

Working Document
for the Continental
Stage

General Secretariat
of the Synod

“Enlarge the space of your tent”

Isaiah 54:2

A summary by Monsignor Roderick Strange



“Together we pray:

Lord, you have gathered all your
People in Synod.

We give you thanks for the joy
experienced by those who decided to
set out

to listen to God and to their brothers
and sisters during this year,
with an attitude of welcome, humility,
hospitality and siblinghood.

Help us to enter these pages as on
“holy ground”.

Come Holy Spirit: may you be the
guide of our journey together!”

*From the Working Document for the
Continental Stage*

Introduction

The synodal journey has begun. What does this 'journeying together' mean, this journey which takes place on so many levels, from the universal to the local? It has given rise to the joy of meeting together as brothers and sisters in Christ and, through listening to the Word, reflecting on the future of the Church. Synodality has thus been recognized, not as an abstract concept, but a concrete experience that has enthused people to continue along this way. The process has prompted a wide range of responses, from Bishops' Conferences, Oriental Catholic Churches, Roman dicasteries, religious superiors, institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life, and associations and lay movements of the faithful, as well as contributions from individuals and groups, not to mention insights gathered through social media, thanks to the initiative of the 'Digital Synod'. The quotations in the Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) have been chosen, not to endorse any one particular viewpoint, but to illustrate powerfully, beautifully and precisely the sentiments expressed more generally in many reports. No single document can exhaust the wealth of the material that has been gathered in. The DCS does not pretend to do so and, in any case, the process is far from complete. Nevertheless it seeks to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church, allowing the *sensus fidei* to emerge.

So, the DCS offers first a profile of the synodal experience, presenting the difficulties encountered and the most significant fruits that emerged, and thereby identifying the key concepts of an authentic collective experience of the Christian faith. In other words, it does not define synodality as such, but expresses rather the experience of synodality enjoyed by those who took part. In particular what emerges is a profound re-appropriation of the common dignity of all the baptized. That is fundamental to a synodal Church for it fashions authentic unity and resists a unity that is artificial

Then, after a brief section on listening to the Scriptures, the document continues by focussing on five key points: first,



listening, secondly, the outgoing drive towards mission, followed, thirdly, by mission based on participation, then the structures and institutions needed to make communion, participation and mission really possible, and finally the basing of this vision in the liturgy, and especially the Eucharist.

And the final section concentrates on spirituality which is interior and methodology which is outward looking, guiding the Church into the future.



1. The experience of the synodal journey

The reports sent by Churches across the world express the joys, hopes, sufferings and wounds of Christ's disciples, and also the desire to walk with Christ under the guidance of the Spirit to fulfil its mission to evangelize.

1.1

There is reference to challenges as well as fruits: 'Largely, what emerges from the fruits, seeds and weeds of synodality are voices that have great love for the Church, voices that dream of a Church of credible witnesses, a Church that is inclusive, open and welcoming' (Episcopal Conference Zimbabwe). Delight in the synodal process, but a sense of struggle – weeds as well as seeds – was a regular theme, and an individual from the UK expressed distrust of the Synod: 'I think it has been called to bring about further change to Christ's teachings and wound the Church further.' Others were suspicious of synodality as pushing the Church towards a democratic-type majority principle or feared that 'the synodal outcome had been predetermined' (EC Canada).

Many reported that the clergy were fearful of the process and the laity passive, perhaps because of 'the novelty of the challenge, since many communities are not accustomed to this way of living the Church ... [There were complaints] about the lack or weak involvement of priests' (EC Chile). 'Consultations in dioceses and at national level have shown that the relationship between priests and the faithful is difficult in many places' (EC Austria). An obstacle of particular relevance on the path of walking together is the scandal of abuse by members of the clergy or by people holding ecclesial office: first and foremost, abuse of minors and vulnerable persons, but also abuse of other kinds (spiritual, sexual, economic, of authority, of conscience). Furthermore, in too many countries the synodal way has crossed paths with the wars that stain our world with blood, 'giving free rein to fanaticism of all kinds and to persecutions, even massacres' (Maronite Church). The Rwandan bishops referred to the genocide against the Tutsi and the need for 'the authentic healing of the collective memory'. They went on to insist that 'unity and reconciliation must continue to be a priority'.



