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**THE SALIENT FEATURES OF THE FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE
SYNOD ON SYNODALITY**

The Canonical Perspective

VON MERLIN RENGITH AMBROSE

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THE SALIENT FEATURES OF THE FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

The Canonical Perspective

MERLIN RENGITH AMBROSE

Summary: In a significant development, Pope Francis has approved the Final Document of the Synod on Synodality, opting to implement its conclusions directly rather than issuing a traditional Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. This article delves into the Final Document from a Canon Law perspective, highlighting its implications for synodality. It also emphasizes the necessity of strengthening, modifying, and introducing new canonical provisions pertaining to lay ministries, participatory bodies, decentralization, and consultation. Furthermore, it examines the establishment of mechanisms aimed at fostering a culture of accountability, transparency and evaluation, the missionary role of the Roman Curia, revisiting the seminary formation, and the involvement of women in the ecclesial life.

Zusammenfassung: Papst Franziskus hat in einer signifikanten Neuentwicklung das Schlussdokument der Synode über Synodalität gebilligt und damit entschieden, dessen Schlussfolgerungen direkt umzusetzen, statt ein traditionelles Nachsynodales Apostolisches Schreiben zu veröffentlichen. In diesem Artikel wird das Schlussdokument aus kirchenrechtlicher Perspektive betrachtet und seine Auswirkungen auf die Synodalität hervorgehoben. Er stellt zudem die Notwendigkeit heraus, die kanonischen Bestimmungen über Dienste der Laien, Beteiligungsgremien, Dezentralisation und Beratung zu stärken und zu überarbeiten bzw. neue einzuführen. Zudem werden die Einrichtung von Mechanismen zur Förderung einer Kultur der Rechenschaft, der Transparenz und der Evaluierung, die missionarische Rolle der Römischen Kurie, die Revision der Seminausbildung und die Einbeziehung von Frauen in das kirchliche Leben untersucht.

1 Introduction

After a month of intense discussions, the second phase of the Synod on Synodality, themed “How to be a synodal Church in mission”, concluded its deliberations on 26 October in Rome. The assembly, with 355 synod members in attendance, issued a Final Document¹ consisting of a 51-page, 155-article summary. This document, published immediately at the behest of the Pope, is the culmination of one of the most extensive consultative processes in Church history, marking a significant milestone in the evolution of Church governance. It builds on the work of the 2023 assembly and the broader synodal journey initiated by Pope Francis in 2021. The Final Document serves as a powerful and urgent call to action, urging for a series of transformative changes that are both necessary and overdue. It eloquently outlines the pressing issues at hand and delineates a clear vision for the future, advocating for reforms that aim at enhanced effectiveness, greater lay participation in decision-making, expanded women’s leadership roles

¹ Cf. *Francis*, Final Document (26 October 2024), at: <https://www.synod.va/en/news/final-document-of-the-xvi-assembly.html>.

in the Church, a climate of accountability and transparency, and significant structural reforms in the ecclesial life and governance and promote inclusivity in participation. Each proposed change is presented with compelling reasoning, emphasising the importance of collaboration and innovation in addressing the challenges that lie ahead. The document resonates with a sense of urgency, inspiring stakeholders to come together and take decisive steps toward meaningful reform.

This article unequivocally outlines these essential recommendations and establishes clear structural guidelines that demand attention and action in Canon Law. Nonetheless, before delving into a substantive analysis of the document's key canonical themes and relevance, it is essential to examine its juridical significance and briefly explore the work of the ten Study Groups.

2 Juridical Value of the Final Document

This Synod, the fifth convened during Pope Francis' pontificate, is significant in that it marks the first time the Pope has opted not to write a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation.² Instead, he has ratified the text the participants drafted, which signifies a commitment to synodality. In 2018, Pope Francis decreed in the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* that reformed the Synod of Bishops that the Pope has the authority to approve and promulgate the final document, and thus it participates "in the ordinary magisterium of the Successor of Peter."³ Canon 343 *CIC* also stipulates the authority. On 26 October, during the press conference, synod special secretary Msgr. Riccardo Battocchio clarified that the Pope's position aligns with the principles outlined in *Episcopalis communio*. This means that if the Pope explicitly approves a document, it is considered part of his Ordinary Magisterium. Though the Final Document is part of the ordinary Magisterium, it is not normative in the sense of being a juridical text which creates "rules". Therefore, it is important to note that this does not establish it as a binding norm; rather, it serves as a set of guiding principles.⁴ This decision to ratify the final document of the synod marks a departure from previous practices, which typically see the Pope using a synod's final document as a foundation for drafting his own Apostolic Exhortation on the topic. This summary highlights key developments that emerged during the First Session, incorporates contributions from various Churches made between the First and Second Sessions, and reflects on what has evolved, particularly through Spirit-led conversations, during the Second Session.

Moreover, on 24 November 2024, Pope Francis issued a Note to accompany the Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. It states:

² Cf. *Francis*, Saluto finale del santo padre francesco (26 October 2024), at: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2024/october/documents/20241026-sinodo-vescovi.html>.

³ Cf. *Francis*, Apostolic Constitution "Synodo episcoporum: Episcopalis communio" (15 September 2018), in: *Communicationes* 50 (2018) 375-394, Art. 18 §1. "Once the approval of the members has been obtained, the Final Document of the Assembly is presented to the Roman Pontiff, who decides on its publication. If it is expressly approved by the Roman Pontiff, the Final Document participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter. §2. If the Roman Pontiff has granted deliberative power to the Synod Assembly, according to the norm of canon 343 of the Code of Canon Law, the Final Document participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter once it has been ratified and promulgated by him."

⁴ Cf. The press conference held to discuss the Synod's Final Document at: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-10/press-conference-synod-final-document-magisterium-women.html>.

“The Final Document will form part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter (cf. EC 18 § 1; CCC 892), and as such I ask that it be accepted. It represents a form of exercise of the authentic teaching of the Bishop of Rome [...]. In approving the Document, last 26 October, I said that it was not strictly normative and that its application would require several forms of mediation. This does not mean that it does not commit the Churches as of now to make decisions coherent with its indications. The local Churches and Church groupings are now required to implement, in the various contexts, the authoritative indications contained in the Document, through processes of discernment and decision-making envisaged by law and by the Document itself. I also added that time would be needed to reach choices involving the Church as a whole: this is particularly true for the topics entrusted to the ten study groups, to which others may be added, in view of the necessary decisions. The conclusion of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops does not put an end to the synodal process.”⁵

3 Formation of ten Study Groups and the Coordinators⁶

In the Spirit of the Chirograph⁷ of Pope Francis, signed on 16 February 2024, he created ten Study Groups with a letter⁸ to His Eminence Mario Cardinal Grech, to examine crucial and controversial issues/themes raised at the Synod on Synodality to ensure that these issues are properly studied and addressed. Different offices of the Roman Curia coordinate the study groups. The themes emerging in the Summary Report (*SR*) of the First Session of the Synod on Synodality in 2023 and assigned to the Ten Study Groups are:

3.1 The First Study Group: Some Aspects of Relations between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church (*SR* 6)⁹

In the first theme, Church experts are expected to look into aspects of relations between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church. At the first Synod Assembly in October 2023, delegates noted that the Eastern and Latin Churches need to mutually understand the increasing number of immigrants.

