

Pathways for the Implementation of the Synod

from the
XII FABC Plenary Assembly
**The Call to Synodal Conversion and the Mission to
be Bridges and Bridge-builders in Asia**

“You will see greater things...” (Jn 1:50)

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The Importance of the Local Church Following the Synod

Cardinal Mario Grech

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FABC Plenary Assembly XII

Jakarta, 24th July 2026

Thank you for the way you have organised this Plenary Assembly! I am fully in harmony with the underlying intuition: it is not a matter of talking about synodality, but of seeking how to live it in the ordinary life of our Churches.

I confess that this is truly an overwhelming ecclesial experience. Dear brother bishops as I listen attentively to your wisdom, as I perceive the passion that animates your love for the Church and for creation, and as I savor the way in which the synodal conversion is unfolding across Asia, I find myself deeply moved. This encounter is not only spiritually enriching but also pastorally energizing; it rekindles in me a sense of joy and courage in my ministry.

Your witness is a living testimony that even a minority Church can become a seed of transformation. By your perseverance, creativity, and fidelity, you show that the Gospel has the power to inspire renewal, to awaken hope, and to bring about change that radiates far beyond numerical strength. You are proof that the Spirit chooses what is small to accomplish what is great, and that the vitality of the Church does not depend on size but on the depth of faith and the generosity of its mission.

Next Monday, our General Secretariat for the Synod will publish a new document containing notes intended to accompany the local Churches in the preparation and celebration of the diocesan Evaluation Assembly, which marks the first stage in the implementation of the Synod process.

In a gesture of sincere appreciation for your untiring dedication and faithful commitment to this journey, we have agreed to share with you this document *ante prima*. It is our hope that, by receiving it ahead of its official release, you may find encouragement and inspiration in

your ministry, and that it may serve as a sign of the esteem with which your contribution to the synodal path is regarded.

1. The local Churches as protagonists of the implementation phase

The subject of the implementation phase and of the path of the Assemblies is, first of all, the local Church. This statement does not have merely organizational value; it expresses a deeply ecclesiological conviction.

Thus I would like to reflect on the importance of the local Churches – an aspect of ecclesiology that is often insufficiently understood and, consequently, too frequently neglected. While much attention is rightly given to the universal Church, we sometimes fail to appreciate that it is through the life, witness, and mission of local Churches that the universal Church becomes visible and effective in the world. The local Church is not merely an administrative subdivision of the universal Church; it is a true manifestation of the Church in a particular place, where the Gospel is proclaimed, the sacraments are celebrated, and the faithful are gathered into communion with Christ.

If a local church fails to contribute, it deprives the universal Church of something vital. Every local church has unique gifts, experiences, resources, and a distinct witness that God intends to enrich the whole body of Christ. The universal Church is not an abstract reality existing apart from its local expressions; rather, it is made visible and sustained through living, faithful local congregations. Just as the body depends on the health and function of each of its members, the universal Church flourishes only when its local churches are spiritually alive, actively engaged in mission, and faithfully exercising their God-given calling. When even one local church neglects its role, the entire Church is diminished, losing a contribution that no other congregation can provide. In this sense, the vitality of the universal Church subsists in and through the vitality of its local churches.

From the very beginning of the Synodal Process on synodality – that is, from the publication of the Preparatory Document in September 2021 – a guiding question has directed the work: how and where can the People of God be reached, so that a Synod which intends to speak about the People of God may do so by speaking first and foremost **to, from, and with the People of God?**

It soon became clear to us that a Synod on the participation of all the baptized, men and women, in the one mission of the Church in the world—in keeping with the programme already outlined by Pope Francis in the programmatic document of his pontificate, *Evangelii Gaudium*—would not have been credible had it not sought the broadest possible participation at every significant stage of the Process.

In other words, the participation of all could not merely be the content; it had first of all to be the method. Likewise, the People of God could not simply be the object; above all, they had to be the subject of the journey.