1.2 Our common baptismal dignity

On the other hand, practices of lived synodality have constituted 'a pivotal and precious moment to realize how we all share a common dignity and vocation through our Baptism as participants in the life of the Church' (EC Ethiopia). This reference to baptism as a felt identity immediately brings into focus the link between the synodal form of the Church and the possibility of fulfilling its mission. Where there are many different Christian denominations living together, this stress on baptismal dignity was recognized as vital for the common mission in service of the Gospel and encouraged deeper ecumenical encounters. Where there has been alienation, the synodal journey was also seen as a first step of the return from the experience of collective exile.

2. Listening to the Scriptures

'Enlarge the space of your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly, lengthen your ropes and make firm your pegs' (Is. 54:2). There are three elements here. To return from exile, it is necessary first to enlarge the canvas that protects those inside, but, by that enlarging there is also a welcome to those who have been outside. Then, secondly, the ropes that hold the tent together must balance the tension that keeps the tent from drooping with the softness that cushions the movement caused by the wind and rain. And finally, the pegs anchor the structure to the ground and ensure its solidity, but remain capable of moving when the tent must be pitched elsewhere.

Welcoming others, however, entails a willingness to die to self out of love for others: 'Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit' (Jn. 12:24). The fruitfulness of the Church depends on an experience of emptying oneself in order to be filled by Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is a process by which we receive richer relationships, deeper ties to God and each other.

3. Towards a missionary synodal Church

The image of the tent captures a tension at the heart of the synodal process,



neither to remain trapped in conflict with others nor to continue on our own way, ignoring those who are close to us on the journey. 'The call is to live better the tension of truth and mercy, as Jesus did ... The dream is of a Church that more fully lives a Christological paradox: boldly proclaiming its authentic teaching while at the same time offering a witness of radical inclusion and acceptance through its pastoral and discerning accompaniment' (EC England and Wales).

3.1 Listening that becomes welcoming

Churches have realised that the path to greater inclusion – enlarging the tent – is gradual. It begins with listening and requires a broader and deeper conversion of attitudes and structures, as well as new approaches to pastoral accompaniment. Listening requires that we recognize others as subjects of their own journey. When we do that, they feel welcomed, not judged, free to share their own spiritual journey.

Listening deeply, however, is not easy nor is accepting being open to being transformed by what we hear. The failure to listen has devastating consequences. Poland's report states: 'Not listening leads to misunderstanding, exclusion, and marginalization. As a further consequence, it creates closure, simplification, lack of trust and fears that destroy the community.' It goes on, 'When priests do not want to listen, making excuses, such as in the larger number of activities, or when questions go unanswered, a sense of sadness and estrangement arises in the hearts of the lay faithful. Without listening, answers to the faithful's difficulties are taken out of context and do not address the sense of the problems they are experiencing, becoming empty moralism. The laity feel that the flight from sincere listening stems from the fear of having to engage pastorally. A similar feeling grows when bishops do not have time to speak and listen to the faithful.' At the same time, the reports are sensitive to the loneliness and isolation of many of the clergy who themselves do not feel listened to, supported and appreciated: perhaps one of the least evident voices in the reports is that of priests and bishops, speaking for themselves and of their experience of walking together.



An option for young people, people with disabilities and the defence of life

There was a widespread concern about the meagre presence of young voices in the synod process. Antilles' report declares: 'Since our young people experience a high degree of alienation, we need to make a preferential option for the young.' There was also awareness of the lack of appropriate structures and ways of accompanying people with disabilities. How can their contributions be welcomed better so as to overcome discrimination against them? There was also commitment to the defence of fragile life at all stages, including of women who feel forced to have abortions due to fear of material poverty and rejection by their families (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church).

Listening to those who feel neglected and excluded.

Those who feel themselves to be in exile are many and diverse, such as groups of women and young people. Then there are those who feel a tension between belonging to the Church and their own loving relationships, such as remarried divorcées, single parents, people living in a polygamous marriage, LGBTQ people and others. They are asking for a more meaningful dialogue. 'People ask that the Church be a refuge for the wounded and broken, not an institution for the perfect. They want the Church to meet people wherever they are, to walk with them rather than to judge them, and to build real relationships through caring and authenticity' (EC USA). These situations often demand wise discernment, for example, with regard to same-sex relationships (EC Lesotho). And there is often sadness too at not being able 'to effectively reach out to the poor on the peripheries and in the most remote places' (EC Bolivia), for example, the poorest, the lonely elderly, indigenous peoples, migrants, street children, alcoholics and drug addicts, those drawn into organized crime or prostitution, victims of trafficking, survivors of abuse, and those who suffer discrimination and violence because of race, gender, ethnicity, culture, and sexuality. All of these people appear in the reports as people with names and faces, calling for solidarity, dialogue, accompaniment and welcome.



