



SECRETARIA GENERALIS SYNODI

Brief FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

25.10.2022

Regarding the synod on synodality, the words “synod” and “Synodality” along with the synodal process in general, please refer to the appropriate FAQ available at this address: <https://www.synod.va/en/resources/faqs.html>

Regarding the Continental Stage itself, please refer to the appropriate FAQ and infographic available at this address: <https://www.synod.va/en/synodal-process/the-continental-phase.html>

It is also suggested that one consult the glossary and examine the infographic on the synodal process (Annex 4). (<https://www.synod.va/en/resources/glossary1.html>)

What is the Working Document for the Continental Stage?

- The DCS is a text of the General Secretariat of the Synod.
- It is **the fruit of listening and discernment** that returns to all local Churches that which emerged from local/national syntheses. It is intended **to enable dialogue between local Churches** and between the local Church and the universal Church. Therefore, **it is neither a summary of the syntheses nor a mere chronicle** of the experience of listening and discernment carried out at the local/national level. **Nor is it the report of a sociological analysis or a roadmap** with goals or objectives to be achieved with precise operational indications.
- It is a **working document** that seeks to bring out the voices of the People of God, with their insights, their questions, their disagreements. It is therefore **not to be considered a document of the Church's Magisterium**.
- This is the **new starting point** for the next stage of listening and discernment provided by the Continental Stage.
- Although **it is a theological document**, it does not intend to offer a complete theological exposition. **Nor is it** a list of so-called 'sensitive' issues or topics. Rather, the document aims **at setting out a framework** for discerning these issues in the next stages of the synod.

How and who drafted the DCS?

- It is a **working document** produced from the Syntheses sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod following the local consultation of the People of God in the first stage of the Synodal Process (October 2021 - 15 August 2022).

- The drafting work began with invited experts reading the contributions received by the General Secretariat of the Synod. They then met for almost two weeks with the actual drafting group, comprised by the General Secretary, the Under Secretaries, members of the Coordination Committee, several officials of the Synod Secretariat together with the General Relator of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. This group was then joined by the Cardinals and Bishops who are members of the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat. Together they worked in an atmosphere of prayer and discernment to share the fruits of their reading for the drafting of this Document.
- It was drafted **simultaneously in two languages** by a drafting team which was accompanied in their work by a group of invited experts: men and women, bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, laymen and women, from all continents and with very diverse disciplinary skills.
- It was approved by the members of the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod.

The DTC is rich in quotes, but not all realities (bishops' conferences, ecclesial bodies...) are represented, nor all topics. What does this choice mean?

- The quotations were chosen because they briefly and happily condense passages that recur in many other syntheses.
- The quotations are intended to give an idea of the richness of the material received, allowing the voice of the People of God from every part of the world to resound.
- They are not to be interpreted as support for the positions of a particular area of the globe, nor as a mere representation of geographical variety, although an attempt has been made to ensure a certain balance in terms of the provenance of the sources.

On 16 October, the Holy Father announced that the celebration of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will take place in two sessions: the first from 4 to 29 October 2023, the second in October 2024. Why this extension of the synod process?

Because the diocesan stage was really a time of true listening! At the beginning of the process, while the General Secretariat of the Synod was planning it, we did not know how the people of God would react or what they would say. Therefore, we could not have known then what the DCS would contain. Shortly before the announcement at the Angelus on 16 October, the Holy Father had the opportunity to read the DCS and discuss it with the Synod Secretariat. His decision to hold the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in two sessions instead of one was made as a result of that meeting, taking into account the contents of the DCS.

This is because the DCS captures a deep desire on the part of the People of God around the world for a more synodal way of proceeding in the Church at all levels. In turn, this sentiment calls for a thorough review regarding the way decisions are made and the ways in which the People of God do or do not participate in the Church's life and mission. The DCS

also asks the Church to consider a number of issues and questions — concerning pastoral ministries and practices — that will inevitably be the subject of disagreement and discussion.

In Church discernment processes, there is an almost proportional link between the time devoted to deliberation and reflection compared to the scope and importance of the decisions to be made. Major and complex decisions require more time than minor and relatively simple ones. Likewise, important issues require a greater level of involvement and participation by the whole Church. If discernment is too short, there is the risk that the discussion become artificially polarised and incorporate insufficient participation. A two-phase Synod, as was already experienced at the Assemblies on the Family (October 2014-October 2015), allows adequate time for honest discussion, including disagreement, but also a subsequent period of reflection and discernment at the level of particular Churches. For this reason, the Pope and the Synod Secretariat considered it right to conduct the Synod of Bishops in two assemblies.

It is very important that synod processes involve listening to all of God's people at every stage of the process, not just at the beginning. In this way, there will be plenty of time for further consultation and discussion by the local churches between the two sessions.