“For several reasons, the establishment of Eastern hierarchies in the countries of immigration is not sufficient to solve the problem, but there is a need for the local Latin-rite Churches, in the name of synodality, to help the Eastern faithful who have emigrated

⁵ Francis, Note of the Holy Father Francis to accompany the Final Document of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/11/25/241125k.html>.

⁶ Cf. *Segreteria Generale del Sinodo*, Gruppi di studio su questioni emerse nella Prima Sessione della XVI Assemblea Generale Ordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi da approfondire in collaborazione con i Dicasteri della Curia romana (14 March 2024), at: https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-03-14_documents/240075---ITA---Gruppi-di-Studio---Curia-romana-14-marzo-2024.pdf.

⁷ Cf. Francis, Chirograph on the Collaboration between the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the General Secretariat of the Synod in: *L'Osservatore Romano*. Weekly Edition in English 57, 8 (23 February 2024), 3.

⁸ Cf. at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2024/03/14/0213/00455.html#en>.

⁹ Cf. A Study Group made up of Oriental and Latin theologians and canonists, coordinated by the General Secretariat of the Synod and the Dicastery for the Oriental Churches, is set up.

to preserve their identity and cultivate their specific heritage, without undergoing processes of assimilation,”¹⁰ reads the Synthesis Report (SR 6 c).

3.2 The Second Study Group: Listening to the Cry of the Poor (SR 4 and 16)¹¹

The second thematic area is “Listening to the cry of the poor,” which allows Christians to “assume the attitude of Jesus towards the people he met” (SR 16 d). Every person has their own story, but what unites them is the shared experience of being victims of marginalisation, exclusion, abuse, or oppression in various situations, including within the Christian community. For these individuals, being listened to is an affirming experience that recognizes their dignity, leading to deep transformation. The second study group focuses on this concern and investigates how to strengthen the Church’s capacity to listen to the different forms of poverty and marginalization at different levels and, above all, at the local level.

3.3 The Third Study Group: Mission in the Digital Environment (SR 17)¹²

The third issue addresses ‘The Mission in the Digital Environment,’ emphasizing that every facet of human life should be acknowledged as a culture, not merely as an area of activity. Although the digital environment concerns everyone, it particularly affects youth, as many of these young people have “abandoned the physical spaces of the Church.” This highlights the need to engage them in online spaces.

3.4 The Fourth Study Group: The Revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a Missionary Synodal Perspective (SR 11)¹³

The fourth theme will deeply reflect on “The revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a missionary synodal perspective” regarding the formation of deacons and priests. Concerns raised during the first phase of the Synod in October 2023 highlighted the need for seminaries and other formation programme for candidates for ministries to be connected to the daily lives of their communities (SR 11 e). Delegates emphasised that the formation process should not create an artificial environment that isolates candidates from the everyday experiences of the faithful (SR 14 n).

3.5 The Fifth Study Group: Some Theological and Canonical Matters Regarding Specific Ministerial Forms (SR 8 and 9)¹⁴

The Fifth thematic area concerns theological and canonical questions about specific ministerial forms, strengthening the relationship between charisms and ministries from a missionary perspective that does not oppose each other. The group is exploring practical ways to encourage

¹⁰ XVI Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops, First Session (4-29 October 2023), Synthesis Report: Synodal Church in Mission, at: <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report.pdf>.

¹¹ Cf. The Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, together with the General Secretariat of the Synod and the Dicastery for the Service of Charity, will coordinate the experts.

¹² Cf. The study group to examine this issue will be coordinated by the Dicastery for Communications, the General Secretariat of the Synod, the Dicastery for Culture and Education and the Dicastery for Evangelization.

¹³ Cf. This concern will be coordinated by the Dicastery for the Clergy, the General Secretariat of the Synod, and the Dicasteries for Evangelisation; for the Eastern Churches; for the Laity, Family, and Life; for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; for Culture and Education.

¹⁴ Cf. The Study Group for this matter will be coordinated by the General Secretariat of the Synod, in cooperation with the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, and in dialogue with various relevant Dicasteries.

and support the participation of all baptised individuals in the Church's mission across various contexts. Additionally, they are examining the issue of whether women should have the opportunity to access the diaconate.

3.6 The Sixth Study Group: The Revision of the Documents Governing the Relations between Bishops, Religious and Groupings of Churches (SR 10)¹⁵

The Sixth Study Group, with the theme of revising, in a synodal missionary perspective, the documents on the relations between Bishops, Consecrated life, Ecclesial aggregations, reflects on the guiding criteria of this relationship proposed in the 1978 document *Mutuae relationes*¹⁶ (SR 10 g). Since synodality goes hand in hand with the recognition and enhancement of the charisms of all members of the People of God, it is important to highlight the importance of the articulation of hierarchical and charismatic gifts in the life and mission of the Church.

3.7 The Seventh Study Group: Ministry of the Bishop (SR 12 and 13)¹⁷

The Seventh Study Group analyses some aspects of the figure and ministry of the Bishop, such as criteria for selecting candidates to the episcopate, judicial function of the Bishop, nature and conduct of *Ad limina Apostolorum* visits from a missionary synodal perspective (SR 12 and 13).

3.8 The Eighth Study Group: Papal Representatives (SR 13)¹⁸

The Eighth Study Group is to discuss the role of Papal Representatives in a missionary synodal perspective and reconsider how this ministry can help consolidate the bonds of communion between the local Churches and the Successor of Peter, enabling him to know, with more certainty, their needs and aspirations.

3.9 The Ninth Study Group: Theological Criteria and Synodal Methodologies for a Shared Discernment of Controversial Doctrinal, Pastoral and Ethical Issues (SR 15)¹⁹

The Ninth Study Group theme will focus on theological criteria and synodal methodologies as a foundation for collaborative discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues. Experts will reflect on the relationship between love and truth as demonstrated by Jesus and the

¹⁵ Cf. The Study Group will be coordinated by the General Secretariat of the Synod, in collaboration with the Dicastries for Bishops, for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, for Evangelization (Section for the First Evangelization and the New Particular Churches), and the Laity, Family and Life which should also involve and include the international bodies of representation of consecrated life (UISG and USG) and the different ecclesial aggregations.

¹⁶ Cf. *Sacred Congregation for Religions and Secular Institutes and Sacred Congregation of Bishops*, Instruction on Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church "Mutuae Relationes" (14 May 1978), in: AAS 70 (1978) 473-506.