3.2 Sisters and brothers for mission

'I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly' (Jn. 10:10). The fullness of life and the fullness of the Kingdom of God are dynamically intertwined movements. The Church's mission is to make Christ present in the midst of his people through the Word, by the celebration of sacraments, and by the service of those in need, the wounded and the suffering. 'Enlarging our tent' is at the heart of this missionary activity: 'The world needs a "Church that goes forth", that rejects the division between believers and non-believers, that looks at humanity and offers it more than a doctrine or a strategy, [but rather] an experience of salvation, a "coup of gift" that responds to the cry of humanity and nature' (EC Portugal).

The Church's mission in today's world

Synodality is a call from God to walk together with the whole human family. In many places, Christians live in the midst of people of other faiths or non-believers and are engaged in a dialogue formed in the exchanges of everyday life and common living, and the wounds of the Church are connected to those of the world: tribalism, sectarianism, racism, poverty, and gender inequality. And in the structures of the Church, 'the rich and the educated are listened to more than others' (EC Uganda), while the underprivileged and the marginalized 'are left out in the Church' (EC Philippines). There is a deep desire to hear the cry of the poor and also of the world. There is a need to recognize the interconnectedness of social and environmental challenges and respond to them by forming alliances with other Christian confessions, believers of other religions, and all people of good will. There is a call for an ecumenical and an interfaith initiative to confront the vulnerability to socio-environmental damage and more pronounced inequalities. This need is no longer optional. African and Pacific Rim reports declare: 'It is our desire to protect this part of God's creation, as the wellbeing of our people depends on the ocean in so many ways. In some of our countries the major threat is the ocean, as changes in climate have drastic outcomes for the actual survival of these countries' (EC Pacific Rim).



Walking together with all Christians

Synodality calls for unity among Christians, not only with regard to these social issues, but also with regard to closer communion between Churches of different rites. Struggles are noted, relating to synodal structures and ministries, but the reports also note 'an ecumenism of martyrdom', while the Indian bishops, for all their efforts 'to foster ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue', note that 'there is a feeling that the mission in this realm is minimal'; very few people became seriously engaged; 'efforts remained mostly as cerebral exercises ... rather than becoming a movement of the masses and becoming also a dialogue of life, love and action at the base, by getting people of various faiths and ideologies to discern, plan and work together for common causes' (EC India).

Cultural contexts

Numerous reports highlight the importance of recognizing that the Church fulfills its mission of proclaiming the Gospel within specific cultural contexts, and is influenced by profound and rapid social changes. The factors vary, but create significant challenges for participation and shape the reality of the Church's mission. Legacies of sectarianism, tribalism, ethno-nationalism share the same characteristic threat: to narrow the Church's expression of its catholicity.

Many examples can be offered. The abuse crisis has undermined trust in the Church and its credibility. There is increased individualism and consumerism (EC Hungary), there are entanglements between Church and State (EC Malta), and there is a plurality of positions within individual Churches themselves, besides those already mentioned, such as 'the Church's teaching on abortion, contraception, the ordination of women, married clergy, celibacy, divorce and remarriage, Holy

Communion, homosexuality, LGBTQIA+' (EC South Africa). Many

Asian reports ask for better accompaniment and formation for families, as they negotiate changing cultural conditions. And there were references to the threat of martyrdom, forced conversion, and persecution. In such cases, walking together with people of other faiths, instead of retreating behind a wall of separation, requires the courage of prophecy.



Cultures, religion and dialogue

An essential element of a synodal Church, one which needs significant deepening and better understanding, is the call to a more meaningful inter-cultural approach. Many regions have experience of this approach, for example, Laos and Cambodia, the North African Region, and Zimbabwe. In many reports, there is a call to better recognize, engage, integrate and respond to the richness of local cultures, many of which have worldviews and styles of action that are synodal. 'This diversity of approaches should be seen as the implementation of a model of interculturality, where the different proposals complement and enrich each other, going beyond that of multiculturalism, which consists in the simple juxtaposition of cultures, closed within their perimeters' (Contribution of the Pontifical Council for Culture). It is also important to pay attention to and learn from the situation of indigenous peoples. Where there are tensions or apparent contradictions within these cultural traditions, synodality needs to promote discernment and generate new life.