To that decisive question—where can the People of God be reached?—there could be only one answer: solely and exclusively in the local Churches, “in which and from which,” as the Second Vatican Council proclaims, “the one and only Catholic Church exists” (*Lumen Gentium*, 23). It is important to stress that the fundamental subject of the entire process always remains the local Church. In each of our dioceses – even the smallest and most geographically dispersed – “the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative” (*Christus Dominus* 11; cf. *Lumen Gentium* 26). The latter, in fact, is not an abstract entity, nor can it be identified with the “Vatican” or with “Rome,” which is itself, first and foremost, a local Church among the others, albeit one endowed by God with a particular mission.

The Church of Christ is a *communio Ecclesiarum*, the Council further affirms (*ibid.*), a communion of Churches. Therefore, to listen to the Church—and this has fundamentally been our intention, since “a synodal Church is a Church which listens” (Francis, *Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015)—means, concretely, to listen to the Churches. This, moreover, is what the Book of Revelation repeatedly states in its opening chapters: “Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (Rev 2:7 and *passim*).

Each local Church receives the full gift of faith, yet none of them, on its own, exhausts the richness of the ecclesial mystery. For this reason, the Churches need one another. They need to share experiences, insights, hopes, and even struggles. The proposed process leading to the Ecclesial Assembly in 2028 seeks precisely to foster this

dynamism. The Assemblies foreseen at the various ecclesial levels are called to gather what has matured within the Churches and to communicate it to other Churches. The primary aim is not to produce new documents. Rather, it is to encourage a circulation of gifts that strengthens communion and supports the mission.

The Second Vatican Council rediscovered the local Church after a long period of relative lack of interest on the part of both the Magisterium and theology itself.

At the same time, the Council did not succeed in offering a fully developed reflection on the subject, probably also because the time was not yet ripe for such a synthesis. Rather, it provided us with numerous authoritative insights, scattered not only throughout *Lumen Gentium*, but also across many other conciliar documents, from the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, with its liturgical ecclesiology, to the Decree *Ad Gentes*, with its missionary ecclesiology.

Building on all these insights, the post-conciliar reception certainly recovered a theme that had previously been neglected, but it often ended up burdening it with ideological meanings that did not always help the theology of the local Church to receive the recognition it deserved.

Faced with an evident stagnation in the discussion of this theme, the Synodal Process, increasingly understanding itself as “a further act of reception of the Council,” intended to extend its “inspiration” and renew “its prophetic force for today’s world” (*Final Document*, 24 October 2024, no. 5), chose to take a different path: the path of reality, in the profound sense that Romano Guardini would have given to this term, embracing the conviction—already adopted by Pope Francis—that “realities are more important than ideas” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 231–233). Anyone seeking in the documents of the Synod an “idea” of the local Church produced in some theological “laboratory” would be wasting their time. Rather, the Synod sought to open its eyes to the “reality” of the local Churches, literally reaching out to each one of them.

Indeed, this Synod did not take place solely, or even primarily, in Rome. Rather, through a journey unfolding in several phases, it made consultation with the local Churches one of its defining features. In

doing so, it was able to benefit from the innovations introduced by Pope Francis in the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, in which the importance of listening to the People of God is already strongly affirmed. We must listen to the People of God because God gives his faithful people the gift of the “instinct of faith” – *sensus fidei*. Yet, as the process unfolded, it became increasingly clear that the local Churches required a movement beyond the very letter of *Episcopalis Communio*. It could not be a matter of listening to them only during the initial phase, only to involve them again at the very end by asking them to implement decisions that had been taken “at the centre” without them.

Thus arose the idea of **continuous feedback** (*restitutio*), which may perhaps be regarded as a new theological category that emerged precisely during the Synodal Process. Every advance made by the Synod – taking concrete form in a new phase, a new gathering, and a new document – had each time to return to the People of God in order to be “authenticated” by them: that People who live precisely within the local Churches. The movement was therefore no longer unidirectional, but bidirectional – indeed, circular.

We may ask: why was this choice made—a choice without precedent in the history of Synods, and indeed of the Roman Curia itself, and one which, from an operational point of view, inevitably prolonged the process and required a considerable expenditure of energy?

The answer may be formulated in these terms: because only by listening and listening anew to the local Churches—that is, to the People of God “in flesh and blood,” made up of baptized men and women—could there be sufficient assurance that the work of a restricted number of “experts,” even if they were members of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, would not simply “steamroll” the ecclesial grassroots, thereby losing the countless accents, nuances, and sensitivities that the Holy Spirit brings forth and nurtures throughout every part of the Church.