¹⁷ Cf. The theme will be discussed in two different groups, with the first group coordinated by the Dicastery for Bishops and the General Secretariat of the Synod, and the Dicastery for Evangelisation and the Dicastery for the Oriental Churches reflecting on the selection procedures and *ad limina Apostolorum* visits. The second study group coordinated by the Dicastery for Legislative Texts and the General Secretariat of the Synod, with the participation of the Dicastries for Bishops and Evangelisation, will delve into the topic of the Bishop's judicial function and how to bring out the thin line difference on the role of father and that of judge (SR 12 i).

¹⁸ Cf. This group will be coordinated by the Secretariat of State and the General Secretariat of the Synod, with the involvement of the Dicastries for Bishops and for Evangelisation.

¹⁹ Cf. This group will be coordinated by the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Secretary of the International Theological Commission, with the support of the General Secretariat of the Synod and the Pontifical Academy for Life.

implications this has for various contentious topics. The group would reinterpret traditional anthropology, soteriology, and theological ethics to clarify the relationship between charity and truth in fidelity to Jesus's life and teachings, as well as the connection between pastoral care and moral doctrine.

3.10 The Tenth Study Group: The Ecumenical Journey in Ecclesial Practices (*SR7*)²⁰

The last theme will be the reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices. This needs a deeper reflection in light of theological dialogues and paying attention to the concrete ecclesial repercussions deepening the mutual interdependence between synodality and primacy at different ecclesial levels, with particular reference to the way of understanding the Petrine ministry at the service of unity (*SR7 h*). The document titled "The Bishop of Rome"²¹ will be used as a foundation for discussions and reflections. Additionally, the experiences of interdenominational marriages, families, and movements will enhance our understanding of Eucharistic hospitality. We will also take a positive approach to exploring non-denominational movements to discern what we can learn from them in a spirit of mutual exchange of gifts.

During the second phase of the Synod on Synodality, at the first General Congregation of the Synodal Assembly on 2 October 2024, members of the Ten Study Groups established by the Pope in February to explore theological and canonical aspects of various themes, along with representatives of three other Commissions, explained the work accomplished up to this point and the outlook for the future. Nonetheless, with the study groups set to present their comprehensive report to Pope Francis by June 2025, this article will refrain from a detailed examination of the individual topics allocated to the Ten Study Groups.²² Rather, it will address only those overarching concerns relevant to these ten thematic areas, as they surfaced during the deliberations of the second session of the Synod on Synodality in 2024.

4 Composition of the Final Document

The Final Document is structured into five primary sections, each presenting a distinct form of conversion essential to the Synod's vision: spiritual, relational, procedural, institutional, and missionary. Each section delves into one of these transformative aspects, outlining both the need for and the pathways to these conversions. The text is divided into five parts:

²⁰ Cf. The Study Group will be coordinated by the General Secretary of the Synod and the Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

²¹ Cf. *Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity*, A Study Document. The Bishop of Rome. Primacy and synodality in ecumenical dialogues and responses to the encyclical *Ut unum sint* Vatican City 2024. "The Bishop of Rome" is a document produced by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, summarising the outcomes of ecumenical dialogues regarding the ministry of the Pope. This effort is in response to an invitation made by Pope John Paul II nearly thirty years ago, reflecting on the progress made since the Second Vatican Council. The goal is to explore a form of the exercise of Papal primacy that aligns with the practices of the early Church during its first centuries of full communion. Although not all theological dialogues have addressed this topic with the same depth or thoroughness, there are several "new approaches" that can be identified regarding the more contentious theological issues.

²² To know more about the Ten Study Groups, cf. General Secretariat of the Synod, Document on "Study Groups for questions raised in the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to be explored in collaboration with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia", at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/03/14/240314h.html>.

The first section, titled “The Heart of Synodality”, presents the theological and spiritual foundations that illuminate and nurture future developments. It reiterates the mutual understanding of synodality that emerged during the First Session and expands on its spiritual and prophetic dimensions. The conversion of our feelings, images, and thoughts must accompany the conversion of our pastoral and missionary actions.

The second part, entitled “On the Boat, Together”, is focused on transforming the relationships that form the Christian community and influence the mission through the integration of vocations, charisms, and ministries.

The third, entitled “Cast the Net”, clearly identifies three practices that are closely interlinked: ecclesial discernment, decision-making processes, and a culture of transparency, accountability and evaluation. We are also asked to initiate pathways of 'missionary transformation,' for which an urgent renewal of participatory bodies is needed.

The fourth part, under the title “An Abundant Catch”, explains how we can develop new ways to exchange gifts and strengthen the connections that unite us within the Church, especially during a time when our sense of being rooted in a community is undergoing significant changes.

The fifth part, titled “So I Send You”, examines the first step: caring for the formation of all synodal missionaries of the People of God.

After examining the juridical value, the ten Study Groups, and the composition of the entire Final Document, this article aims to analyse the key features and significance of the Final Document within the framework of Canon Law. Key topics to be examined include the roles of instituted and non-instituted ministries and participatory bodies in decision-making and governance, the establishment of particular councils, the principles of sound decentralisation, the protection of Eastern Catholic Synodal Structures, the obligation of the Roman Curia to engage in consultation, the formation and active participation of laypeople, the promotion of a culture of safeguarding, as well as of accountability and credibility. The end goal is to make the Church more missionary and effective at evangelisation by making it more participatory and inclusive.

5 Ministries

The Final Document of the Synod on Synodality emphasises the importance of ministries for the mission, and the need for more participation from women and laypeople. At the centre of the document are “charisms, vocation, and ministries for the mission.” The need for greater participation of women and laity in ministries is highlighted.

5.1 Stable Lay Ministers – Instituted (*FD 75*)

A missionary synodal Church would promote lay ministries that do not require Holy Orders. They can be instituted or not instituted. Instituted ministries through ritual are lector, acolyte (*Motu*

proprio *Spiritus Domini*),²³ and catechist (Motu proprio *Antiquum ministerium*).²⁴ A legitimate authority establishes the terms and conditions of their practice by mandate. Episcopal Conferences establish the personal conditions that candidates for these ministries must fulfil and draw up the formation pathways that must be taken to access these ministries. The Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) has prescribed several norms on the formation of lector and acolyte. They are:²⁵

Lay persons who are not candidates for the diaconate or the priesthood may be admitted to the stable ministries of lector and acolyte.

1. They are to:
 - i. have completed 21 years of age;
 - ii. have sufficient human maturity, genuine piety and right intention;
 - iii. enjoy a good reputation in the community;
 - iv. have the desire to serve in the pastoral ministry and be available for service in the parish;
 - v. undergo adequate doctrinal, scriptural and liturgical formation.
2. The lector must be able to proclaim the Word of God and explain it without prejudice to can. 767 §1. The acolyte can serve at the altar and be a liturgical animator. Both of them can be true evangelizers and be capable of being leaders at prayer meetings.