3.3 Communion, participation, and co-responsibility

The reports express a deep desire to recognize and affirm the dignity of all the baptized as the basis for the renewal of life and ministries in the Church. All vocations are valued and invite us to follow Jesus, returning to his style and way of exercising power and authority as a means of offering healing, reconciliation and liberation.

Beyond clericalism

The reports are not anti-clerical. They express appreciation and affection for dedicated priests, but they also recognize the need to rid the Church of the spiritual impoverishment that clericalism causes, often seen as an authoritarian attitude in priests who give orders, while refusing to listen to alternative viewpoints and surrounding themselves only with lay people who agree with them (Central African Republic). They long instead for renewed forms of leadership – priestly, episcopal, religious and lay – that are relational and collaborative, and forms of authority capable of generating solidarity and co-responsibility (BC Slovakia).



Rethinking women's participation

The call for a conversion of the Church's culture is linked to the possibility of establishing a new culture, with new practices and structures. A critical and urgent area in this regard concerns the role of women and their vocation, rooted in our common baptismal dignity. Awareness of and sensitivity to this issue is registered all over the world. The Holy Land report acknowledges women as 'most committed to the synod process', while in the Church 'almost all the decision-makers are men'. The Korean report confirms that 'women are often excluded from key decision-making processes'. And the Bishops' Conference of New Zealand affirms, 'This lack of equality for women within the Church is seen as a stumbling block for the Church in the modern world.' Change is needed urgently. The report from Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life notes: 'Sexism in decision-making and Church language is prevalent in the Church ... As a result, women are excluded from meaningful roles in the life of the Church, discriminated against by not receiving a fair wage for their ministries and services. Women religious are often regarded as cheap labour. There is a tendency – in some Churches – to exclude women and to entrust ecclesial functions to permanent deacons; and even to undervalue religious life without the habit, without regard for the fundamental equality and dignity of all baptized Christian faithful, women and men' (USG/USIG).

Virtually all the reports raised the issue of the full and equal participation of women and their active role in the governing structures of the Church, although opinions differed on the question of their priestly ordination. Some were in favour, while others regarded the matter as closed. At the same time, women, especially women religious, were often seen as being at the forefront of synodal practices in many challenging social situations. In these circumstances, women seek collaborators and can be teachers of synodality within wider Church processes.

Charisms, vocations and ministries

Responsibility for the synodal life of the Church cannot be delegated, but must be shared by all in response to the gifts the Spirit bestows on the faithful. One parish commented: 'When we want to do anything in our parish, we



meet together, take the suggestions of everyone in the community, decide together and carry out the decisions together' (EC Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands). But it isn't easy, as the Mexican bishops observed: 'As bishops we recognize that the "baptismal theology" promoted by the Second Vatican Council, the basis of co-responsibility in mission, has not been sufficiently developed, and therefore the majority of the baptized do not feel a full identification with the Church and even less a missionary co-responsibility' (EC Mexico). This desire for co-responsibility is grounded first of all as service to the common mission, and the theme of service is taken up in many reports, such as the Italian and Belgian, and the recognition and promotion of ministries and the charisms that accompany them is taken up in others, such as Mozambique, RD Congo, and again, Belgium. A great challenge of synodality is to harmonize these charismatic gifts with the Church's institutional dimension.

3.4 Synodality takes shape

The tensions that have emerged do not need to create fear. They should be harnessed as a source of energy without becoming destructive and articulated in a process of constant communal discernment. The Church also needs to give a synodal form and way of proceeding to its own institutions and structures, particularly with regard to governance. There will naturally be implications for Canon Law. To achieve all this, the structures will need to be inhabited by people well-formed in terms of visions and skills and spirituality in order to avoid synodality being reduced to technical-organizational issues (EC India). For there to be synodality, the presence of the Spirit is necessary, and there is no Spirit without prayer.

Structures and institutions

For synodality to become an effective reality in the Church, a novelty has to be embraced which has rarely been witnessed in the Church. This Continental Stage in the process is not a mere organizational ploy, but an attempt to make synodality a reality incarnate in the Church. This creates challenges not least for the Roman Curia and for Bishops' Conferences. Even the Oriental Churches with their wealth of synodal structures recognize that they are called to renewal. The dynamic of co-responsibility, with a view to and in the service of the common mission and not as an organizational way of allocating roles and powers, runs

through all levels of Church life. The Korean bishops report discussions 'to have structure and organization which sincerely reflect the spirit of synodality'. There is a need for greater accountability and transparency.

