


**FINAL DOCUMENT
OF THE CONTINENTAL
STAGE IN
LATIN AMERICA AND
THE CARIBBEAN**



“This is what we need most of all: a Church that can walk together, that can tread the paths of life holding high the living flame of the Gospel. The Church is not a fortress, a stronghold, a lofty castle, self-sufficient and looking out upon the world below.”

(Pope Francis)

Narrative: The Continental Phase of the Synod in Latin America and the Caribbean

1. "It is possible to walk with Christ at the center and to allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit of God. We have the growing hope of living already a new time for the Church". This expression of one of the participants of the Continental Phase of the Synod reflects the enthusiasm that the process awakened in Latin America and the Caribbean. The four regional meetings held in El Salvador, Santo Domingo, Quito and Brasilia in February and March 2023 were the central moment of discernment in this process.

2. Preparation for the Continental Stage began the year before, with the formation of a commission to accompany the national teams responsible for animating the Diocesan Phase and to establish, in dialogue with the General Secretariat of the Synod, the method for conducting the continental assembly. After a few months, an interdisciplinary work team was formed with the following membership: Miguel Cabrejos (president of CELAM), Msgr. Jorge Lozano (General Secretary general of CELAM), Fr. Pedro Brassesco (Assistant Secretary of CELAM), Sr. Daniela Cannavina (General Secretary of CLAR), Fr. Francisco Hernández (Executive Secretary of Caritas Latin America), Mauricio López (Director of CEPRAP, CELAM, and liaison with the General Secretariat of the Synod) and Oscar Elizalde (Director of the Center for Communications, CELAM).

3. The Latin American and Caribbean Church has a long history of participatory experiences marked by the five General Conferences of the Latin American Episcopate, the Amazon Synod, the Ecclesial Assembly and the various ecclesial structures of communion on the continent.

4. Our Church is nourished by the social and cultural diversity of each region, which is an aspect to be cherished and strengthened in order to consolidate our common identity and a renewed enculturation of the Gospel among the peoples. For this reason, it was decided that the Continental Stage would be centered on regional meetings that would allow greater participation, discernment and listening in order to contribute the richness and the particular way of being Church.

5. Out of a total of 400 participants, a number of representatives, proportional to the total population, was established for each country. Each group of representatives was also assigned an estimated number of bishops, priests, religious men and women, deacons, laymen and laywomen. Among the latter, a special request was made for the integration of people from areas that had not been sufficiently heard in the diocesan phase. Finally, CELAM also invited representatives from peripheral sectors that had not been invited previously.

6. The regional meetings were held on the following schedule: in San Salvador (El

Salvador) from February 13 to 17 for the Central America and Mexico region; in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) from February 20 to 24 for the Caribbean region; in Quito (Ecuador) from February 27 to March 3 for the Bolivarian region; and in Brasilia (Brazil) from March 6 to 10 for the Southern Cone region.

7. A total of 415 people participated: 96 in Central America and Mexico; 41 in Caribbean countries; 92 in the Bolivarian region and 177 in the Southern Cone. There were 65 bishops; 70 priests; 61 religious men and women, 16 deacons and 194 lay men and women.

8. Each assembly opened with a spiritual retreat on Monday morning. It was a moment of profound encounter with the Spirit held in a physical space of special significance for two of the regions: in El Salvador, the martyr's chapel of St. Oscar Romero and in Santo Domingo, the Primate Cathedral of America. That same afternoon there was a time for the presentation of the synodal process in relation to the Ecclesial Assembly, the explanation of the methodology of "Spiritual Conversation" and the formation of the "Communities of Life" with a first meeting so that the members could get to know each other.

9. The following days were dedicated to reflecting on the Document for the Continental Stage and the three questions it poses. The third chapter was divided into three parts, each day dealing with one of them in three group sessions, one for each question. At the end of each day, all the communities were brought together as a new moment of communal discernment. A total of 423 syntheses were collected with intuitions, tensions and themes to be deepened based on what was developed in the DEC. A CELAM team recorded and organized these proposals, identifying common themes while respecting the multiplicity of voices and suggestions.

10. On the last day, the assemblies were divided into groups by vocation to reread the experience and make new contributions concerning the horizons for the next stage, which allowed another 30 documents containing contributions to be received.

11. In addition to the contributions from the regions, various pastoral organizations, such as the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA), the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) and the Afro Pastoral, made their own journey in light of the DEC by way of their meetings and gatherings.

12. Moments of spirituality were a powerful feature of each day, providing a climate of encounter with God and a sense of fraternal community beyond the diverse states of life, languages, positions or places of origin represented by each participant. In addition, local organizers offered moments of recreation or cultural exchange that strengthened the bonds of belonging to each region. Each assembly culminated with the celebration of the Eucharist.

13. From March 17 to 20, a meeting was held at CELAM headquarters in Bogota

(Colombia) to draft a continental synthesis based on the contributions of all the assemblies. Members of CELAM's Pastoral Theological Reflection Team (many of whom participated in the assemblies), the facilitators who carried out the methodology in each regional meeting, and the members of the continental coordinating team were summoned. A team of sixteen people, accompanied by members of the General Secretariat of the Synod, guided the process.

14. The drafting process involved discerning (first individually and then as a group) the main themes in light of the Spirit and the lived experience. The assembly agreed on an outline with the contributions offered and themes were drafted by groups, taking care to insert quotations that reflected the voices heard. The drafting team consolidated the final text based on a joint reading, corrections and suggestions made.

15. Within the framework of the face-to-face meeting of the General Secretaries of the Episcopal Conferences, and with the online participation of their Presidents, March 21 was dedicated to a collegial rereading of the synodal experience, based on their specific charism and responsibility. The bishops were presented with the process that had been developed and the proposed text of the synthesis. Then, gathered in pastoral regions, the document was read and finally, in plenary, they made their contributions and evaluations. The dialogue was enriched by the presence of Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J., General Relator of the Synod; Bishop Luis Marín de San Martín, Undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod; and Father Giacomo Costa, coordinator of the Preparatory Commission of the Synod.

16. The experience lived in this Continental Phase has thus consolidated the participatory and communitarian character of the Church on pilgrimage in Latin America and the Caribbean and has brought new elements from the methodology used, a strong spiritual imprint that was sought, and the openness to listen to new voices.

Introduction: A Church in a synodal key

17. The Latin American and Caribbean Church has completed the continental stage of the synodal process convoked by Pope Francis with the theme "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission". The preceding narrative explained the process of listening, dialogue and discernment carried out in the four regional assemblies with the participation of the twenty-two Episcopal Conferences. In this journey together, we have learned to develop more fully the sense of the "ecclesial we" and are reaping various fruits.