Charisms take the form of ministries when they are publicly recognised by the community and by those responsible for leading the community. For a charism to be recognised and established as an official ministry within the community, it is essential that the community first identifies a clear and genuine pastoral need. This identification process should be accompanied by thoughtful discernment, led by the pastor, who collaborates closely with the community members. Together, they will assess whether there is a significant necessity for creating a new ministry that addresses this need. Following this collaborative discernment, the appropriate ecclesiastical authority will make a well-informed decision regarding the establishment of the ministry. In the context of a missionary synodal Church, there is a strong emphasis on encouraging a diverse range of lay ministries, *i.e.*, roles that do not require the sacrament of Holy Orders. These ministries extend beyond the confines of liturgical functions, encompassing various aspects of community life and service. Lay ministries can be formally instituted, with specific recognition and support from the Church, or they may exist informally, driven by the

²³ Cf. *Francis*, Motu Proprio "Spiritus Domini" (10 January 2021), in AAS 113 (2021) 169-170; For deeper study, cf. *Ambrose, Merlin Rengith*, The Amendment in Can. 230 §1. Its Juridical Implications for Women as Lector and Acolyte, in: Indian Theological Studies 58 (2021) 95-119. *Ambrose, Merlin Rengith*, Women As Lector and Acolyte. The Amendment in Can. 230, §1 of CIC 1983, in: NomoK@non, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5282/nomokanon/235>, at: <https://www.nomokanon.de/index.php/nomokanon/article/view/235/481>.

²⁴ Cf. *Francis*, Motu Proprio "Antiquum Ministerium" (10 May 2021), in AAS 113 (2021) 527-534. For more study on this topic, cf. *Ambrose, Merlin Rengith*, Lay Ministry of Catechist in Light of the Apostolic Letter Antiquum ministerium, in: Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection 87 (2023) 440-457. *Ambrose, Merlin Rengith*, Stable Lay Ministry of Catechist. Intent and Impact of the Apostolic Letter Antiquum Ministerium, in: NomoK@non, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5282/nomokanon/250>, at: <https://www.nomokanon.de/index.php/nomokanon/article/view/250/503>.

²⁵ *Conference of Catholic Bishops of India*, Complementary Norms to the Code of Canon Law, Bangalore 2024, 9.

passions and commitments of individuals within the community. This broadening of ministry roles reflects a commitment to inclusivity and active participation by all members of the Church.

5.2 Non-Instituted Stable Ministries (FD 76)

Instituted ministries are complemented by those not instituted that are exercised with stability as mandated by the competent authority. Some examples of such ministries include the ministry of coordinating a small church community, leading community prayer, organising charitable activities, and so forth. Although there is no prescribed rite, to promote its effective recognition, a public entrustment should be made through a mandate before the community.

5.3 Extraordinary Ministries (FD 76)

There are also extraordinary ministries, such as the extraordinary ministry of the Eucharist, which includes leading Sunday liturgies when a priest is unavailable, administering specific sacramentals, and other similar responsibilities. The canonical order of both the Latin and Eastern Rites already allows for certain cases where laypeople, both men and women, may serve as extraordinary ministers of Baptism (cann. 230 §3; 961 §2 *CIC*). In the Latin canonical order, the Bishop, with the Holy See's permission, may delegate assistance at marriages to lay faithful men or women (can. 1112 §1 *CIC*). In this vein, the prescriptions of the Motu proprio *De Concordia inter codices*²⁶ are to be considered carefully. Only a priest (*sacerdos*) may celebrate a marriage validly when it involves even one member of an Eastern Catholic Church or of an Eastern non-Catholic (Orthodox) Church, even though the other party is a Latin Catholic. Motu proprio *De Concordia Inter Codices*, added a new paragraph to can. 1108 according to which the law does not permit delegation to a deacon, since he cannot confer the priestly blessing required by the Eastern law for validity, and this is not a dispensable law.

Responsive to the needs of local contexts, consideration should be given to extending and stabilising these opportunities for the exercise of lay ministries. Finally, there are spontaneous services, which need no further conditions or explicit recognition. They reveal the ways that all the faithful, in various ways, participate in the mission through their gifts and charisms.

5.4 New Forms of Service and Ministries (FD 77)

The lay faithful, both men and women, should be afforded greater opportunities for participation, allowing for the exploration of new forms of service and ministry that respond to the pastoral needs of our time. This should be pursued in a spirit of collaboration and differentiated co-responsibility.

The synodal process has identified several concrete needs that must be addressed in various contexts:

- a) Increased involvement of laymen and laywomen in the Church's discernment processes and throughout all phases of decision-making, drafting, and confirming decisions.
- b) Enhanced access for laymen and laywomen to positions of responsibility within dioceses and ecclesiastical institutions, including seminaries, institutes, and theological faculties, while ensuring the full implementation of existing provisions.

²⁶ Cf. *Francis*, Motu proprio "De concordia inter Codices" (31 May 2016), in AAS 108 (2016) 602-605.

- c) Greater recognition and support for the lives and charisms of consecrated men and women, along with their engagement in positions of ecclesial responsibility.
- d) A larger number of qualified laypeople serving as judges in all canonical processes.
- e) Effective acknowledgement of the dignity and the rights of individuals employed by the Church and its institutions.

5.5 Full Implementation of Canonical Provisions for Women (*FD 60*)

The document broadly called for “full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law with regard to the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain under-explored.” Crucial turning points in Church history confirm the essential contribution of women moved by the Spirit. Women make up the majority of churchgoers and are often the first witnesses to the faith in families. They are active in the life of small Christian communities and parishes. They run schools, hospitals and shelters. They lead initiatives for reconciliation and promoting human dignity and social justice. Women contribute to theological research and are present in positions of responsibility in Church institutions, diocesan curia and the Roman Curia. There are women who hold positions of authority and are leaders of their communities. This Assembly asks for full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law with regard to the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain under-explored. There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped. Additionally, the question of women's access to diaconal ministry remains open. This discernment needs to continue.

5.6 Women Deacon (*FD 60*)

This Assembly asks for full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law concerning the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain under-explored. There is no reason or obstacle that should stop women from taking on leadership roles in the Church; what is inspired by the Holy Spirit cannot be hindered. Furthermore, the question of women's access to diaconal ministry is still open for discussion. This discernment process needs to continue. However, in the Final Document, all paragraphs were approved with the votes favouring and against, but the paragraph with the highest number of “no” votes was the 60th,²⁷ which addressed women's role in the Church, saying that the question of women's access to diaconal ministry remains open. Study Group No. 5 on some theological and canonical matters regarding specific ministerial forms may dwell on this element in its further study. The Final Document calls for a more thoughtful approach to the language and imagery employed in preaching, teaching, catechesis, and the creation of official Church documents. It emphasises the importance of highlighting the rich contributions of female saints, theologians, and mystics, ensuring that their voices and perspectives are given the recognition they deserve within the broader context of the Church's teachings and practices.