All Church institutions, as fully participatory bodies, are called to consider how they might integrate the call to synodality into the ways in which they exercise their functions and mission, renewing their structures and procedures. Reference is made to universities, academic institutions, and theological faculties. There is also reference to communities of consecrated life: 'Although communal discernment has been practised in our Institutes, there is room for improvement' (USG/UISG).

Formation and Spirituality

Establishing structures, however, is not enough. There is a need as well for formation in synodality to support a widespread synodal culture, a formation that goes beyond providing technical or methodological skills, 'an integral formation that includes personal, spiritual, theological, social and practical dimensions' (EC Spain). It is needed for clergy and laity (EC Myanmar) and should be included in seminary formation as well (EC Sri Lanka). And hand in hand with this formation is familiarity with the Lord and the capacity to listen to the voice of the Spirit: 'spiritual discernment must accompany strategic planning and decision-making, so that each project is welcomed and accompanied by the Holy Spirit' (Greek Melkite Catholic Church). As a synodal Church needs to deal with the many tensions that emerge when encountering diversity, a synodal spirituality must be one that welcomes differences and promotes harmony, drawing from the tensions the strategies to continue on the journey. A synodal Church is built around diversity, and the encounter between different spiritual traditions can be a setting which is capable of promoting communion and harmony, contributing thereby to overcoming the polarizations that many Churches experience.

3.5 Synodal life and liturgy

Many reports emphasise the deep link between synodality and liturgy: 'prayer, devotion to Mary as a missionary disciple listening to the



Word, lectio divina and liturgical celebration inspire the purpose of belonging' (EC Colombia).

Roots that reach deep

The Eucharist is already in itself the 'source and summit' of the Church's synodal dynamism, fostering the 'joy of life and a purpose of community' (EC Burkina Faso). Popular devotions as well are considered by many people as 'a sign of belonging to the Church' (EC Panama), especially among people who live among phenomena of popular religiosity.

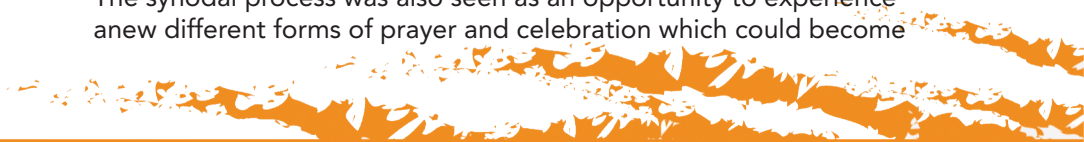
Managing tensions: renewal and reconciliation

Many reports encourage strongly the implementation of a synodal style of liturgical celebration that allows for the active participation of all the faithful, welcoming all differences, valuing all ministries, and recognizing all charisms. 'While being faithful to the tradition, its originality, antiquity, and uniformity, let us try to make the liturgical celebration more alive and participatory of all the community of believers, priests, laity, youth and children, reading the signs of the times with sound discernment. The young people are trying to have a space in the liturgy with songs and it is positive' (EC Ethiopia).

However, current experience in the Church also records knots of conflict, most evidently with regard to access to the pre-Conciliar Mass. 'People on each side of the issue reported feeling judged by those who differed from them' (EC USA). The sacrament of unity becomes a source of confrontation and division. Reports also raised the question of poor liturgical praxis, poor preaching, and the passivity of the wider liturgical community. There were also references to those deprived of the Eucharist and other sacraments because of living in remote areas, as well as those excluded from the Eucharist because of divorce and remarriage or entering into polygamous marriages. 'Some expressed the view that the Church should be more flexible, but others felt [its traditional] practice should be upheld' (EC Malaysia).

A synodal style of celebrating

The synodal process was also seen as an opportunity to experience anew different forms of prayer and celebration which could become



more accessible in the ordinary life of communities. The French made three suggestions: 'the first ... concerns the diversification of liturgies to the benefit of celebrations of the Word, that is, moments of prayer that place meditation on biblical texts at the centre. The second, less frequent, recalls the importance of pilgrimages and popular piety. The third calls for a renewed liturgical formation, to address a problem reported by many reports, namely the incomprehensibility of the language normally used by the Church' (EC France). Many also, such as the Philippine bishops, highlighted the importance of gathering socially and sharing food as well, when meeting for liturgy. And from Uruguay, 'All the contributions received speak of celebrations as spaces that can offer inspiration and help to live the faith in personal, family, professional life, in the neighbourhood and in the community itself' (EC Uruguay).