18. Conciliar, synodal, and collegial life in our Church has a long history. In the path walked by the great missionaries of the first evangelization, we find Our Lady of Guadalupe with her dark face, her message of "God for whom we live", her

enculturated pedagogy through conversation in the indigenous language, and the search for a land without evil. She is the first missionary disciple of the continent. In the Church on pilgrimage in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Spirit has distributed a rich diversity of gifts among its peoples and endowed them with spiritual and communitarian values, such as respect for Sister Mother Earth. For five centuries the Church, with lights and shadows, with holiness and sin, evangelized the continent bearing witness to the faith and fighting for justice—above all through its saints and martyrs—and thus contributed to the formation of communities of children, brothers and sisters.

19. In recent times, we have welcomed the power of the Holy Spirit who always rejuvenates the Church through significant synodal processes. This common journey has intensified since 1955 with the celebration of the First General Conference of the Episcopate in Rio de Janeiro and the creation of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), an organism of communion and coordination at the service of the bishops and the Episcopal Conferences. Also noteworthy are the assemblies of the General Conferences of the Episcopate: Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979), Santo Domingo (1992) and Aparecida (2007), in the Marian sanctuary of Brazil, with the invitation to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ so that, in Him, our peoples may have life.

20. In 2019 Pope Francis suggested preparing a first Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, insisting that it not only be a meeting of bishops but of all the holy faithful people of God who walk, pray, speak, think, discuss and seek His will. This Assembly, celebrated in 2021, was received with great joy. This unprecedented experience, fruit of the overflow of the Spirit, took place in the midst of the pandemic crisis and constituted, in times of suffering and death, the prophetic sign of a Church alive and close to her people to sow hope and build the future. It is a true milestone that combines the participation of many members of the People of God with the exercise of the pastoral ministry of the bishops and episcopates. With all that was shared, the text *Towards a Synodal Church, Going Out to the Peripheries. Reflections and pastoral proposals from the First Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean* was elaborated.

21. There have also been other synodal processes of different magnitude and scope that teach us to walk together: CELAM was renewed and restructured with a more synodal style; the Assembly of the Synod for the Amazon Region was held; the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA) was created; and several ecclesial networks were formed: Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM); Mesoamerican Ecological Ecclesial Network (REMAM); Ecclesial Network of the Gran Chaco and the Guaraní Aquifer (REDCHAG). These networks pay particular attention to the enculturation of the Gospel and the Church, the particular problems of indigenous and Afro- American communities, the values of inter-culturality and care for our common home.

22. Within the context of these ecclesial processes, and in the midst of the complex

realities of our countries and our region, the Latin American and Caribbean Churches welcomed Pope Francis' convocation to the Synod on the Synodal Church. We wanted to incorporate this new process into our regional experience and, at the same time, contribute to the synodality of the whole Church from our own recent history, knowing that the Spirit weaves harmony. The People of God are experiencing the call to feel themselves as active subjects of the Church. In the regional assembly of Central America and Mexico (CAMEX), a layman said, "This is already Synod". All these processes have been intertwined, forging rich contributions of experience, concern and proposals.

23. The General Secretariat of the Synod has formulated the main question guiding our synodal journey as follows: "How is this 'journeying together' that enables the Church to proclaim the Gospel, in accordance with the mission entrusted to her, taking place today at various levels (from local to universal) and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take to grow as a synodal Church?" (*Preparatory Document 2*, 26; *Document for the Continental Stage 2*, 105). In one of our regional meetings this question was clarified in the following way: "What do we mean when we say 'synodal Church'?" These important questions invite us to deepen our theological, pastoral and spiritual reflection in ways that helps us to better live ecclesiality, synodality, ministeriality and collegiality.

24. In this paragraph we synthesize the main contributions of the continental stage in Latin America and the Caribbean around eight main themes. These themes include and refer to other important questions for the nature and practice of synodality; they bring together concerns, tensions and priorities. Each and every one is considered "in synodal key".

- 1) The protagonism of the Spirit in a synodal Church.
- 2) The synodality of the People of God.
- 3) Synodality: the way of being and acting of the Church.
- 4) Missionary synodal Church.
- 5) Synodality: socio-environmental commitment in a fragmented world.
- 6) Synodal Conversion and reform of structures.
- 7) Vocations, Charisms and Ministries in a Synodal Key.
- 8) Contributions of the Latin American and Caribbean synodal itinerary.

1. The leading role of the Spirit in a synodal Church

25. The Church is the People gathered to share in communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (cf. LG 4). The road we have traveled has allowed us to recognize how God is really leading the Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean towards an increasingly synodal way of being, something that is inherent to the Church, but which takes on greater importance in view of the challenges that societal changes

pose to its life of communion and mission. This implies an awareness of the experience of our lowliness and fragility, intensified by the crisis caused by the pandemic. It is necessary to “trust and affirm the Holy Spirit as the protagonist of this process, and that he illuminates the changes that can take place in the Church of Jesus” (CAMEX).

26. At Pentecost the Spirit is the Church’s origin and the permanent source of her vitality. It is he who moves her to flow and to traverse history with relevance and meaning, and who leads her along paths of renewal into the future. He shapes the Church’s face and her relational fabric, making unity in diversity possible. Without him, there is no authentic following of Jesus, no new life, no ecclesial *kairos*. The Spirit encourages his Church to an authentic conversion that presupposes the following: listening, dialogue, discernment, honing our attention to reality and our capacity to understand the cry of God in the enduring cries that resound in history. This is the moment to recognize the *kairos* in which we live with confidence in the Spirit and the certainty that everything is God’s work.

27. The experience of knowing that we are inhabited by the Spirit has launched us beyond our own analyses and reflections, inviting us to overcome the temptation of intimism, fundamentalisms and ideologies that make us disguise ourselves as wanting God when they are the pursuit of particular interests. He asked us to place ourselves in context and to root the ecclesial journey in the depths of history, until we allow ourselves to be permeated by reality, recognizing that in it God manifests himself and acts, calling us to commitment, to work with him, passionate for his Kingdom. We have understood the synodal journey “as a personal and communitarian process of radical openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who alone is capable of creating a new Pentecost in the Church and overcoming the constant temptation to fragment ourselves” (BOLIVARIANA).

28. The action of the Spirit, like everything in the dynamism of the Kingdom of God, must be discerned. His voice must be heard and welcomed, listening to “what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 2:11). His promptings require the docility of our hearts. Hence the need to assume a permanent attitude of discernment, of seeking not to our own will but rather to do will of the Father of Mercy, imitating Jesus. This generates a great tension in these our times in which individuality and voluntarism have been inordinately exalted and the “I” has been made the measure of all things; in which we are tempted to impose our own intentions, which are only ideologies and partial visions of reality, on others. To discern means to distinguish, among so many voices and movements, that which comes from the Spirit, what the Lord tells us and expects of us. This is what we have done in this process, trying to overcome our own temptations. Like the experience of faith itself, this discernment must become ever more communitarian, and attentive to the “*sensus fidei*” of the God’s People on “the way”.