²⁷ This paragraph received 258 votes in favour and 97 against out of 355 synodal participants. Cf. at: https://press.vatican.va/content/dam/salastampa/it/fuori-bollettino/pdf/Risultati%20Votazioni_Sinodo.pdf.

6 Participatory Bodies

Synodality serves as a practical expression of the *communio* ecclesiology that developed from the documents of Vatican II and the teachings of the post-conciliar Popes. It invites all baptized individuals to take an active role in the life of the Church. Indeed, the majority of discussions and contributions during the synod centred around further developing this idea. The participation of the laity is not a concession but a consequence of baptism so that they must assume all the responsibility that corresponds to them, however, without laicising the clergy or clericalising the laity. Every baptised person must feel involved in the life and mission of the Church and participate in the discernment for decision-making, seeking her good. It is the co-responsibility since each person participates in accordance with his or her different ministries and functions.

6.1 Consulted Opinion to be Respected (*FD 91*)

The Fathers of the Church emphasise the communal nature of the mission of the People of God through the principle of “nothing without.” This principle is expressed in three key ways: “nothing without the bishop” (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Trallians 2:2); “nothing without the council of presbyters; nothing without the consent of the people” (St. Cyprian of Carthage, Letters 14:4). When this principle is overlooked, the synodal identity of the Church becomes obscured, and its mission is impeded. It is important to promote a synodal Church by involving everyone in the decision-making process. According to Canon Law, in several situations, superiors must consult before making decisions. There are many bodies at the diocesan and parish level to be consulted on certain circumstances as prescribed in Canon Law.²⁸ Superiors are often required by law to consult before making decisions. They must actively listen to participants during this consultation and cannot ignore the consultation provided. As a result, those in authority are expected to adhere to the outcomes of the consultation that lead to a unanimous agreement unless there is an overriding reason to deviate, and this reason must be clearly explained (cf. can. 127, §2, 2° *CIC*; can. 934, §2, 3° *CCEO*). Therefore, a good superior should not disregard the opinion of the majority and all the more so if it is a unanimous one. Only when there is a serious overriding reason, can he go against the views expressed by the majority. There could be a tendency on the part of a superior to disregard the advice or opinions of the councillors. This, too, is most dangerous when it comes to sound and synodal governance.

6.2 Abrogation of “Only/merely” (*tantum*) (*FD 92*)

In a synodal Church, the authority of the Bishop, of the Episcopal College and of the Bishop of Rome in regard to decision-taking is inviolable as it is grounded in the hierarchical structure of the Church established by Christ; it both serves unity and legitimate diversity (cf. 13). Such an exercise of authority, however, is not without limits: it may not ignore a direction which emerges through proper discernment within a consultative process, especially if participatory bodies do this. It is not appropriate to set the consultative and deliberative elements involved in reaching a decision in opposition to each other: in the Church, the deliberative element is undertaken

²⁸ Cf. At the diocesan level: College of Consultors (can. 502), Diocesan Synod (cann. 460-468), Episcopal Council (can. 473 §4), Diocesan Pastoral Council (cann. 511-514), Diocesan Finance Committee (cann. 492-494), Council of Priests (cann. 495-501); At the parish level: Parish Pastoral Council (can. 536); Parish Finance Committee (can. 537); In the Religious Institutes, Superior Generals have General councils, Provincial Superiors have Provincial councils, and Local Superiors have Local councils to advise them by way of consultation.

with the help of all, and never without those whose pastoral governance allows them to take a decision by virtue of their office. For this reason, the recurring formula in the Code of Canon Law, “only/merely consultative vote” (*tantum consultivum*), should be reviewed to eliminate the possibility of ambiguity. The inclusion of the adverb “only/merely” (*tantum*) can be taken to imply a diminishment of the participatory body’s contribution to the life of the Church. The inclusion of the adverb “only/merely” (*tantum*) implies that consulted opinion is “only/merely” effective or useful after a superior authority judges them to be accurate or appropriate. The text implies that the participatory body lacks trustworthiness, suggesting that a higher authority with greater wisdom and resources should verify the accuracy, appropriateness, or relevance of its recommendations. It would be advisable for the legislator to remove this unnecessary adverb in future legislation.²⁹ It seems appropriate to conduct a revision of Canon Law from a synodal perspective. This involves clarifying the distinction and relationship between consultation and deliberation while shedding light on the responsibilities of individuals in various roles within the decision-making process. In this perspective, the text advocates for a revision of Canon Law to clarify the distinction and relationship between consultation and deliberation while also emphasising the responsibilities of those involved in the decision-making process.

6.3 Synodal Participatory Bodies (FD 103)

Implementing decision-making processes correctly and decisively, in a synodal style, will advance the growth of God’s People in a participatory manner. This can be achieved by utilising the institutional means outlined in Canon Law, particularly through participatory bodies. The baptised individuals engage in decision-making, accountability, and evaluation processes through established institutional structures, primarily those provided for the local Church as stipulated in the existing Code of Canon Law. In the Latin Church, these are: Diocesan Synod (can. 466 *CIC*), Presbyteral Council (can. 500 §2 *CIC*), Diocesan Pastoral Council (can. 514 §1 *CIC*), Parish Pastoral Council (can. 536 *CIC*), Diocesan and Parish Council for Economic Affairs (cann. 493 and 537 *CIC*). In the Eastern Catholic Churches, these are: Eparchial Assembly (can. 235 *CCEO*), Eparchial Assembly for Economic Affairs (can. 262 *CCEO*), Presbyteral Council (can. 264 *CCEO*), Eparchial Pastoral Council (can. 272 *CCEO*), Parish Councils (can. 295 *CCEO*).

Members of the community engage in the process according to their specific ecclesial roles and the distinct responsibilities they carry. Their unique capacities, including charisms, ministries, experiences, and skills, enrich their contributions. Each one within this framework plays an essential role in the discernment process, offering valuable insights and perspectives that guide decision-making through well-defined methods. Moreover, these bodies are held accountable for their actions and decisions, ensuring they reflect on their work and provide a clear report on their efforts. This emphasis on accountability fosters a culture of transparency and responsibility. Participatory bodies are particularly vital, as they represent one of the most promising avenues for swiftly implementing the synodal guidelines. Their active engagement can

²⁹ Cf. In fact, during the schema development of the canon on the pastoral council, Archbishop Bernardin, in the meeting of *coetus studiorum* for the drafting of the Code of Canon Law, commenting on the parish pastoral council, suggested deleting the word “only/merely” (*tantum*) to increase the pastoral council’s importance. The reply of the Secretariat was that the text ‘only/merely’ should remain as it is, and only a consultative nature should be observed since the parish priest (*parochus*) is the proper pastor of the parish entrusted to him, exercising the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan Bishop. Cf. *Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law*, Relatio complectens synthesim animadversionum ab Em.mis atque Exc.mis Patribus commissionis ad novissimum schema Codicis Iuris Canonici exhibiturum, cum responsibus a secretaria et consultoribus datis, Vatican City 1981, 128.

lead to significant and visible changes in the community, demonstrating the power of collaborative participation in the ecclesial mission.