Pope Francis himself once admonished me: “Be open to what comes from the local Churches!” His conviction was that the Synod should not adopt a pre-packaged programme, defining its objectives in advance, but should instead move forward by listening to the Churches, allowing itself to be guided—and, if necessary,

redirected—by what emerged from the living and authentic People of God. The same is applicable to the Ecclesial Assembly scheduled for 2028.

Making room for the local Churches at every stage of the Process ultimately means making room for cultures, thereby highlighting the catholicity of the Church of Christ: that is, her being one without being uniform; her being a single “we,” the “ecclesial We”—a formulation in which unity is expressed in the plural rather than the singular.

The Church—the Church whom the Father has predestined from all eternity, whom the Son historically founded two thousand years ago, and whom the Holy Spirit permanently vivifies (LG 2-4)—is the one and only People of God gathered from all the peoples of the earth (LG 9 and 13). For this reason, she is capable of bringing into harmony—that harmony which is itself a gift of the Spirit—countless languages, histories, geographical contexts, conceptions of life, expressions of faith, and interpretations of the one revealed truth.

Seen in this light, a Church of Churches, understood as a communion of local Churches, takes shape as a Church that is less Rome-centred and more oriented towards mission; that is, a Church more ready to reach out to all the nations of the earth and proclaim to them that the Gospel does not diminish their cultures, but rather assumes, purifies, and brings to fulfilment all their legitimate expressions, demonstrating that every culture is, in principle, compatible with the Christian message.

This is what *Evangelii Gaudium* affirms (cf. nos. 115-118) and, looking further back, what *Ad Gentes* declares—a decree in which, not by chance, we find the Council’s most mature theology of the local Churches. It is more mature precisely because it is constructed not in the abstract, but on the concrete ground of inculturation. Every local Church is a theological locus, a laboratory of the Spirit, a place where the Gospel becomes incarnate and, as such, an indispensable point of passage for the reform of the entire Church.

In this sense, the Synod has woven the local Churches of the world into a genuine network, becoming a point of connection and mutual illumination among them. It has enabled their best practices to circulate more freely, so that what until now has been the heritage of

only a few might increasingly become the richness of all. This corresponds to the profoundly conciliar logic of the exchange of gifts, through which the Spirit allows the diverse experiences of the Churches to converge, resonate, and bear fruit for the whole People of God.

The narrative report and the letter to other Churches – both of which each diocese is invited to prepare at the conclusion of its Evaluation Assembly – serve precisely this complementary purpose. They are meant to help each local Church recognize not only what it shares with others, but also the particular gifts the Lord has entrusted to it for the enrichment of the entire ecclesial body. In this way, the Synodal process becomes a space where the Churches learn from one another, support one another, and together discern how the Spirit is guiding the Church in this moment of history.

Throughout the Process, we have allowed ourselves to be surprised by the creativity of the Holy Spirit, who inspires one person in one way and another in another way, so that only “together” does the Church possess the whole.

This, it seems to me, is the indispensable starting point for a theology of the local Churches that is not ideological, but rooted in practice, in life, and in reality: a theology that does not abstract itself from the People of God, because it always begins from them and always returns to them.

Thus, when we ask, “Where is the People of God?”, the only possible answer is this: there is no People of God other than the one concretely living in each *portio Populi Dei*, that is, in each Diocese!

In keeping with this fundamental vision, the synodal process on synodality devoted considerable attention to the local Church throughout its many documents. Most recently, this is evident in the *Final Document* of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, approved on 26 October 2024 and subsequently received by Pope Francis into the ordinary Magisterium of the Bishop of Rome – an unprecedented step in the sixty-year history of the Synod. In support of this affirmation, I would refer in particular to paragraphs 18, 37 and 116, where we read, among other things: “The local Church, understood as a diocese or eparchy, is the fundamental sphere in which the communion in Christ of the Baptised is most fully

manifested. As local Church, the community is gathered in the celebration of the Eucharist presided over by its Bishop. Each local Church has its own internal organisation, whilst also maintaining relationships with other local Churches”.

