

XVI ASSEMBLY GENERAL ORDINARY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

First Session

(October 4-29, 2023)

A SYNODAL CHURCH ON MISSION

October 28, 2023

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A SYNODAL CHURCH ON MISSION

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Convergences

a) Digital culture represents a fundamental change in the way we conceive of reality and consequently relate to ourselves, one another, our surroundings, and even to God. The digital environment changes our learning processes as well as our perception of time, space, our bodies, interpersonal relationships and, indeed, much of our way of thinking. The dualism between real and virtual does not adequately describe the reality and experience of people, especially the youngest, the so-called "digital natives."

b) Digital culture, then, is not so much a distinct area of mission as a crucial dimension of the Church's witness in contemporary culture. This is why it holds special significance in a synodal Church.

c) Missionaries have always gone with Christ to new frontiers, while the Holy Spirit pushed and preceded them. It is up to us to reach today's culture in all spaces where people seek meaning and love, including the spaces they enter through their cell phones and tablets.

d) We cannot evangelize digital culture without first understanding it. Young people, and among them, seminarians, young priests, and young consecrated men and women, who often have profound and direct experience of it, are best suited to carry out the Church's mission in the digital environment, as well as to accompany the rest of the community, including pastors, in becoming more familiar with its dynamics.

e) Within the synodal process, the initiatives of the "Digital Synod" ("The Church Listens to You" Project) show the potential of the digital environment approached in a missionary key, the creativity and generosity of those who engage in it, and the importance of providing them with training, accompaniment and opportunities for peer-to-peer discussion and collaboration.

Matters for Consideration

f) The Internet is increasingly present in the lives of children and families. While it has great potential to improve people's lives, it can also cause harm and injury, such as through intimidation, disinformation, sexual exploitation, and addiction. There is an urgent need to consider how the Christian community can support families in ensuring that the online space is not only safe but also spiritually life-giving.

g) There are many valuable and useful Church-related online initiatives that provide excellent catechesis and faith formation. Unfortunately, there are also sites where faith-related issues are addressed in a superficial, polarized and even hate-filled manner. As a Church and as individual digital missionaries, we have a duty to ask ourselves how we can ensure that our online presence constitutes an experience of growth for those with whom we communicate.

h) Online apostolic initiatives have a reach and scope that extends beyond traditionally understood territorial boundaries. This raises important questions about how they can be regulated and which ecclesiastical authority should be responsible for supervision.

i) We must also consider the implications of the new digital missionary frontier for the renewal of existing parish and diocesan structures. In an increasingly digital world, how do we avoid being trapped within a mindset that seeks only to conserve what we are already doing and instead unleash new energies for new forms of mission?

j) The COVID-19 pandemic stimulated a range of creative online pastoral initiatives that reduced the effects of the experience of isolation and loneliness experienced particularly by elderly and vulnerable community members. Catholic educational institutions also used online platforms effectively to continue offering formation and catechesis during lockdowns. We need to assess what this experience has taught us and what the lasting benefits might be for the Church's mission in the digital environment.

k) While young people do seek beauty, many young people have abandoned the physical spaces of Church into which we continue to try to invite them, favouring instead online spaces. This has implications for how we try to engage them and seek to offer them formation and catechesis. This is something to consider from a pastoral perspective.

Proposals

l) We need to provide opportunities for recognising, forming, and accompanying those already working as digital missionaries, while also facilitating them in networking with one another.

m) It is important to create collaborative networks of influencers that include people of other religions or indeed who may profess no faith, but who wish to collaborate on common causes to promote human dignity, justice, and care for our common home

Numbers that mention the digital mission in the report:

PART I – THE FACE OF THE SYNODAL CHURCH

1. Synodality: Experience and Understanding

Proposals:

o) The synodal culture needs to become more intergenerational, with spaces for young people to speak freely for themselves, within their families, and with their peers and pastors, **including through digital channels.**

PART II – ALL DISCIPLES, ALL MISSIONARIES

8. The Church is Mission

Convergences:

d) If the mission is a grace involving all the Church, the lay faithful contribute in a vital way to advancing that mission in all areas and in the ordinary situations of every day. **Above all, it is they who make the Church present and who proclaim the Gospel, for example, in digital culture, which has such a strong impact throughout the world;** in youth culture; in the world of work and business, politics, and the arts and culture; in scientific research, education, and training; in the care of our common home; and especially through participation in public life. Wherever they are present, they are called to witness to Jesus Christ in daily life and to explicitly share the faith with others. In a special way, young people, with their gifts and fragilities, growing in friendship with Jesus, become apostles of the Gospel to their peers.

PART III – WEAVING BONDS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

14. A Synodal Approach to Formation

Convergences:

e) The areas in which the formation of the People of God takes places are many. In addition to theological formation, the Assembly requested training in specific skills: the exercise of coresponsibility, listening, and discernment; conducting ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, service to the poorest and care for our common home; **engagement as "digital missionaries," facilitation of discernment processes,** Conversation in the Spirit, consensus-building and conflict resolution. Particular attention should also be given to catechetical formation of children and young people, which should involve the active participation of the community.

Matters for Consideration

j) Episcopal Conferences are encouraged to work together at the regional level to create a culture of lifelong formation and learning, using all available resources, **including the development of digital options.**

Proposals:

k) In the light of synodality, we propose that priority should be given to providing programmes designed and intended for the joint formation of the entire People of God (laity, consecrated and ordained ministers). Dioceses should endeavour to encourage these projects within the local Church. We encourage the Bishops' Conferences to work together at regional level to create a culture of ongoing formation, using all available resources, **including the development of digital options.**

15. Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions

Convergences:

b) This basic approach creates a context that enables careful consideration of matters that are controversial within the Church, **such as the anthropological effects of digital technologies and artificial intelligence**, non-violence and legitimate self-defence, issues related to ministry, and issues related to sexuality and “bodiliness”, among others.

20. Synod of Bishops and Ecclesial Assembly

Issues to be Addressed:

h) It will also be necessary to reflect on the **interaction between Internet and media communication and synod processes**.