6.4 Participatory Bodies Be Made Compulsory in the Local Church (FD 104)

One of the most significant proposals is to strengthen pastoral councils at both the parish and diocesan levels. A synodal Church relies on the genuine existence, effectiveness, and vitality of participatory bodies rather than on their mere nominal existence. This requires these bodies to operate in accordance with canonical provisions or legitimate customs and to adhere to the statutes and regulations that govern them. The necessity for these bodies to become mandatory, as requested throughout all stages of the synodal process, is emphatically stressed. They should be able to fulfil their roles meaningfully rather than merely in a formal manner, and their functions should be adapted to suit the unique contexts of their local communities. The lay faithful should be given greater opportunities to participate in decision-making processes with co-responsibility primarily through Diocesan Synod (cann. 460, 466 *C/C*), Diocesan Pastoral Council (can. 514 §1 *C/C*), Parish Pastoral Council (can. 536 *C/C*), Diocesan and Parish Finance Committee (cann. 493 and 537 *C/C*). It must be ensured that optional bodies hitherto, *i.e.*, parish and diocesan pastoral councils, must be made mandatory, and other bodies that Canon Law mandatorily envisages, *i.e.*, parish and diocesan finance committees, must be set up in the parishes and dioceses to ensure lay participation. The particular law must provide for it.

6.5 Finance Committee (FD 102)

To foster a more effective and transparent Church governance, it is crucial to implement the following actions in ways that resonate with diverse local contexts: Particular law needs to develop a robust structure for finance committees (cann. 537 and 492 *C/C*) to ensure that they operate effectively, providing guidance and oversight on financial matters. It should actively engage the People of God in the decision-making processes, drawing on the expertise of knowledgeable community members in both pastoral and financial planning. Their insights can lead to more informed and representative outcomes. It must create and disseminate an annual financial report that is tailored to the local community's needs and is presented in a clear and accessible format. Whenever feasible, this report should undergo external auditing to promote transparency, offering a comprehensive view of how the Church's temporal goods and financial resources are being managed responsibly. Ultimately, it is necessary to produce an annual report detailing the local Church's accomplishments and initiatives. This report should encompass efforts related to safeguarding (such as the protection of minors and vulnerable adults). The report should also highlight advancements made in enhancing lay participation in leadership roles and decision-making processes. Importantly, it should specify the distribution of men and women in these positions to ensure gender equity is addressed. Establishing measures for implementing regular evaluations of all ministries and roles within the Church to assess their effectiveness and impact, ensuring that ministerial activities align with the Church's mission and values is to be envisaged.

6.6 Diocesan Synod Organs of Evaluation for Accountability and Transparency

The Assembly recommends recognising the diocesan Synod (cann. 460-468 *C/C*), along with other participatory bodies, as vital for regular consultation between the Bishop and his community. The diocesan Synod also must provide a platform for the Bishop to report

accountably on pastoral activities, including implementing the diocesan pastoral plan, receiving Church synodal processes, safeguarding initiatives, and financial management. Strengthening the Canonical provisions to make this body meet regularly is necessary.

The diocesan Synod plays a crucial role in fostering accountability and evaluation within the Church's pastoral activities. It provides an opportunity for the Bishop to present a comprehensive report on a variety of key areas. These areas include the execution of the diocesan pastoral plan, which outlines the strategic direction for ministry and outreach within the diocese, as well as the reception and integration of synodal processes endorsed by the broader Church. Additionally, the diocesan Synod addresses initiatives aimed at safeguarding vulnerable individuals and promoting a culture of safety within the Church community. It also involves thorough oversight of the administration of finances and temporal goods, ensuring that resources are managed responsibly and in alignment with the Church's mission. To truly reflect the missionary and synodal character of each local Church, it is essential to enhance the existing canonical regulations that govern these bodies. This enhancement should ensure that the Synod meets on a regular basis, fostering ongoing dialogue and collaboration rather than allowing these important gatherings to occur infrequently. Regular meetings will help cultivate a dynamic and responsive pastoral ministry that can adapt to the evolving needs of the community.

7 Exchange of Gifts and Fostering the Bond

7.1 Rejuvenation of Particular Councils and "Sound Decentralisation" (FD 129, 134)

To realise a "sound decentralisation" (EG 16)³⁰, it is necessary to rejuvenate the institution of provincial and plenary councils. The periodic celebration of councils has been an obligation in the Church's history and is required by Canon Law (cann. 439-446 *CIC*). It is already envisaged by *Christus Dominus* no. 36.³¹ They should be convened periodically. According to can. 283 of *CIC* 1917, the provincial council should be convoked at least every twenty years.³² The procedure for the recognition of the conclusions of particular councils by the Holy See (*recognitio*) should be reformed to encourage their timely publication by specifying precise deadlines or, in cases of purely pastoral or disciplinary matters (not directly concerning issues of faith, morals, or sacramental discipline), by introducing a legal presumption equivalent to tacit consent (FD 129).

The second principle and criteria for the service of the Roman Curia mentioned in the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*³³ allows Bishops and Superiors of Consecrated Life to address familiar issues while preserving the Church's unity of doctrine and communion. This should be done in line with the recent Motu Proprio *Competentias quasdam decernere*, which modified 11 canons (cann. 237 §2; 242 §1; 265; 604; 686 §1; 688 §2; 699 §2; 700; 775 §2; 1308; 1310 *CIC*). These canons, which, until 2022, reserved the power to the higher authority, have left

³⁰ Cf. *Francis*, Apostolic Exhortation On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World "Evangelii gaudium" (24 November 2013), in AAS 105 (2013) 1019-1137.

³¹ Cf. *Vatican II*, Decree "Christus Dominus" (28 October 1965), in AAS 58 (1966) 673-696.

³² For an analysis of the Particular Councils, cf. *Provost, James*, Particular Councils, in Michel Thériault / Jean Thorn, *The New Code of Canon Law*, Ottawa 1986, 538-542.

³³ Cf. *Francis*, Apostolic Constitution "Praedicate Evangelium" (19 March 2022), in: *Communicationes* 54 (2022) 9-81.

it to the lower authority to resolve.³⁴ The principle of subsidiarity is to be encouraged in the contexts envisaged according to the Canon Law, nevertheless without affecting the Church's unity of doctrine, discipline and communion, always acting with that spirit of co-responsibility which is the fruit and expression of the specific *mysterium communionis* that is the Church.