Even before speaking *about* the local Churches, however, the synodal process sought to speak *to* the local Churches and *from* the local Churches, repeatedly emphasizing the consultation of the People of God within each Diocese as the primary and fundamental expression of synodality. This was precisely the vision articulated by Pope Francis in his landmark address marking the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015), a speech which, together with *Evangelii Gaudium*, may rightly be regarded as the point of departure for the Church’s present “synodal springtime”. Without fear of contradiction, we may therefore say that the most recent Synod was not celebrated only in Rome: it unfolded throughout the local Churches across the world, albeit – inevitably – with varying degrees of intensity.

Now that the celebratory phase of the Synod has come to an end, we have entered what the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, promulgated on 15 September 2018, calls the implementation phase, which we might also describe, using a theologically richer term, as the phase of reception. This phase, which will lead us to the ecclesial Assembly of 2028, once again places at the centre the People of God gathered in each local Church, within the living network of relationships that unites the Bishop, his presbyterate, deacons, other ministers, and all the baptised – women and men alike – who share the one mission of proclaiming Christ crucified and risen to the world in which we live.

Synodality is not only a matter of participation but also an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the service of authority entrusted to the diocesan bishop. In the synodal journey, the Bishop’s first service is to safeguard the conditions that enable the Church to continue generating the life of the Gospel within its own context. For this reason, ecclesial discernment does not limit the Bishop’s responsibility; rather, it is the place where that responsibility reaches its fullest expression. As a matter of fact, the bishop is invited to listen to the people of God (*sensus fidelium*) in order to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit, who precedes every decision; he is called

to accompany the process of discernment, helping the various gifts converge in the one mission of the Church. While he bears the responsibility of making the final decision, this responsibility means safeguarding this communion while directing it toward the future that the Lord is opening.

If the celebratory phase undoubtedly attracted the greatest public attention, the phase of reception is, in many respects, the more important one. For it is not enough to engage in reflection, draft documents and approve them by large majorities – important though these things undoubtedly are. Nor is even the formal approval of the Bishop of Rome sufficient, despite the fact that, by receiving the *Final Document*, he chose not to issue a post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation. The history of the Church is marked by conciliar and papal decisions that ultimately faded into obscurity because they were never truly received by the People of God – not through organised opposition, but simply through neglect, forgetfulness or lack of interest. This is precisely what reception means: the living and creative appropriation of a magisterial teaching by the People of God, who recognise in it a norm that is genuinely consonant with their life.

Certainly, reception is a process that ecclesiastical authority can and indeed must foster through appropriate initiatives. This is precisely the aim of the work currently being completed by the Study Groups established in 2024, as well as of the various milestones that the General Secretariat of the Synod – first with the approval of Pope Francis and now with that of Pope Leo XIV – has scheduled between now and 2028. Yet reception cannot ultimately be directed from above. Its hidden protagonist is the Holy Spirit, who works within the heart of the People of God, gradually leading them along the path of renewal and reform, of which he himself is the divine source.

The *Pathways for the Implementation Phase*, published by the General Secretariat of the Synod on 7 July 2025, move precisely in this direction. Among other things, the document states that: “The implementation phase aims to examine new practices and structures that will make the life of the Church more synodal, starting from the overall perspective outlined in the *Final Document*, with a view to more effectively carrying out the mission of evangelisation”. The document continues: “Every local Church, every parish community will be able to practise synodality within its ordinary pastoral

ministry, improving the way it carries out its mission through the ecclesial discernment that the Holy Spirit asks of us today". In other words, the *Pathways* affirm that: "The implementation phase therefore aims to have a tangible impact on the life of the Church and on the functioning of its structures and institutions. If it were to be limited to the formulation of abstract hypotheses, it would not achieve its purpose and, above all, it would dissipate the enthusiasm and energy that the synodal process has generated so far".

It is in this spirit that every local Church is now called to undertake a serious discernment regarding the paths of pastoral renewal that the Synod encourages it to embrace. During the first semester of 2027, these paths will become the subject of dedicated diocesan evaluation assemblies - in this respect our Secretariate shortly will be publishing a document to help the local Churches prepare for the diocesan evaluation assembly - evaluation is not primarily a technical exercise or an assessment of institutional efficiency; rather it is an ecclesial and spiritual act whereby the local Church looks back with gratitude and honesty upon the journey it has undertaken, to recognize the fruits that have matured, to acknowledge difficulties and resistances and to discern the further conversions to which the Lord is calling the community. This will be followed by national assemblies in the second semester of 2027 and continental assemblies during the first four months of 2028.