29. We are called to a profound reform of the Church, one which arises from God’s action in the depths of history. “Behold, I make all things new, do you not perceive” (Is

43:19). We are called to live a conversion that originates in our faithful listening to God and to reality, a listening that is the condition for the transformation of the heart. We must listen to one another and discern the signs of the times in order to seek together God's will in the light of Sacred Scripture.

30. During this synodal journey we have felt the call to listen to the melody of the present, convinced that the quality of our listening determines the quality of our response and opens paths to missionary commitment. We note that today the Church is more than ever committed to a new relational style that is more contextualized and embodied in reality; that is capable of listening and making different voices resonate; that is capable of positioning herself so as to generate that is required for encounter. We feel called to generate authentic dynamics of listening, participation, communion, shared mission and co-responsibility.

31. One fruit of the Spirit in those who participated in the synodal process is the renewal of their hope and of the humble and confident recognition that synodal conversion is led by the Spirit. From an attitude focused on thinking only about the synodal assembly and the final document as the desired response, we have moved on to recognize the need for patience, constancy, perseverance in purpose, creative courage and audacity, all of which are virtues linked to hope. We have moved on to the conviction that synodal conversion begins in our own daily lives, and from there it projects itself, like leaven in dough, towards the transformation of the whole world. "On the synodal journey we must not run, we must follow the rhythm of the Spirit so that the experience allows us to give time to each moment" (CAMEX) "The synodal journey is an invitation to be peasants of faith; this requires us to learn new verbs: to wait without despairing, to water what is necessary for each kind of plant, to persevere without tiring, certain that we are guided by the Spirit" (BOLIVARIANA).

32. The People of God walked in hope of the Savior's coming. Today we walk in the joyful hope of His return, which encourages our service to the Kingdom and longs for the fullness of Life for all.

2. The synodality of the People of God

33. Many voices heard in the four regional assemblies have reminded us that synodal renewal presupposes "recovering the conciliar proposal expressed in the notion of the People of God, which emphasizes equality and common dignity rather than differences of ministries and charisms" (BOLIVARIANA).

34. The Church is the community of those who follow "the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25). It is the People of God on pilgrimage in the world. Synodality manifests the

social and historical dimension of the Church, rooted in the pilgrim condition of the human being who journeys through life searching for happiness. The People of God is called to walk together with the whole human family, being a sacrament of salvation and hope. Here arises the double dimension of synodality in that it expresses the Church's life of walking together and the Church's accompaniment of people in history toward the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

35. The common journey of the Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean is advancing a sense of "we" through the dynamics of old and new synodal processes that are experienced. In this process we are bringing to life our conviction that the People of God on the way is the subject of synodal communion. The assemblies reaffirmed what the Second Vatican Council expressed about the common dignity and fundamental equality of all the baptized, women and men. The gift of faith and the sacrament of baptism make us followers of Jesus and confer on us all membership in the one People of God, from the least of the baptized to the successor of St. Peter.

36. In our journey we feel and affirm that synodality helps us to be a more participative and co-responsible Church. A synodal Church is challenged to encourage the participation of all, according to the vocation of each and every one, with the authority conferred by Christ on the College of Bishops presided over in charity by the Bishop of Rome. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are called and enabled to place the gifts received from the Holy Spirit at the service of others. The authority of the Pastors is a gift of the same Spirit of Christ the Head to serve the edification of the whole Body. In synodal communion the Bishops exercise their apostolic mission by walking with, accompanying and guiding their brothers and sisters to follow Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

37. Synodality expresses the condition of subject that corresponds to the whole Church and to each one in the Church. We believers are brothers and sisters on the same journey, called to be active subjects through our participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the source of a great diversity of vocations, identities, talents, competencies and ministries that enrich our unity in communion. Here a permanent challenge arises. How can we synodally promote diversities so as to prevent them from becoming divisions? How can we build unity in such a way that avoids unity becoming homogeneity? The vast majority of the Christian faithful are lay men and women who receive the faith and learn to live the communion of love within their families and communities.

38. Synodal life witnesses to a Church made up of persons and communities who are free and diverse subjects called to relate to one another fraternally by bonds of mutual respect and reciprocal affection. Many voices questioned how we treat one another within the Church, especially in the relationship between pastors and laity and between women and men. In all the assemblies we heard a deep cry to be treated well, respected as equals, and valued in one's own identity and specific contribution. The shared discernment shows that we still have a long way to go in relating to each

other with human, evangelical, and synodal attitudes. *“We need a structural change that uninstalls us. It requires flexibility, dialogue, tolerance, acceptance, respect. Not putting new wine into old wineskins”* (CARIBE).

39. One challenge is to open the spaces, provide the means and generate ways for the effective participation of women in the instances of discernment and decision making. The October synodal assembly should deepen these themes: women’s leadership and their contribution to theological reflection in pastoral councils, in the accompaniment of communities, in the areas of elaboration and decision-making. *“The participation of women is a prophecy, a factor of hope”* (CONO SUR).

40. Synodality is founded on and expressed in the celebrations of Baptism and the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of Christian life. In the Eucharistic assembly, baptismal communion is actualized and a dynamism of participation is generated. There is a tension between different ways of valuing and living these sacraments. There are those who point out *“a tension between a ritualistic liturgy and an open and inculturated liturgy”* (CONO SUR). It is necessary to build new liturgical languages and expressions while maintaining the Eucharist as the source and summit of our journey together” (BOLIVARIANA).

41. Synodality encourages the ecumenical commitment of all Christians because it is an invitation to walk together on the path to full unity in Christ. Without minimizing differences, synodality opens us to recognize legitimate diversities in a reciprocal exchange of gifts and guides our steps toward *“reconciled harmony”*. At the same time, a synodal Church desires to advance interreligious dialogue and universal fraternity on every continent.

42. The Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows the beauty of this pluriform face in the different peoples who experience God’s gift within and through their own culture. *“In order to advance in the configuration of Churches with their own face and to respond to the specific challenges of their context, the Amazon region feels the need for greater autonomy and diversification of the local Churches, as well as of their representative bodies, such as the Episcopal Conferences”* (CEAMA-REPAM).

III. Synodality: the Church’s way of being and acting

43. Synodality is the dynamic dimension of ecclesial communion, called to incarnate a way of being and acting founded on union with the Most Holy Trinity, animated by the Spirit and centered on Jesus Christ. Encounter with the person of the Lord is the fundamental criterion of all discernment and sustains the Church’s evangelizing mission. We are convinced that *“the great horizon is the discernment of a new way of being Church from the encounter with Christ as the path to communion, participation*

and mission with a clear pastoral conversion that reflects the desire to live in synodality in all its spheres, until synodality becomes a way of life [...] (BOLIVARIANA).