7.2 Safeguarding Eastern Catholic Synodal Structures (FS 132)

The Bishop of Rome serves as a vital guarantor of unity amidst diversity, playing a crucial role in safeguarding the distinct identity of the Eastern Catholic Churches. This responsibility involves a deep respect for their rich and time-honoured traditions, which span across various aspects such as theology, canon law, liturgical practices, spiritual heritage, and pastoral care. Furthermore, these Churches are empowered with their own deliberative synodal structures, allowing them to engage in governance and decision-making processes that honour their unique customs and insights. Their synodal structures are: Synod of Bishops of the Patriarchal Church, the Synod of the Major Archiepiscopal Church (can. 102. ss., 152 *CCEO*), Provincial Council (can. 137 *CCEO*), Council of Hierarchs (cann. 155 §1, 164 *CCEO*), and, lastly, Assemblies of Hierarchs of the various Churches *sui iuris* (can. 322 *CCEO*). As distinct Churches *sui iuris* in complete communion with the Bishop of Rome, these communities proudly uphold their rich Eastern traditions and enjoy a significant level of autonomy. In the pursuit of genuine synodality, it is vital to reflect on our shared historical journey together, allowing us to address and heal the wounds of the past while deepening our understanding of communion. This process calls for a thoughtful reevaluation of the dynamics between Eastern Catholic Churches and the Roman Curia. Such relationships should be defined by meaningful exchanges of spiritual and cultural gifts, collaborative efforts, and a commitment to mutual enrichment that recognizes and celebrates the unique contributions of each tradition.

7.3 The Obligation of the Roman Curia to Consult (FD 135)

In what might be a response to the backlash against the Declaration *Fiducia supplicans* by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith on 8 December 2023,³⁵ the Final Document said: "Before publishing important normative documents, the dicasteries are exhorted to initiate a consultation with episcopal conferences and with the corresponding structures of the Eastern Churches *sui iuris*." The Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* has configured the service of the Roman Curia in a synodal and missionary sense. It insists that it "is not set between the Pope and the Bishops, but is at the service of both, according to the modalities proper to the nature of each."³⁶ The implementation of this initiative should foster enhanced collaboration among the various dicasteries, encouraging them to actively listen to and engage with local Churches. This approach aims to create a more unified and responsive Church that values the insights and needs of communities at the grassroots level.

³⁴ Cf. *Francis*, Motu proprio "Competentias quasdam decernere" (15 February 2022), in: *Communicationes* 54 (2022) 84-89; For further study on this document, cf. *Ambrose, Merlin Rengith*, Motu proprio Competentias quasdam decernere. A Greater Authority to Bishops, Bishops' Conferences and Superiors, in: *Studies in Church Law* 18 (2023) 67-98.

³⁵ Cf. *Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith*, Declaration On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings "Fiducia supplicans" (8 December 2023), at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dof_doc_20231218_fiducia-supplicans_en.html

³⁶ Cf. Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, I. 8.

8 Forming People for Missionary Discipleship

8.1 Formation in the Seminary

Throughout the synodal process, many participants expressed a strong desire for the discernment and formation of candidates for ordained ministry to be carried out in a synodal manner. This approach should include a substantial involvement of women, a deep engagement with the daily lives of communities, and training that promotes collaboration with everyone in the Church, as well as guidance on practising ecclesial discernment. Achieving this requires a courageous commitment to adequately prepare those who will serve as formators. The Assembly calls for a revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*³⁷ of 8 December 2016 (can. 241 *CIC*) to incorporate the insights shared during the Synod. These insights should be transformed into specific guidelines that promote a formation centred on synodality. Additionally, the formation pathways should inspire candidates to develop a passion for their mission to all people (*ad gentes*). Given the anticipated changes to *Ratio fundamentalis*, it is essential that the charter for priestly formation needs to be revised to reflect the principles of synodal thinking. This approach emphasises collaborative and inclusive methodologies in shaping the education and spiritual development of seminarians, ensuring that their formation is not only comprehensive but also resonates with the contemporary needs of the synodal Church and its community.

8.2 Culture of Safeguarding

It is crucial to promote a culture of safeguarding within all ecclesial contexts to ensure that communities are safe places for minors and vulnerable individuals. Efforts are already underway to establish regulations and legal procedures within Church structures that facilitate the prevention of abuse and enable timely responses to inappropriate behaviour. This commitment must continue, providing specific and adequate training for those who work with minors and vulnerable adults. Such training will help them act competently and recognise the often silent signals from those in distress who need assistance. It is essential to welcome and support victims, addressing their needs sensitively. This approach requires great compassion and should involve qualified professionals. The Universal Guidelines Framework³⁸ to protect and establish a climate of safeguarding, stringent attention to *Vademecum on Certain Points of Procedure in Treating Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors Committed by Clerics ver.2.0.*,³⁹ *Rescriptum* on the Confidentiality of Legal Proceedings,⁴⁰ Revised Book VI on Penal Sanctions in the Church,⁴¹ *Motu*

³⁷ Cf. *Congregation for the Clergy*, The Gift of the Priestly Vocation. *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, Vatican City 2016.

³⁸ Cf. at: <https://www.tutelaminorum.org/universal-guidelines-framework/>. The Universal Guidelines Framework (UGF) was developed in three phases: Phase 1 established Safeguarding Principles; Phase 2 established Criteria to translate the principles into policy and procedure; and Phase 3 established Indicators to measure and review the effective implementation of policy. The Universal Guidelines Framework was published in March 2024.

³⁹ Cf. *Dicasterium for the Doctrine of the Faith*, *Vademecum on Certain Points of Procedure in Treating Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors Committed by Clerics* (version 2.0) (5 June 2022), in: *Communicationes* 54 (2022) 161-193, at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/ddf/rc_ddf_doc_20220605_vademecum-casi-abuso-2.0_en.html.

⁴⁰ *Secretariat of State*, *Rescriptum ex audientia* on the Confidentiality of Legal Proceedings (6 December 2019), in: *Communicationes* 51 (2019) 366-367.

⁴¹ Cf. *Francis*, Apostolic Constitution *Pascite gregem Dei* (23 May 2021), in: *Communicationes* 52 (2021) 9-16; at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/06/01/210601b.html>.

proprio *Vos estis lux mundi*;⁴² *Chiarimento sugli adulti vulnerabili*;⁴³ Motu proprio *Come una madre amorevole*;⁴⁴ and Norms⁴⁵ Regarding Delicts Reserved to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Motu Proprio *Recognitum Librum VI*⁴⁶ should be meticulously complied with in following the procedures for the offenders and possible victims.

9 Which Paragraphs received the Most Pushback?⁴⁷

While Pope Francis approved and published the final document, several paragraphs garnered a significant number of unfavourable votes from the 355 synodal delegates convened in the Vatican. Certain points deserve special attention.

No. 60 on women's access to diaconal ministry. Over 27%, *i.e.*, 97 of 355 delegates in the Synod, voted against continuing to explore the possibility of women deacons.