The Working Document for the Continental Stage

The document for the Continental Stage is a text of about 43 pages. After the table of contents, **the introduction** (n. 1-14) is followed by four chapters: 1) The experience of the synodal process (n. 15-24); 2) **Listening to the Scriptures** (n. 25-28); 3) **Towards a missionary synodal Church** (n. 29-97) - the largest chapter, which is in turn divided into sub-chapters: 3.1) Listening that becomes welcoming (n. 32-40); 3.2) Sisters and brothers for the mission (n. 41-56); 3.3) Communion, participation and co-responsibility (n. 57-70); 3.4) Synodality takes shape (n. 71-87); 3.5) Synodal life and liturgy (n. 88-97); 4) **Next steps** (n. 98-109)

Introduction (n. 1-14)

The introduction aims to offer key ideas for a correct understanding of **what the Document for the Continental Stage is and what it is not**.

As an example, note the following: "The DCS will be understandable and useful only if it is read with the eyes of the disciple, who recognizes it as a testimony to the path of conversion toward a synodal Church. This means a Church that learns from listening how to renew its evangelizing mission in the light of the signs of the times, to continue offering humanity a way of being and living in which all can feel included as protagonists".

The "Introduction" concludes with a prayer of praise for "the joy experienced by those who decided to set out" and a plea to "enter these pages as on 'holy ground'".

Chapter One (n. 15-24)

The first chapter offers, in the light of faith, **a narrative - not a chronicle** - of the experience of synodality lived so far in the consultation of the People of God in the local Churches along with the discernment of the Pastors in the Bishops' Conferences: it traces the outline of this discernment, presents the difficulties encountered as well as the most significant fruits gathered, identifying the cornerstones of that which constitutes an authentic collective experience of the Christian faith.

Although **it does not provide a definition of synodality** in the strict sense, it expresses the shared sense of the experience of synodality lived by those who took part in it.

What emerges is a profound **re-appropriation of the common dignity of all the baptised**, the authentic pillar of a synodal Church and the theological foundation of that unity which is able to resist the tendency towards homogenisation in order to continue to enhance the diversity of vocations and charisms that the Spirit pours out on the faithful with unpredictable abundance.

Chapter Two (n. 25-28)

The second chapter presents a biblical image: that of **the tent** with which Isaiah Chapter 54 (v. 2-3) opens: "Enlarge the space for your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly; lengthen your ropes and make firm your stakes. For you shall spread abroad to the right and to the left; Your descendants shall dispossess the nations and shall people the desolate cities."

The image of the tent offers an interpretive key for the contents of the DCS in light of the Word, placing these contents in the arc of God's promise that becomes a vocation for his People and his Church: "Enlarge the space of your tent!"

**The graphics of the paginated DCS are intended to refer to the image of the prophet Isaiah's Tent.*

Chapter Three (n. 29-97)

While in chapter two the image of the tent is the space for communion, a place for participation and a basis for mission, chapter three articulates the main expressions of the synodal journey together with the fruits of listening to the People of God. It does so by grouping them around **five generative tensions** that intertwine with one another:

- 1) **listening as openness to welcome** beginning with **a desire for radical inclusion** — no one excluded! — to be understood in a perspective of communion with our sisters and brothers and with our common Father. Listening appears here not as merely an instrumentalising action, but as an action capable of assuming the basic attitude of God who listens to his people; as an action capable of following the Lord whom the Gospels constantly present as listening to those he meets along the roads of the Holy Land. In this **sense listening is already missional and a proclamation;**
- 2) **the outgoing impetus towards mission.** This is a mission that Catholics recognise must be carried out in the company of their brothers and sisters of other confessions and in dialogue with believers of other religions, transforming human actions of care into authentically spiritual experiences that proclaim the face of a God who loves to the point of giving his own life so that we may have it in abundance;
- 3) **the taking on of a style based on the participation** — which also means a shared responsibility — of all the baptised, stemming from our common baptismal dignity, in the commitment to carry out the Church's one mission;
- 4) the construction of **concrete possibilities** for living communion, participation and mission through structures and institutions inhabited by people adequately formed and sustained by a vibrant spirituality;
- 5) the **liturgy**, in particular the **Eucharistic** liturgy, source and summit of Christian life, which brings the community together, making communion tangible, allows the exercise of participation and nourishes with the Word and the Sacraments the impetus towards mission.

Chapter Four (n. 98-109)

Lastly, the fourth chapter looks toward the future by drawing on two perspectives, both of which are indispensable to our proceeding along the way: a spiritual perspective, which envisages the horizon of synodal missionary conversion, and a methodological perspective that offers next steps for the Continental Stage, that is, the restitution of the text to the entire People of God, the involvement of the particular Churches through their bishops, and the involvement of the Episcopal Conferences in view of the celebration of the Continental Assemblies.