During this stage, the Churches in Asia (dioceses, Episcopal Conferences, and FABC) are not simply faced with the task of implementing the Synod in a new geographical context. They are called to manifest, through their own experience, dimensions of ecclesial life that belong to the whole Church. Their long experience of dialogue with the great religious traditions, the often minority status of Christian communities, the plurality of cultures and languages, and their closeness to peoples who experience poverty, migration, and many forms of vulnerability all constitute places where the Holy Spirit continues to form the Church. From these experiences, new ways of living communion, exercising authority, discerning the path for proclaiming the Gospel, and building relationships capable of bearing witness to Christ without relinquishing attentive listening to others can emerge. In this way, our mission is enriched and deepened: to be bridges and

bridge-builders in Asia, serving as instruments of unity and reconciliation in the name of God.

For this reason, the fundamental question is not primarily what the Churches of Asia will receive from the Synod. Rather, the question is what gift the Holy Spirit wishes to offer to the whole Church through them - your contribution will help the *Ecclesia tota* "to see greater things" (cfr. Jn 1:50). The implementation of the Synod will bear its fullest fruit when every local Church recognizes itself simultaneously as both the recipient and the bearer of a gift. In this mutual exchange, the Church continues to grow as communion and as mission.

Pathways for the Implementation of the Synod

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XII Plenary Assembly FABC

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Dear brothers and sisters,

Before turning more specifically to the journey that lies before us over the next two years, I would like to recall an appeal that Pope Leo XIV addressed to the Cardinals gathered in Consistory– an appeal he would surely make to you as well, and that also introduces our theme well, *Pathways for the Implementation of the Synod*: “I wish once again,” said Pope Leo, “to entrust to you the implementation journey of the Synod. I ask you to accompany it with conviction in the Churches you serve, fostering an authentic understanding of it and encouraging everyone to take part. It is about helping our Churches grow in an ever more evangelical style”. (Pope Leo XIV, *Concluding Address at the Extraordinary Consistory*, 27 June 2026).

If, as Cardinal Grech has reminded us, the subject of the implementation phase is the local Church, then the question becomes very practical: *how can we accompany a local Church so that it can fully assume this responsibility?*

Implementation and evaluation processes

To answer this question, the General Secretariat of the Synod has progressively made available a number of resources. The documents are never the focus of the process. They should help us live together in a synodal manner. It is important to understand how they relate to one another, because each serves a different purpose and, taken together, they outline one coherent journey.

On one side there is the implementation process opened after the Synod. The fundamental point of reference is the *Final Document*. The document *Pathways for the Implementation Phase of the Synod* clarifies its meaning, identifies its subjects, and proposes its method. Above all, it reminds us that the process of becoming a synodal Church is an ongoing process of ecclesial conversion.

But this implementation process, even if it has local Churches as protagonists, it's a process shared by **the whole Church**. So another question arises for the Secretariat of the Synod: *how can we accompany a local Church so that its bonds with other local Churches grow? How can the local Churches be accompanied to walk together in the implementation process?* The document ***Towards the Ecclesial Assemblies 2027-2028*** explains that there are moments in which the journey is reviewed, celebrated, and shared together **among** the Churches. It explains the framework of a set of "revision moments" (Evaluation Assemblies) that will take place in the local Churches, at the level of the Episcopal Conferences, on each continent, and finally in the Ecclesial Assembly of 2028. They will help the Local Churches to walk together.

Finally, we are happy to announce today another instrument: the ***Notes for Bishops and Synodal Teams*** are intended to accompany the stage of Local Churches in a very practical way, offering them criteria and concrete tools for their preparation. It has just been sent out today, and it is still confidential till Monday!

It is important, therefore, to understand that these documents don't present separate processes and that one document doesn't replace the other. And the assemblies planned for 2027 and 2028 **do not interrupt the implementation journey of the Churches, nor do they replace it.**

They provide an opportunity in which a **community pauses**, becomes more conscious of the path it has travelled, and recognizes what the Lord has brought to maturity in its life. In this sense, they are **Evaluation** opportunities.