No. 125 on Bishops' Conferences. Over 13%, *i.e.*, 45 of 355 delegates in the Synod, voted against the paragraph emphasising the significance of episcopal conferences, which also appears to bind a Bishop to decisions made by his conference.⁴⁸

No. 27 on making Eucharistic assembly more of a synodal assembly. Over 12%, *i.e.*, 43 of 355 delegates in the Synod, voted against establishing a study group to examine ways to make liturgical celebrations "more an expression of synodality," including what may be a reference to lay preaching during the liturgy. This non-favourable voting echoes their dislike regarding the deepening of the link between liturgy and synodality, which is expected to help all Christian communities, in the diversity of their cultures and traditions, to adopt celebratory styles that make visible the face of a synodal Church.

⁴² Cf. *Francis*, Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio "Vos estis lux mundi" (25 March 2023), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/20230325-motu-proprio-vos-estis-lux-mundi-aggiornato.html.

⁴³ Cf. *Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith*, *Chiarimento sugli adulti vulnerabili* (30 January 2024), at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dcf_doc_20240130_chiarimento-adulti-vulnerabili_it.html.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Francis*, Motu Proprio "Come una madre amorevole" (04 June 2016), in AAS 108 (2016) 715-717.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, Norme sui delitti riservati della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede (07 December 2021), at: *Communications* 53 (2021) 428-436; at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20211011_norme-delittiriservati-cfaith_it.html.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Francis*, Apostolic Letter "Recognitum Librum VI" (26 April 2022), in *Communications* 54 (2022) 96.

⁴⁷ Cf. at: https://press.vatican.va/content/dam/salastampa/it/fuori-bollettino/pdf/Risultati%20Votazioni_Sinodo.pdf.

⁴⁸ No. 125 of the Final Document: "Based on the outcomes of the synodal process, we propose the following: a) to gather the fruits of deliberations on the theological and juridical statute of Episcopal Conferences; b) to specify precisely the domain of the doctrinal and disciplinary competence of Episcopal Conferences. Without compromising the authority of the Bishop within the Church entrusted to him or putting at risk either the unity or the catholicity of the Church, the collegial exercise of such competence can further the authentic teaching of the one faith in an appropriate and enculturated way within different contexts in addition to identifying fitting liturgical, catechetical, disciplinary, pastoral theology and spiritual expression (cf. AG 22); c) a process of assessment of the experience of the concrete functioning of Episcopal Conferences, of the relations among the bishops and with the Holy See so as to identify the particular reforms needed. The visits *ad limina Apostolorum* can provide appropriate occasions for this; d) ensuring that all dioceses are part of an ecclesiastical province and to an Episcopal Conference; e) specifying that decisions made by an Episcopal Conference impose an ecclesial obligation on each Bishop who participated in the decision in relation to his own diocese."

No. 148 on making the presence of women in the formation of seminarians and revision of *Ratio fundamentalis*⁴⁹ also earned the next highest number of unfavourable votes: Over 11%, i.e., 40 of 355 delegates in the Synod voted against it.

10 Conclusion

Although Pope Francis has stated that the synodal path is “completed,” the document highlights that a vital implementation phase is forthcoming. This next stage will aim to incorporate synodality as a constitutive dimension of the Church. In this vein, the synodal path will be the process for all of us to live it out concretely. During this phase, it is especially important to heed the encouragement to resist the allure of rigidity. In his final greeting on 26 October 2024, Pope Francis quoted the poem by Madeleine Delbr  l, a mystic of the peripheries who exhorted, “Above all, do not be rigid” – rigidity is a sin that sometimes creeps into the lives of the clergy or of consecrated persons.⁵⁰

Moreover, in the same final greeting, Pope Francis states:

“For this reason, I do not intend to publish an Apostolic Exhortation, what we have approved is sufficient. There are already highly concrete indications in the Document that can be a guide for the mission of the Churches, in their specific continents and contexts. This is why I am making it immediately available to everyone, it is the reason I said that it should be published. In this way, I wish to recognize the value of the synodal journey accomplished, which by means of this Document I hand over to the holy faithful people of God.

On certain aspects of the life of the Church pointed out in the Document, as well as on the themes entrusted to the ten “Study Groups”, who work with freedom, to offer me proposals, more time is needed in order to arrive at decisions that involve the whole Church. I will continue to listen to the Bishops and the Churches entrusted to them.

This is not the classic way of postponing decisions indefinitely. It is the way that corresponds to the synodal style with which even the Petrine ministry is to be exercised: by listening, convening, discerning, deciding and evaluating. On this path we need pauses, silences and prayer. It is a style that we are still learning together, little by little. The Holy Spirit calls and supports us in this learning, which we need to understand as a process of conversion.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ No. 148 of the Final Document: “Throughout the synodal process, a widely expressed request was that discernment and formation of candidates for ordained ministry be undertaken in a synodal way. There should be a significant presence of women, an immersion in the daily life of communities, and formation to enable collaboration with everyone in the Church and in how to practise ecclesial discernment. This implies a courageous investment of energy in the preparation of formators. The Assembly calls for a revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in order to incorporate the requests made by the Synod. They should be translated in precise guidelines for a formation to synodality. Formation pathways should awaken in candidates their passion for the mission to all peoples (*ad gentes*). Formation of Bishops is just as necessary so that they may better assume their mission of bringing together in unity the gifts of the Spirit and exercise in a synodal manner the authority conferred on them. The synodal way of formation implies that the ecumenical dimension is present in all aspects of the paths towards ordained ministries.”

⁵⁰ Cf. *Francis*, Final Greeting (26 October 2024), at: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2024/october/documents/20241026-sinodo-vescovi.html>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Many of the Final Document's proposals for a more participatory and inclusive Church are already possible within existing structures and canonical frameworks and must be strengthened and insisted upon. To begin with, the implementation stage should focus on better usage of current juridical possibilities, enshrined in Canon Law. The Final Document does propose "a revision of Canon Law from a synodal perspective" (FD 92), particularly in terms of clarifying "the distinction and relation between consultation and deliberation" regarding ecclesial governance and the roles of pastors and lay faithful in decision-making. The other necessary canonical revisions in order to advocate the synodal style will be executed by the relevant bodies designated for this purpose. A Commission of Canon Law has been established to work on necessary innovations regarding ecclesial norms. This initiative seeks to harmonise traditional Church teachings with modern pastoral needs, fostering greater inclusivity and other synodal tenets in Church governance. Any changes to Canon Law must maintain fidelity to the past while being open to the future. This ensures that the unity of doctrine and theology is preserved while promoting synodal initiatives. The task of convening the Synod is accomplished; however, the task ahead is the implementation phase of the Synod's Final Document, the third phase of the Synod on Synodality, following the preparatory and celebratory phases.⁵²

⁵² Cf. *Francis*, Letter on the Accompaniment Process of the Implementation Phase of the Synod (15 March 2025), at: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2025-03-15_letter_process2028/ENG_Letter_To_the_Bishops_-_implementation_phase_of_the_Synod.pdf.