44. Missionary disciples find their source of life and inspiration in the celebration of the Eucharistic feast and in the prayerful reading—personal and communal—of the Word of God. These permit them to live in a continuous process of pastoral conversion, to strengthen the sense of belonging to the ecclesial community, and to enliven co-responsible participation in the synodal journey.

45. A Church of missionary disciples, attentive to the signs of the times, feels invited to cultivate a synodal spirituality that is both concrete and Marian because “Mary reminds us that Christ is the center of our life and the model of the synodal journey” (BOLIVARIANA). It recovers richness of faith and popular piety “to strengthen the interior experience of our people as a complement to the liturgical life” (BOLIVARIANA), which should be enculturated, and should express the “wisdom, joy and teachings of our peoples [...] They contribute, celebrate, listen, welcome, accompany, give and receive in the various dimensions of existence” (Afro-Garifuna Contribution).

46. The Church’s synodal way of being and acting demands a style of community discernment based on mutual listening to the Spirit and on truthful and trusting dialogue. It is the “Spirit who impels us to this openness, to this search for the newness of God, even at all the risks that this implies” (CARIBE). We must “overcome our fears in the face of listening, because we know that it commits us to action and to responding to the brother who is being listened to” (CONO SUR).

47. For such discerning listening, the Church must consider and practice spiritual conversation. As a method and praxis, it helps to learn to listen, to dialogue, to be formed in pathways, dynamics and processes that support conversion at the personal, ecclesial and structural levels. In light of this style, a necessary reciprocity is generated which leads us to a complementarity of vocation and the gifts of each one. The dynamic will be “to learn to listen, to listen to each other and above all to listen to each other with depth, because when we listen to the other person with depth (full attention) it touches, stirs our being and requires transforming attitudes, changing ways of relating and moving on to dialogue” (Indigenous Peoples contribution). This way of being helps to rebuild bonds and invites us to adopt new ways of relating that are open to the action of the Spirit who always surprises and opens new paths. Synodality supposes a “spirituality that consists in loving and listening, with responsibility, with commitment and without fear” (CONO SUR); it moves us to embrace the “path of forgiveness and reconciliation, recognizing our faults and omissions, to rebuild from our own vulnerability, the synodal Church” (CAMEX).

48. In light of the reflection, especially appropriate for this time, on the method of spiritual conversation, intuitions, tensions and priorities emerge that can assist in the process. Spiritual conversation enables us to speak freely about uncomfortable and painful topics, in an experience of one-on-one relationship. Far from cancelling

one's own identity and life stories, it helps to put oneself in the other person's place, to tune in with his or her sentiments, and from there to refine one's own convictions. This experience is a formative process that is open to learning and to combining feelings and ideas; it leads to change by making improbable encounters possible, favoring dialogue and creating channels of communication.

49. It is evident that the animation and action of the Spirit accompanies the whole process. It is necessary to live this experience from an interior freedom and with an open heart, avoiding polemics, the imposition of ideas, "agendas" and everything that prevents the Holy Spirit from being the protagonist.

50. The method is like an upward spiral that moves from the "I" (1st moment - feelings: personal) to letting myself be touched by the other, the "You" (2nd moment - echoes: relational), to finally arrive at the "We" (3rd moment - choosing the will of God: the common). The method should not be the sum of individual discernments, but the means and expression of a communitarian process.

51. It is important to integrate the hermeneutical method of "See - Judge - Act" that has been adopted by the Church of Latin America and the Caribbean, with the process of spiritual conversation. In this way a profound analysis of reality associated with discernment is maintained as well as the search for a consensus in order to reach a transforming action. Certainly there are already advances from our region that come from our experience of continental synodal work. These advances associate associating seeing with listening and contemplating; judging with discerning and interpreting; acting with projecting and responding.

52. In fidelity to what is shared and to what the Spirit wants to tell us, and in order to promote the process of synodal discernment, its timing and its steps, it is important that group moderators and secretaries be trained and instructed. Moderators must be trained so that he/she can animate the process as such and avoid conducting a conversation that leads merely to a group opinion. Secretaries must be trained so that he/she can help to elaborate a community synthesis that is not merely the fruit of brainstorming.

IV. Missionary Synodal Church

53. A synodal Church, according to the name given this Synod, is a Church in communion and participation for the mission. A "Church that is synodal has the challenge and the mission to show herself missionary" (CARIBE). Therefore, "structures are urgently needed to ensure a missionary Synodality, including all the members of the periphery" (CAMEX). Instead of the Church closing in on itself, synodality leads the Church to be missionary at the service of universal fraternity. Like synodality, missionality is constitutive of the Church, for every baptized person is a missionary

disciple of Jesus Christ in his Church. Discipleship is the following of Jesus, a setting out with him to collaborate with his work and to prolong it in history. In turn, because the work of Jesus is to evangelize, this is also the Church's mission. As St. Pope Paul VI said, "the Church exists to evangelize" (EN 14). A "revision of the structures and of the ecclesial institution as a whole is necessary, in function of service and evangelization" (CONO SUR).

54. In his person, his life, his work and his Passover, Jesus makes present the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is an absolute, to which everything becomes relative. The Church's evangelizing mission is none other than to give continuity to Jesus' mission, contributing to the growth of the Kingdom in the world, especially in the peripheries, which must be its center. It is necessary "to take the Good News to the peripheries; to recognize that there it is incarnated and is life, that it is lived and builds synodality" (BOLIVARIANA).

55. Undertaken in synodal key the mission to evangelize is not proselytism. The latter leads to a self-referential Church and an eclipsing the Kingdom of God of which the Church is meant to be a sacrament. It is necessary "to be a credible Church, sacrament of the Kingdom" (CARIBE). This mission consists in the joyful and gratuitous proclamation to all humanity of Jesus Christ and his Paschal Mystery. This proclamation is offered within intercultural relationships since it is made to a plural and diverse world. It was indicated that "the clearest horizon that opens up is the challenge of evangelization in diversity. How to be missionary disciples in the midst of the diversity of contexts, situations and the complexity of the world" (CARIBE). It is urgent to "attend to the subjects of evangelization, respecting their culture, inviting them to participate, approaching their way of life and understanding their vision of the world" (CONO SUR). The mission consists of incarnating the Gospel within cultures, contributing to form native local Churches with the face of the peoples who are part of them. To an incarnated Church corresponds an enculturated and enculturating evangelization of the Church as an institution, in its organization and structures.