Here we encounter **one word that, especially in English, can easily be misunderstood: "evaluation"**. Many people naturally associate it with measuring results, assessing objectives, or verifying the efficiency of an organisation. That is perfectly understandable, because this is how the word is commonly used.

Within the synodal journey, however, we mean something quite different. **Evaluation** is not primarily about asking whether we have been successful, **but** about discerning what the Lord has accomplished among us and to what further steps He is calling us. For this reason, the evaluation assemblies **are not technical assessments**. They are spiritual events: moments of ecclesial discernment, shared responsibility, and thanksgiving.

Scripture offers us a beautiful key for understanding this attitude. For example, when the apostles return from their mission, they tell Jesus everything they have done (cf. i.e. Mk 6:30). He then invites them to withdraw to a deserted place. This pause is not an interruption of the mission, but an essential part of it. It is the moment in which the mission can be understood more deeply in the presence of the Lord. In the same way, the evaluation assemblies invite our Churches to pause along the journey – not to look nostalgically at the past, but to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit and to be opened to the future.

The Evaluation Assemblies

This perspective also **changes the focus of the evaluation itself, which takes place in the Assemblies**. The primary object of attention is not only collecting best practices or at least of practices and judging them. All these activities certainly have their value, but they are not what we are first called to seek.

The decisive question is another: **what concrete features of a missionary synodal Church are emerging in our community?** What processes of transformation are taking shape? How are the relationships, ecclesial processes and bonds within our Church being transformed? In other words, we are called to recognize the fruits of the conversion to which the *Final Document* invites every Church: the conversion of relationships, of ecclesial processes, and of bonds.

If these **three conversions** provide the criterion by which we spiritually revisit our journey, they also tell us what we are looking for. The goal is not to verify whether we have completed every planned initiative, but to recognize what transformations are truly taking shape in the life of the Church.

The first conversion you know concerns **relationships**. This is not simply a matter of becoming kinder or more welcoming. It means recognizing that no vocation and no ministry exists in isolation. Every vocation is structurally relational. A Bishop cannot be a Bishop alone. He cannot exercise his ministry without priests and deacons, nor without the other baptized, individually and gathered in communities, associations and movements.

The second concerns conversion of **ecclesial processes**. As Pope Leo has reminded us at the Consistory, the question is not who decides or

who holds greater power, but how we care together for the common mission entrusted to us.

Finally, the conversion of **bonds** broadens our horizon. A Church that grows in synodality does not become more self-contained. On the contrary, it grows in communion with other Churches, in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, in its missionary presence within society, and in its capacity to share in the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of humanity.

This is an essential dimension of evaluation: **recognizing how the Lord is widening the horizons of our communion and our mission.**

For this reason, the journey proposed to the local Churches unfolds in two closely interconnected movements.

The Narrative Report

The first consists in a **prayerful revisiting of the experience lived during these years.**

Allow me a brief remark about this word as well. In many Latin languages — *relectura*, *relecture*, *rilettura* — it refers to a particular way of approaching a lived experience. In English, however, the word *reread* naturally suggests reading a text for a second time. Here we mean something much deeper: revisiting our experience in the light of the Word of God and the action of the Holy Spirit, allowing a meaning to emerge that perhaps we were not yet able to recognize while we were living those events.

This dynamic runs throughout the whole of Scripture. In the Bible, the full understanding of God's action often comes only after the events themselves have taken place. **Moses** is allowed to see the Lord only "from behind": he recognizes God's passing only after He has gone by (cf. Ex 33:23). At the end of his journey, the disciples on the road to **Emmaus** realize that the Risen Lord had been walking with them only when they reread their experience in the light of the Scriptures; only then can they say to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us?" (Lk 24:32). The same pattern appears several times in the Gospel. **Memory, illuminated by the Word and by the Spirit, enables us to recognize a presence that had already been at work, even though we were not yet able to perceive it.**

Faith gradually illuminates our experience until we can recognize what the Lord has already been accomplishing in the life of the community. Memory thus becomes thanksgiving, discernment and guidance for the journey ahead.