4. The next steps

There are two objectives: first, to recognize that synodality is a perennial call to personal conversion and the reform of the Church; and secondly, to reflect upon the present call to synodality that we are experiencing.

4.1 A journey of conversion and reform

The reports affirm that the Church is called to mission rather than maintenance: 'we believe that communion must lead us to a permanent state of mission: meeting and listening to each other, dialogue, reflection, discernment together are all actions with positive effects in themselves, but not understandable if they are not directed at pushing us to go beyond ourselves and our communities of reference in order to carry out the mission entrusted to us as Church' (EC Spain). What has been wonderful so far still leaves much more to be done (EC Namibia).

The free and gratuitous attention to the other which is the basis of listening, is not a limited resource to be jealously guarded, but an overflowing source that does not run out, but grows the more we draw from it. Everyone is called to take part in this journey, no one is excluded.



4.2 Methodology for the Continental Stage

This Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) invites us to take a further step in this spiritual journey: 'Just as the experience of the disciples at Emmaus was only the beginning of their new mission, our synodal process is only a first step' (EC Russian Federation).

To pursue the process of listening, dialogue and discernment, our reflection will focus on three questions:

- ▷ After reading and praying with the DCS, which **intuitions** resonate most strongly with the lived experiences and realities of the Church in your continent? Which experiences are new, or illuminating to you?
- ▷ After reading and praying with the DCS, what substantial tensions or divergences emerge as particularly important in your continent's perspective? Consequently, what are the **questions or issues** that should be addressed and considered in the next stage of the process?
- ▷ Looking at what emerges from the previous two questions, what are the **priorities, recurring themes and calls to action** that can be shared with other local Churches around the world and discussed during the First Session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023?

Key stages in the process

Each Continental Assembly is to put in place a discernment process on the DCS, appropriate to its local context, and draft a Final Document to account for it. The final documents from the continents will be the basis for the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

The vast majority of episcopal conferences wanted the Continental Assemblies to be ecclesial, not merely episcopal, so as to draw on the experiences of many people, especially those often mentioned in this document as frequently ignored. At the end of the Continental Assemblies, the bishops are then to reread what has been composed and to identify appropriate ways of validating and approving the Final Document, ensuring that it is the fruit of an authentically synodal



journey, respectful of the process that has taken place and faithful to the diverse voices of the People of God in each continent.

Five steps will mark the process from the publication of the DCS to the drafting of the *Instrumentum Laboris*:

1. The DCS will be sent to all diocesan bishops; each of them, together with the diocesan synodal team that coordinated the first phase, will arrange an ecclesial process of discernment on the DCS, starting with the three questions indicated above. Each local Church will thus have the opportunity to listen to the voice of the other Churches, gathered in the DCS, and to respond to it from its own experience.
2. With the involvement of its synodal team, each Episcopal Conference has the task of collecting and synthesizing in the form most appropriate to its own context the reflections around the three questions coming from the individual Dioceses.
3. The reflection and discernment of each Episcopal Conference will then be shared within the Continental Assembly, according to the modalities identified by the Continental Task Force.
4. In planning the conduct of each specific Continental Assembly, it may be useful to reflect on how to use the widespread and much-appreciated method of 'spiritual conversation' (see *Vademecum*, Appendix B, no. 8), which can facilitate the involvement of all in discernment. In particular, its three phases should be emphasized: the taking of the floor by each participant, the resonance of listening to others, and the discernment of the fruits by the group. As already highlighted in the Methodological Guidelines, it will be important to ensure the participation in the Continental Assemblies of bishops, priests, deacons, lay men and women, consecrated men and women, as well as people capable of expressing the views of those on the margins.



5. Each Continental Assembly will draft its own Final Document of a maximum of about twenty pages confronting the three questions from its own specific context. The Final Documents are to be submitted by each Continental Task Force to the Synod Secretariat by March 31, 2023. Based on the Final Documents of the Continental Assemblies, the *Instrumentum laboris* will be drafted by June 2023.

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