice allows us to move from the "I" to the "we": it does not lose sight of or take away the personal dimension of the "I", but recognises it and inserts it into the community dimension.

Formation for conversation in the Spirit is formation for the synodal way of being Church. It requires in particular the formation of facilitators capable of accompanying communities in practising it.

Communion, Mission and Participation

The synod process that has taken place so far has brought out three priorities that the IL illustrates in connection with the three key words of the Synod: communion, mission, participation, with a change in the order of the latter. The three words indicate the challenges with which the whole Church must assess itself in order to take a step forward and grow in its own synodal being at all levels and from a variety of perspectives. They need to be addressed from the point of view of theology and canon law, as well as from that of pastoral care and spirituality. They call into question the way dioceses plan as well as the daily choices and lifestyle of each member of the People of God.

It was decided to invert the terms 'Mission' and 'Participation', because the synod process itself made it possible to understand that participation is not an end in itself, but draws its origin and orientation - its very *raison d'être* - from Communion and Mission. The latter are closely connected and reflected in each other. It leads to move beyond a dualist understanding in which communion expresses the relationships within the ecclesial community, while mission concerns the momentum *ad extra*. At the same time, the synodal process has raised awareness that the orientation for mission is the only evangelically founded criterion for the internal organisation of the Christian community, the distribution of roles and tasks, and the management of its institutions and structures. **It is in relationship with communion and mission that participation can be understood, and for this reason, it can only be addressed after the other two.**

First challenge - A communion that radiates: how to be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?

In the Church, communion is not to be understood in terms of sociology or as a strategy, but refers to the task, never exhausted, of building the 'we' of the People of God. It interweaves what *Lumen Gentium* calls the «union with God» (vertical dimension) with «the unity of all humanity» (the horizontal dimension), in a strong dynamism towards the last days. Of that moment we receive a symbolic anticipation in **liturgical action**, with the multiplicity of its rites to be promoted and protected.

It is the communion of the Church that makes it possible to understand the synod not as representative and legislative, similar to a parliamentary structure with its dynamics of majority building. Rather, we are called to understand it by analogy with the liturgical assembly: in line with the Church's unbroken tradition, we must remember that the synod is celebrated, because it is an encounter in which the Church places herself, in faith, listening to the Spirit.

In the specific historical reality of our times, preserving and promoting communion requires taking on the limitations of being able to live **unity in diversity** (cf. 1 Cor. 12). History produces divisions, which cause wounds that need to be healed and require pathways to be forged for reconciliation. In this context, **in the name of the Gospel, bonds of communion need to be strengthened.**

Second challenge - Co-responsibility in mission: how to share gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?

Mission constitutes the dynamic horizon from which we are to think about the synodal Church: it leads the Church to go out of herself and project herself into the world. In other words, mission allows one to receive the experience of Pentecost. Having received the Holy Spirit, the apostles come out of the cenacle, the place where the community was gathered, and announced the death and resurrection of Christ to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Synodal life is rooted in the same dynamism.

Mission is not the marketing of a religious product, but the building up of a community in which relationships are a manifestation of God's love. Therefore her very life becomes a proclamation.

Mission is about the way in which one really succeeds in eliciting the contribution of all, each one with their gifts and tasks. The perspective of mission places charisms and ministries within the horizon of common. **A missionary synodal Church has the duty to ask herself how she can recognise and value the contribution which each baptised person can offer to the mission, going out of himself and participating together with others in something greater.**

The worksheets linked to this priority try to concretise this basic question with respect to topics such as the recognition of the variety of vocations, charisms and ministries, the promotion of the baptismal dignity of women, the role of the Ordained Ministry and in particular the ministry of the bishop within the missionary synodal Church.

Third Challenge - Participation, governance and authority. What processes, structures and institutions are essential to a missionary synodal Church?

Pope Francis recalled at the beginning of the synodal process (9 October 2021) that «Communion and mission risk remaining somewhat abstract terms if we do not cultivate an ecclesial praxis that expresses the concreteness of synodality in every step of the journey and the work of promoting the real involvement of each and every one» and further on «participation is a requirement of the baptismal faith».

Concern for procedures, rules and structures within which it can take place in an orderly manner, allows the mission to be consolidated over time, generating institutions, and not seeing communion from being perceived as a mere desire. To the procedural dimension, which are the concrete way of proceeding, participation adds something to our human being **an anthropological density** of great relevance: in fact, it expresses the concern for relationships which are more empathetic, compassionate and respectful at the heart of the project of communion and the commitment to mission. It safeguards the uniqueness of each person's face, urging that the transition to the 'we' does not absorb the 'I' into the anonymity of an indistinct group of people. Participation is essentially an expression of creativity, a way of nurturing the relationships of hospitality, welcome and human well-being that lie at the heart of mission and communion.

The concern for participation gives rise to the third priority: **the question of authority, its meaning and the style of its exercise within a synodal Church.** Linked to this question is a second one, charged with the concern for concreteness and continuity over time: **how can we**

imbue our structures and institutions with the dynamism of the missionary synodal Church?

However, the IL recognises that institutions and structures alone are not enough to make the Church synodal: **A synodal culture and spirituality animated by a desire for conversion and sustained by adequate formation is required.**

Formation is an indispensable means to make the synodal way a pastoral model for the Church's life and action. Finally, the IL highlights the need for an effort **to renew the language used by the Church:** in the liturgy, in preaching, in catechesis, in sacred art, as well as in all other forms of communication, including through new and old media, addressed both to her members and to the wider public.

SECOND PART OF THE IL - THE THEMATIC WORKSHEETS

To accompany the preparation and structure of the work of the Assembly, five worksheets have been prepared for each priority. Each of them represents a gateway to the treatment of the underlying issue, allowing it to be approached from different but complementary perspectives, addressing different aspects of the life of the Church that have emerged through the work of the Continental Assemblies.

B1. A communion that radiates. How to be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?

B 1.1 How do the service of charity and commitment to justice and care for the common home nourish communion in a synodal Church?

B 1.2 How can a synodal Church make credible the promise that "love and truth shall meet" (Ps 85:11)?

B 1.3 How can a dynamic relationship of exchange of gifts between the Churches grow?

B 1.4 How can a synodal Church better fulfil her mission through a renewed ecumenical commitment?

B 1.5 How can we recognise and reap the richness of cultures and develop dialogue with religions in the light of the Gospel?

B2. Co-responsibility in mission. How to share gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?

B 2.1 How can we walk together towards a shared awareness of the meaning and content of mission?

B 2.2 What can be done so that a synodal Church is also an "all ministerial" missionary Church?

B 2.3 How can the Church of our time better fulfil her mission through greater recognition and promotion of the baptismal dignity of women?

B 2.4 How can the ordained ministry, in its relationship with baptismal ministries, be enhanced in a missionary perspective?

B 2.5 How to renew and promote the Bishop's ministry in a missionary synodal perspective?

B3. Participation, governance and authority: What processes, structures and institutions are necessary in a missionary synodal Church?

B 3.1 How can we renew the service of authority and the exercise of responsibility in a missionary synodal Church?

B 3.2 How can we evolve discernment practices and decision-making processes in an authentically synodal manner, enhancing the leading role of the Spirit?

B 3.3 What structures can be developed to consolidate a missionary synodal Church?

B 3.4 How to configure instances of synodality and collegiality involving groupings of local Churches?

B 3.5 How can the institution of the Synod be strengthened so that it is an expression of episcopal collegiality within a fully synodal Church?

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