When the Churches are asked to prepare a **narrative report**, they are not simply being asked to write a report. Rather, they are invited to devote time to listening to the memory of the community, gathering testimonies, bringing different experiences into dialogue, dwelling on the signs that emerge, and allowing their meaning gradually to unfold. This is an exercise in ecclesial discernment, lived in prayer and, wherever possible, in the style of Conversation in the Spirit. The narrative report is the fruit of this process.

I would like to emphasize the adjective “*narrative*”. The Churches are not being asked to submit a list of activities, to complete a questionnaire, or to provide a set of statistical data. **They are invited to tell their story.** To narrate means to weave together events, people, intuitions, challenges and transformations and to allow their meaning gradually to unfold, enabling us to recognize how the Lord has accompanied the growth of the community. In this sense, the narrative report is more than a document; it is already an exercise in ecclesial conversion, because **it teaches a community to read, to revisit its own history through the eyes of faith.**

The Letters to the Churches

While the narrative report can help a local Church revisit its experience in a prayerful way (*rilettura*), it must not be an exercise in self-reflection for its own sake. From the very beginning, the synodal process has taught us that **synodality is intrinsically missionary.** It is a missionary conversion that is urgently needed in a fragmented world. At the same time, it reminds us that **mission is never something each Church carries out on its own.** Every local Church lives within a wider communion, and the gifts it has received are always meant to be shared and placed at the service of proclaiming the Gospel.

The narrative report is therefore one outcome of the Assembly's work. Another one is equally important: the drafting of a **Letter to the Churches.**

The choice of the letter is far from accidental. **It recalls one of the oldest practices of ecclesial life. During the first centuries,** the Churches sustained their communion precisely through letters. They shared the story of their communities, bore witness to their faith, communicated their joys and trials, and recounted what the Lord was accomplishing in their midst. Communion was nurtured not only through common decisions, but also through the exchange of lived experience, mutual knowledge, and gratitude for the gifts received through one another.

We have sought to recover this ancient intuition. **For this reason, we are not asking the Churches to prepare yet another report for Rome.** Instead, we are inviting them to write first and foremost to the other Churches. This change of perspective is significant. A Church does not tell its story so that someone else may evaluate it, but so that its experience may become nourishment, encouragement and inspiration for the journey of other communities.

This **reciprocal communication** is one of the most original features of the implementation phase. We often imagine ecclesial communication as essentially vertical: from the Churches to Rome, or from Rome to the Churches. **Yet the Letter is not written for Rome.** The synodal process invites us instead to strengthen also a form of communication in which the Churches learn to speak directly to one another, to know one another more deeply, and to share their insights, challenges and hopes. In this way, that circulation of gifts among the Churches, which belongs to the Church's most ancient catholic tradition, can flourish once again with renewed creativity.

Roles and responsibilities

Understanding the purpose of the Evaluation Assemblies, the Narrative Report and the Letter to the Churches also helps us appreciate the complementary roles of the Bishop and the synodal teams.

The **Bishop** remains the **primary person responsible** for the entire process. It is his task to convene the community, to safeguard the ecclesial meaning of the journey, to accompany its different stages, and to recognize both the narrative report and the Letter to the Churches as authentic expressions of the journey of his local Church.

The **synodal team**, on the other hand, has a ministry of **animation and facilitation**. It involves the different members of the community, gathers its living memory, fosters dialogue, prepares the Assembly, and helps the local Church recognize what the Holy Spirit is bringing to maturity in its life. It does not replace either the discernment of the community or the ministry of the Bishop. Rather, it **enables that process of listening and shared responsibility through which the Church gradually grows as the true subject of the implementation of the Synod**.

I would like to dwell for a moment on the synodal teams, because they are one of the most significant legacies of the synodal process. In many Churches they were established to accompany the consultation phase that began in 2021, **and some may think that, now that this phase has ended**, their task is complete. In reality, the opposite is true. If, during the first phase, they helped the People of God to find their voice, they are now called to help the Church recognize what the Holy Spirit is bringing to maturity through that very voice. To register, write to synodus@synod.va putting your name and the one of your (new) team responsible.