56. Synodality helps all the baptized to be active subjects of the evangelizing mission and enables the People of God to take on a posture of dialogue and service to the world and, in view of a universal fraternity, to journey with humanity that, in its entirety, is on pilgrimage. It is indicated that "the world needs an 'outgoing Church' that rejects division, that turns its gaze to humanity and, more than mere doctrine or strategy, offers an experience of salvation, an 'overflow of the gift' that responds to the cry of humanity and nature" (CAMEX). In the Church's evangelizing mission, the "others" are not only addressees, but also partners in dialogue by the fact that missionary disciples are in a horizontal relationship of communion with all people of good will, in whom the Spirit of God is at work. Synodality leads to open missionary activity, to participation and exchange without borders.

57. However, the evangelizing identity of the Church does not always seem to be present in all communities since, at times, they are more concerned with resolving

their internal problems and not with announcing the Good News. There is a tension “between a self-centered church and a missionary church” (CONO SUR). This can lead to the temptation of “believing that first we have to solve the problems of synodality and then go out on mission” (CARIBE). Synodality and mission are two intimately linked aspects because synodality enriches mission and mission energizes synodality.

58. In the regional assemblies it was mentioned that the Church’s tendency to focus on itself can arise from “fear and doubt about how to go out in daily life and in living with the people” (BOLIVARIANA). There is also “fear of losing power and desire to control, which leads to intolerance and rigidity that prevents taking concrete and bold steps to fulfill the evangelizing mission of bringing people to their encounter with God” (CARIBE). This causes a strong tension between a pastoral ministry of a Church that seeks merely to maintain its spaces and times and a Church that not only widens its tent to welcome, but also moves beyond itself to meet others where they are.

59. In this sense, a question arises that generates a variety of attitudes: to what extent and in what way should the Gospel penetrate cultures? Responding to this question represents the challenge of discerning how to carry out the evangelizing task in the present multicultural and intercultural context in order to learn to live the faith in the great diversity of our day. “This enculturation should also influence the construction of liturgical spaces to make them more adequate to the theology of synodality” (CONO SUR).

60. Evangelization takes place through the witness of personal and community life. Faith grows through the attraction of God’s grace, values individuals and peoples as subjects, and recognizes the evangelizing patrimony of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples who live the faith in their own way. Another “challenge for the Church in its evangelizing mission is sectarianism” (CONO SUR), understood as the division and internal struggles of sectors closed in on themselves, which is an anti-witness.

61. It also calls for “moving from an evangelization centered on sin, to a perspective of the Good News, like the doctor who, rather than focusing on the disease, focuses his work on health; (in this way) we can move from lamenting to focusing on what we can do” (BOLIVARIANA). At the same time, it is always necessary to remember the purpose of the evangelizing mission which, at times, is reduced to one of its processes, such as the administration of the sacraments, rather than fostering a true encounter with Christ that initiates and strengthens a path of following and growing in faith.

62. The role of the laity, and especially of women, in the transmission of the faith was emphasized in the meetings. Catechists and evangelizers who serve, with passion and hope, in distant places and difficult contexts, are a gift of God for whom we are grateful and whom we value. However, it has also been mentioned that at times there is a perceived tension with the clergy who arrogate to themselves the responsibility of directing all evangelizing action in the community. “The support, proclamation and

witness of missionary women must be valued. And this is fundamental in a synodal Church" (BOLIVARIANA).

V. Synodality: socio-environmental commitment in a fragmented world

63. Synodality motivates the Church to move beyond herself and to place herself and her entire mission at the service of society. As the syntheses show, there are synodal experiences of a Church that is a companion on the journey of the peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean. Several contributions affirm that there is great ethnic, cultural and social diversity in many societies of our region. This is a richness, but it can also be perceived as a threat that manifests itself in multiple fragmentations, in wide inequalities, and in the marginalization and exclusion of various groups on the continent. Our societies also suffer from strong ideological and political polarization; in several countries we are concerned about the weakening of democracy as a system of representation and government. In these contexts, a synodal Church is called to renew its preferential option for the poor and to highlight the social dimension of evangelization, because if it "is not properly explained, there is always the risk of distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the evangelizing mission" (EG 176).

64. At the meetings, attention was drawn to what is observed in many places: "the distancing of the local Churches from reality, from the cries that come from the lands and peoples, from the diverse realities of people in vulnerability, from the peripheries" (CONO SUR), be they geographical, territorial, social and existential peripheries. The poor have the many faces of women, native peoples and people of African descent, people in vulnerable conditions such as migrants and refugees, people with disabilities, children and the elderly who are vulnerable, and many others.

65. A synodal Church is called to "be a more prophetic and Samaritan Church. A prophetic and missionary Church that truly goes out to the geographical and existential peripheries and listens to the cry of the poor and creation" (BOLIVARIANA). It is important that in the synodal process we have the audacity to raise and discern major topics, often forgotten or ignored, and to meet with the "other" and with all those who, within the human family or within our Church, are often marginalized. In several appeals it is remembered that, in the spirit of Jesus, we must "be inclusive of the poor, LGTBQ+ communities, couples in second union, priests who want to return to the Church in their new situation, women who have abortions out of fear, the imprisoned, the sick" (CONO SUR). It is about "walking together in a synodal Church that listens to all types of exiles so that they feel at home", a Church that is "a refuge for the wounded and the broken" (CONO SUR). This calls for availability to "go out to the encounter, to give our attention, to get involved. Because synodality means not waiting for people to come, but going out to meet them" (CONO SUR).

66. The Church offers its Samaritan love and service in solidarity, learning to walk with all those who are also at the service of those who suffer, seeking to generate alternatives to the throwaway culture, and to confront the different types of violence that have increased in recent years, among them: violence linked to the great social inequalities, drug trafficking, organized crime, human trafficking, abuse of children and women. In this journey together, the Church is discovering different ways of being synodal in alliances with social and popular movements, and other people and institutions involved in promoting everyone, such as the Global Education Pact.

67. Some contributions ask: "Listening to the cry of the peoples and the earth" is a commitment to the Gospel that asks us to be allies with the peoples in defense of life and their territories" (CONO SUR). This is especially true for the Amazon, threatened by ecological collapse, with disastrous consequences for the life of the earth and its peoples. There is a feeling from the Amazon that points out "the abandonment of our indigenous peoples; the lack of a real presence in the midst of the Amazonian peoples" (BOLIVARIANA). It is identified as "a pending matter: to reach the original peoples, marginalized by their different language, culture and cosmovision; and [...] to reach the [other] peripheries, to approach and welcome the indigent, those of other creeds and customs-values" (CONO SUR).