For this reason, synodal teams are **not simply organizational committees responsible for preparing an assembly**. Their first service is ecclesial and spiritual. They safeguard a way of proceeding. They foster participation, facilitate dialogue, help different experiences enter into conversation with one another, promote the practice of Conversation in the Spirit, and accompany the community as it gradually learns a synodal style of life. In other words, **they make possible that process of listening and spiritual revisiting** without which ecclesial discernment risks being reduced either to the sum of individual opinions or to the judgments of a few experts.

This **naturally requires a close relationship with the Bishop and with the ordinary bodies of participation in the life of the Church**. The Presbyteral Council, the Pastoral Council and the other consultative bodies established in the Church **are not replaced by the synodal teams**. On the contrary, it is precisely the collaboration among these different subjects that allows co-responsibility to take concrete and lasting form. The synodal teams animate the process; the participatory bodies exercise **their consultative role**; the Bishop safeguards the unity of the journey and guarantees its authentically

ecclesial character. Together, these complementary responsibilities enable the local Church to exercise fully its vocation as the subject of the implementation phase.

Allow me to conclude with some final observations.

The preparation of the evaluation assembly should never be regarded as an extraordinary task added on to the ordinary pastoral life of the Church. If it is experienced in this way, it will inevitably appear as yet another burden. **In reality, it is a precious opportunity to introduce gradually into the ordinary life of our Churches a culture of revisiting experience, discernment and evaluation.** If we learn, from time to time, to pause together, to recognize what the Lord is bringing to maturity among us, and to allow this recognition to shape the steps ahead, then one of the most important fruits of the Synod will already have begun to take root in the daily life of our communities.

If this highlights the responsibility of each local Church, the perspective opened up by the Letters also helps us understand the **meaning of the subsequent stages of the process.** The national, continental and finally the 2028 Ecclesial Assembly **are not higher levels before which the local Churches must report once they have completed their own work.** Rather, **they are places where this exchange of gifts gradually widens.** What each Church has recognized in its own experience is received, brought into dialogue with the experience of others, and returned as a gift to the whole Church. In this way, **the journey of each local Church truly contributes to the journey of the whole Church,** and the growth of communion itself becomes a concrete expression of mission.

Growing in communion

Perhaps this is one of the most beautiful fruits of the synodal journey. For centuries, the Churches recognized one another by sharing what the Holy Spirit was accomplishing in their communities. Today we are invited to recover this tradition in new forms. **The implementation phase does not consist simply in putting the *Final Document* into practice within our dioceses.** It also consists in **learning once again to receive from other Churches and to offer them what the Lord has entrusted to them—as we ourselves are doing here today.**

For this reason, the assemblies leading to 2028 are not simply a sequence of meetings. They gradually shape an ecclesial space in which this exchange of gifts can truly take place. Each local Church offers its own experience. The Episcopal Conferences help to bring these experiences into dialogue within their own context and to deepen their theological interpretation in the light of their culture and circumstances. The continental assemblies widen the horizon still further, making it possible to discern common orientations and shared paths within each continent. Finally, at the Ecclesial Assembly of 2028, the whole Church, gathered by the Holy Father, will be able to celebrate together and recognize what the Holy Spirit has brought to maturity in the different contexts of the world. At every stage, the movement is the same: not to make experiences uniform, but to place them in dialogue, so that each may enrich the others.

This, ultimately, is one of the most concrete expressions of catholicity, as Cardinal Grech was saying. The Church does not grow because every community reproduces the same model. It grows because each Church lives the Gospel authentically within its own context and culture and offers that gift to all the others. Diversity of experience is not an obstacle to communion; when it is lived in the Holy Spirit, it becomes one of communion's richest expressions.

Allow me, then, to conclude by returning to where we began. The subject of the implementation of the Synod is the local Church. But no local Church walks alone. Each grows together with the others, continually receiving and offering gifts. To accompany the implementation phase, therefore, means helping every Church become ever more aware of what the Lord is accomplishing in its own history, so that it may share this gift with the others and, at the same time, allow itself to be transformed by what the Holy Spirit continues to say through the journey of the sister Churches. It is within this circulation of listening, discernment and exchange of gifts that the Synod continues to bear fruit, and that the Church grows together as a communion at the service of mission.

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