68. The socio-environmental service to which the Church is called to serve in the light of the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church is strengthened in an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue that leads to common action. In many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean there are Interreligious Councils in which representatives of various Christian Churches and multiple religions present in our region actively participate. From a shared commitment to the promotion of human rights, justice, peace and care for the common home, they jointly carry out activities for the benefit of society.

69. Several contributions express that a synodal Church, lived as a field hospital, should give a central place to young people. To be close to them, to heal their wounds and to accompany them in their search, the Church must "adapt its language and symbols to approach their concrete realities. We must think of new methods to enchant and rescue the presence of young people in the Church, going where they are and walking together with them" (CONO SUR). It is important that "they, and we too, become aware of the leading role they have to assume in the Church and society" (CONO SUR).

70. The request for listening, integration and participation in decision making on the part of young people is reiterated. The prayer that a group of them made at the meeting of the Southern Cone Region resounds, expressing why their friends had left the Church and concluding with a heartfelt prayer: "God, Mother and Father, hear our cry in prayer! Blow strongly so that the Church does not forget the youth, that it may embrace their lives as they come, with their dreams and desires, and accompany them in the task of spreading and promoting synodality".

71. Many young people show great sensitivity to social and environmental problems and great creativity in generating solutions from within their own contexts. Being “digital natives,” they have much more knowledge and skill to help the Church discover the digital potential for evangelization, networking and the creation of a synodal culture in these spaces.

72. The participation of representatives of the Digital Synod in the assemblies generated an interest in a more active and proactive presence in this space. There was also a need to accompany digital evangelizers more closely.

VI. Synodal conversion and reform of structures

73. The Second Vatican Council conceived the Church as an institution in need of permanent renewal. In continuity with the Council, Francis refers to the Church as *Ecclesia semper reformanda*, which requires the conversion of the entire ecclesial community. The Latin American and Caribbean Church assumes this call as a permanent pastoral conversion, which calls for the revision of “personal and community praxis, relationships of equality and authority, and structures and dynamisms” (SD 30). The regions consulted stated that “synodality requires a personal, communitarian, ecclesial and structural conversion” (CONO SUR), for which reason “a change of mentality, a change of structures is urgent” (CAMEX)

74. This call is not exempt from challenges and tensions. We find people and groups who want to separate the change of mentality and personal conversion from the reform of structures, just as there are those who do not want the reform of the Church. Therefore, these changes must be part of a process of “active conversion, for a real transformation of mind and heart, since we were all formed in different times and have many ingrained practices” (CONO SUR). From this derives the need for the local Churches to generate processes and spaces for listening, dialogue and discernment that continue to deepen the fundamental question of the synodal journey: “How does this journey together take place today in our own particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take”?

75. The answer to these questions is built by involving the entire People of God. It is necessary to take the step towards an authentic synodalization of the whole Church, which will entail “spiritual, pastoral and institutional reforms” (DA 367) with the aim of shaping a new institutional model. The regional consultations recognize that, in order to achieve this, “new pastoral options must be created from a change of mentality and renewal of existing structures” (CARIBE). In this context, the challenge of seeking the reform of seminaries and houses of formation arises, especially when some of these institutions have not moved beyond their Tridentine form. Many people see

“seminaries as closed houses that do not help the vision of a ministerial priesthood” (CAMEX). It is necessary to continue with the updated reform of the *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*. In the formation of candidates to the priesthood, families, laity and consecrated men and women must be involved. This was emphasized by all the regional assemblies.

76. The whole process of renewal toward greater synodality in the Church requires more formation. It was requested that formative and catechetical programs be integrated and that the members of the People of God carry them out together. It was emphasized that families, as domestic churches, and parish and educational ecclesial communities, should be the first sphere of formation in synodal communion. At the same time, it was requested that parishes be renewed based on the model of a community of communities, thus revitalizing small communities.

77. Among the numerous proposals and requests for formation expressed in the assemblies as an outstanding theme, various horizons and areas emerge: “we believe in the importance of synodal formation and therefore we would like to contribute some ideas for an integral formation: learning to work collaboratively; growing in a culture of discernment; implementing transparency in the various areas of ecclesial life; acquiring digital and radio skills to be permanently connected with the needs of the parishioners; showing experiential experiences to make visible the relevance of synodality” (BOLIVARIANA).

78. A theme that cuts across all ecclesial areas is that of formation for a culture of respect for all persons and in the prevention of all types of abuses.

79. The regional consultations mention the priority of making obligatory the constitution of the various councils promoted by Vatican II: presbyteral councils, economic councils (diocesan and parochial) and pastoral councils (diocesan and parochial). They also ask that “they be a space for inclusion, dialogue, transparency and discernment not only at the national and regional levels, but also in the base communities, parishes and dioceses, prelatures and vicariates, following the process of communion and participation” (CONO SUR). It is recognized that the councils offer “permanent environments for the exercise and promotion of communion and synodality” (CTI Sinodalidad, 80). But their formal implementation is not enough. It is requested that each council “not only be a consultative space, but that we ensure that it has a weight in the decisions on the mode of government and change of structures” (CAMEX).

80. A Church structured on the basis of a network of councils would make it possible to establish institutional procedures of accountability and transparency that start from the communities and help to eradicate abuses of conscience and power as well as spiritual, psychological, sexual and economic abuse. This requires the creation of instances and protocols for prevention, reparation and justice (cf. AE 355). This would respond to the voices that see “a tension between the desire for a

more transparent Church versus a culture of secrecy" (CONO SUR), and that call for a greater "commitment to care for and listen to the victims of abuse" (CAMEX). This and other aspects will require "openness to possible modifications in Canon Law that give juridical form to synodal practice; especially that synodal institutions be recognized by law and that law help to guarantee and promote greater transparency" (CONO SUR).

81. The emergence of a new synodal ecclesiality presents us with the challenge of imagining new structures. Some have already been emerging, such as the Ecclesial Conference for the Amazon (CEAMA) and the first Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean. However, the concern has arisen regarding how to articulate episcopal collegiality and synodal ecclesiality, inviting us to think about how to integrate the elaboration and the making of decisions: "the synodal dimension of the Church must be expressed through the realization and governance of processes of participation and discernment capable of manifesting the dynamism of communion that inspires all ecclesial decisions" (CTI Sinodalidad 76). Likewise, these new structures place us before forms of organization and functioning that must consider how to articulate the sense of faith of all the faithful, episcopal authority and the service of theology, because the Holy Spirit speaks through all the People of God as a whole and not just through some (the bishops) or one (the Bishop of Rome, who has the primacy). "If the People of God were not a subject in decision-making, there is no synodality. And if the People of God is not constitutive of an organism that makes decisions for the Church as a whole, this organism is not synodal either" (CEAMA-REPAM). In all of the above, we understand the need to "renew and rethink the structures of the Church in order to respond to the challenges of today's world, interpreting the signs of the times [and] one step towards this is the reform of the Code of Canon Law" (BOLIVARIANA).

VII. Vocations, Charisms and Ministries in a Synodal Key

82. Synodality is the art of valuing, welcoming and knowing how to articulate all the gifts and charisms that the Lord has given us, so that they flow and become a channel of grace and blessing, and, therefore, it is important to value the different vocations" (BOLIVARIANA). The Church is a prophetic, priestly and royal-serving People whose members are subjects of the theological life towards holiness. They receive from God diverse charisms to serve the common good (Cf. AE 171).

83. The regional meetings repeatedly mentioned the rich diversity of charisms and ministries expressed both in the gifts that enrich the consecrated life and in the widely varied gifts of the laity. Therefore, it is necessary "to review the structure of the Church so that it may be a community of communities, recognizing the unity in mission with the diversity of ministries that the Holy Spirit gives through gifts to each of its members, according to their vocation, so as not to oppose the charismatic dimension

with the institutional dimension" (BOLIVARIANA).

84. However, a Church that is "all ministerial" is not necessarily a Church of "all instituted ministries". There are many legitimate ministries that flow from the baptismal vocation, including spontaneous, non-instituted ministries and others that are instituted with their training, mission and stability. Some indigenous peoples even indicated that they have their own ministries, which are already being lived, but are not recognized by the ecclesial institution.

85. Profound community discernment is needed regarding the ministries to be created or promoted in light of the signs of the times, especially among the laity. These should have the purpose not only of attending to the internal needs of the Church, but also to be a "response and at the service of the world" (CAMEX), because "the mission of Christians, above all, is in the world" (CEAMA-REPAM). Here resounds the voice of Pope Francis who, in the exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, speaks of "a markedly lay ecclesial culture" (QA 94). We must value and promote "the service of the laity in the construction of the world, the economy, politics, the sciences, the arts, etc." as an essential dimension so that "the Church may be a prophetic, priestly and regal People" (CARIBE, CEAMA-REPAM).

86. A central issue is to encourage the participation of the laity, especially women and young people, in decision-making scenarios. There is a majority presence of women because "they are the ones who support the Church the most" (CAMEX). At the same time, they "need to be open to incorporation and participation in decision-making spheres" (CONO SUR). Some contributions indicate that these spaces already exist in some of our local churches, but others have "the feeling that women are 'cheap labor' within the Church" (CONO SUR) and that it is "necessary to create and institute new ministries, especially for women" (CEAMA-REPAM). Many voices consider the institution of the female diaconate an urgent need, recognizing what is being experienced in several communities.

87. Priestly ministry has undergone a profound renewal since Vatican II. Nevertheless, the denunciation of clericalism, understood as the expression of clerical authoritarianism and the deformation of ministerial service into an abuse of power, has arisen repeatedly. This affects not only the ordained priesthood, but is also a temptation for all ministers of the Church, including the laity. "We see the need to think of a conversion within the Church that overcomes clericalism and machismo that excludes women from the processes of discernment and decision-making, and that is something cultural that we have to face, even if we have to go against the current. Fraternity and sisterhood is what must be cultivated" (CONO SUR, CEAMA-REPAM).

88. That is why it is important "to take steps to overcome clericalism in the laity and in the clergy, taking up our mission from the principle of subsidiarity as a synodal way of proceeding" (BOLIVARIANA). The Church is more synodal when it walks with all the baptized and encourages them to live the mission recognizing the common dignity as

the basis for the renewal of ecclesial life and with ministries in which authority is service. "Authority as service builds interdependence (neither dependence nor independence) based on the common vocation as disciples" (BOLIVARIANA).

89. The revalorization of baptismal life and dignity as the primary source of all ministries demands a new institutional model to counteract the pyramidal model that facilitates clericalism. Synodality offers the appropriate interpretative framework for thinking about the renewal of ordained ministry, which implies, among other things, "discerning the ministeriality of the entire People of God in terms of co-responsibility" and living "ministeriality as a covenant with the poor" (CONO SUR).

90. This also entails rethinking the model of ordained ministry. There are those who say that in their communities there is a "conflict between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood", as well as "forms of priesthood that do not respond to the needs of the People of God" (CAMEX), "We do not know how to articulate lay and ordained ministry" (CARIBE). Thus, if we want a more synodal and missionary Church, "it is necessary to rethink the profile of the ministries, especially of the ordained ministers, so that they exercise their ministry 'in' the community and not 'over' it", with a formation" that is closely related to the pastoral processes and the life of the people they are going to serve" (CEAMA-REPAM).

91. In this area of ordained ministry, several voices have stated that "we need an open and sincere dialogue on whether the topic of celibacy and its relationship with priestly ministry is still useful" (CARIBE, CEAMA-REPAM). In addition, the possibility of the priestly ordination of permanent deacons has been favorably considered, and some have raised "the service and inclusion of married priests and members of the consecrated life who have left their institutes" (CONO SUR).

92. In a special way, it is requested that the October General Assembly address this issue, promoting the revision of the theology and forms of a ministerial Church, the formation and profile of ministers, instituted and ordained, and the opening of some ministries to women.

93. Consecrated life, present in the Regional Assemblies, is aware of the action of the Spirit and perceives a strong call to walk in communion with the Church, which is a community of equal disciples—by baptism—and that shares ministries, vocations and charisms for building the Kingdom. It is born in the Church, grows and is called to bear evangelical fruit in the living communion of the faithful People of God, for which reason it longs "to continue to nourish the experience of synodality and to be an engine to energize it in the various contexts and in the local communities of belonging, in which it is constitutively called to be a prophetic synodal presence expressed in community meetings, Chapters, Assemblies, pastoral services, etc." (CARIBE). Consecrated men and women are committed to live as an outgoing Church centered on the Gospel, and therefore poorer, missionary, rooted in local contexts, pneumato-centric and in constant dialogue with reality.

94. Synodality and consecrated life are interlinked in the journey of conversion, listening and mission, with the criteria of participation and co-responsibility which also define the identity and nature of the Church herself. Hierarchical and charismatic gifts walk together to “unlearn and eradicate all attitudes of dependence, submission and silence within communities, Churches and society; and to remove the clericalism introduced in the way we relate to other members of the Church. For this reason, we try to rescue and value the synodal experiences that have been lived for a long time in some churches of Latin America in order to apply them in a renewed way in our here and now” (BOLIVARIANA).

VIII. Contributions of the Latin American and Caribbean Synodal Journey

95. In the Narrative of the Regional Assemblies and in the Introduction to this synthesis, we pointed out some peculiarities of the synodal journey made in the Latin American and Caribbean Church. In the development of the seven previous themes we gathered the main contributions of the assemblies and of the syntheses for the *Instrumentum laboris*. Now, as a summary projection, we raise four central questions.

96. (I) Both the text of our first Ecclesial Assembly and the *Document for the Continental Stage* promote a missionary synodal Church. This first question concerns the mutual relationships between ecclesiality, synodality, ministeriality and collegiality. Throughout the Assembly process we felt the mutual fruitfulness and positive tension between synodal ecclesiality and episcopal collegiality. The recent journey of the People of God in our midst, the discernment of the voices and expressions of the *sensus fidei fidelium*, the responsible and co-responsible participation of all, present the adequate interpretative framework—theoretical and practical—to listen, dialogue and discern together based on the common dignity received in the filial and fraternal grace of baptism. Our experience shows that in this horizon of communion the exercise of the episcopal ministry as a pastoral service to the People of God is enriched. We are learning that, if the ministry of the bishops is not situated within a synodal ecclesiality, it can be impoverished because it fails to receive the benefits of a broad exchange and by feeling threatened as if synodality were a democratization that questions the hierarchical institution of the Church. In a process that is lived synodally, the elaboration and making of decisions by the competent authorities grows in legitimacy and fosters a more positive reception by the community.

97. In this context a question arises which should be analyzed in the next synodal assembly with spiritual discernment, theological depth and pastoral sense. It concerns the mutual relationships between ecclesiality, synodality, ministeriality and collegiality. This can be deepened on the basis of the central role of the Spirit of God in the life and mission of the Church. The theology of the sacraments, especially Baptism

and Holy Orders, the reciprocal relationships between the common priesthood and the ordained ministry, and the reforms of the ministries and structures of the Church, including the reform of the ministry of the Successor of Peter, can be analyzed from a synodal point of view.

98. (II) The emergence of a renewed synodal ecclesiality is driving the challenge to envision synodal reforms in ecclesial mentalities, attitudes, practices, relationships and structures. The novelty that is represented by both the Ecclesial Conference for the Amazon and the first Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean shows that the creation of new institutions is not enough, but that they must be accompanied by an awareness and a formation that help to articulate communion in new, organic and dynamic forms of community participation. It is not possible to successfully carry out the promptings of the Spirit for the Church of the third millennium without a spirituality of synodal communion.

99. We must take up, in a synodal way, the orientations of the Second Vatican Council for a permanent renewal of the Church in her fidelity to Jesus Christ and her evangelizing mission to the peoples. The conciliar exhortations that the Church be an *Ecclesia semper reformanda* (UR 4, 6), or an *Ecclesia semper purificanda* (LG 8), are a source of inspiration for the next Assembly to renew synodality as communion, participation and mission. In the new synodal context, the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean continues to receive that conciliar call as a path of pastoral and missionary conversion.

100. In this process, questions arise that, while not being new, acquire new relevance. What is the magisterial value of the outcomes of Ecclesial Assemblies? Would they not have greater validity and acceptance if they were presented as guidelines and documents of the entire People of God in a region, because they are the fruit of listening, dialogue and common discernment? What would happen if some decisions of an Assembly were rejected by the episcopal body? When, how and where should consultative and deliberative votes be taken? Is it possible to dream of a synodal configuration for Episcopal Conferences and continental structures such as CELAM? Certainly, spiritual discernment, theological foundation and canon law must be articulated here.

101. (III) Ever since the Second Vatican Council, and based on the method employed by the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the Latin American and Caribbean Church has made a major contribution in the form of reflecting on the faith and orienting evangelization not only through the service of bishops and theologians, but also through the contributions of the synodal tradition of the People of God. The teaching of recent Popes leads us to learn from the *sensus fidei* of the faithful as a whole, while at the same time sustaining the service proper to those who teach the faith of the Church with apostolic authority. It seems to us that the Synod should consider the admirable exchange between the magisterium of the People of God, Pastors and theologians.

102. The “See-Judge-Act” method has acquired “citizenship” in the Latin American and Caribbean Church, as expressed in the Aparecida Document (cf. DAp 19). It has been refined and now it has been enriched with the method of spiritual conversation, even as it enriches the latter. In this context we speak of the circular and progressive process configured by the respective moments of seeing/listening/contemplating, judging/discerning/interpreting, and acting/responding/projecting.

103. The background of our hermeneutical method is the conviction that God communicates himself in history and has spoken fully through his Son Jesus Christ, that his Word is transmitted in Sacred Scripture received and communicated in the Tradition of the Church, and that God continues to speak through historical events, especially through the signs that mark the present time. In the magisterium of Latin America and the Caribbean, history, theology and pastoral ministry are mutually enriching.

104. The Synodal Assembly could synodally deepen communitarian discernment in listening to the Spirit and the historical-pastoral hermeneutic in the light of the Gospel of Christ, at all levels and in all ecclesial subjects, in conformity with conciliar teaching (cf. GS 11, 44).

105. (IV) The Church on pilgrimage in Latin America and the Caribbean recognizes herself as a Church of churches and a community of communities. In the councils and synods of the first evangelization, and in the post-conciliar conferences of our Episcopate, there were valuable exchanges between the local churches, episcopal conferences and regional structures, which were promoted by CELAM. In his teaching, Pope Francis refers to local, regional and universal synodality. At this moment we are going through a process that begins in the local churches, is enriched in the national conferences and now reaches continental dimensions. In the Assembly it will be lived at the level of the entire Church. In his encyclicals, exhortations, and speeches, Pope Francis includes local ecclesial experiences and the magisterium of episcopal conferences, such as the Document of Aparecida (cf. EG 25, 122).

106. The call to live and act synodally urges us to redefine the mutual implications between the particular and the universal, the value of ecclesial experience in the peripheries and its repercussion on the whole, the just and tense balances between local, national, regional and global priorities, and the challenge of opening ourselves to harmony, the work of the Spirit. The next Assembly may focus on these questions: How to integrate the particular riches into the beauty of the whole; how to respect the rhythms and demands of those who walk more slowly; how to overcome a predominantly vertical practice, where particular churches seem subordinate, with a true communion of churches in universal catholicity; how to overcome a predominantly vertical practice, where particular churches seem subordinate, with a true communion of churches in universal catholicity.

107. The text of the Ecclesial Assembly teaches: “From the beginning of our ecclesial history the Mother of God sustains the hope of the people of the continent

and is the great spiritual bond in all America" (AE 224). Our believing people, spiritually and affectively Marian from our Guadalupean origins and in all its local expressions, feels and knows that "there is a Marian style in the evangelizing activity of the Church. This dynamic of justice and tenderness, of contemplating and walking towards others, is what makes her an ecclesial model for evangelization" (EG 288). From the heart of faith and piety of our Church we ask the Virgin Mother to sustain us in the hope of the synodal journey because she is "queen and mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope".