



# SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

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UISG - USG CONTRIBUTION



Synod  
2021  
2023

For a synodal Church

communion | participation | mission



# INTRODUCTION

Cardinals João Braz de Aviz (Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life) and Mario Grech (Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops) sent a joint letter to all the general governments that are members of the USG and UISG, inviting them to "reflect on the exercise of governance within institutes and the relations between the various institutes" (17 January 2022), as a way of actively participating in the Synod process on synodality.

In fact, even before receiving that letter, from October 2021 until April 2022, the general governments of the various institutes and societies of apostolic life carried out their own processes of dialogue and prayer, sometimes involving members of the Curia, provincial governments or even the entire Congregation. 224 congregations participated, 169 female (75%) and 55 male (25%). The proportion corresponds to the reality of religious life today, since female congregations account for 75% of the total.

Starting in April 2022, a commission, consisting of Gemma Simmonds CJ, José Cristo Rey García Paredes CMF, Maria Cimperman RSCJ and Orlando Torres SJ, prepared a summary of the contributions received, which was then presented to the USG Assembly (May 2022) and the UISG Online Assembly (July 2022).

Both Assemblies expressed their identification with the results of the consultation and thus count with the strength not only of the congregations that directly participated in the consultation, but of all the congregations belonging to the two Unions, through their Superiors General.

We wish to express our deepest thanks to the members of the Synthesis Commission for their excellent work and their passion for consecrated life. Thanks also to all the congregations who actively participated in the consultation.

We are equally grateful for the invitation to participate in the synodal process and reiterate, on behalf of the two Unions, our willingness to continue to collaborate in building a more evangelical and synodal Church.



*Nadia Coppa ASC  
UISG President*



*Arturo Sosa SJ  
USG President*

# SYNOD DOCUMENT

## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE UISG-USG

28/07/2022

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Invitation and project**

The UISG and the USG invited the General Governments of religious institutes to participate in the process of reflection on the Synod in the run-up to the 2023 General Assembly. To this end, the two Unions opted for a methodology that would enable the general governments to have meaningful conversations on the topic. Six perspectives were offered for the conversation:

- 1) Evoke stories and accounts of synodality in your Institutes.
- 2) Discover the seeds of synodality that already exist.
- 3) Discover weeds that threaten the seeds.
- 4) God's dream of synodality for the Church and the consecrated life of the third millennium.
- 5) Consequences for consecrated life.
- 6) Implications for the life and mission of the Church.

The responses received were numerous and representative of both women's and men's institutes. Some institutes invited all their members to enter the process, others invited provincials and teams, and others were completed by general councils. The present document reflects the contributions received; the Synthesis Commission has tried to organise the richness of these contributions in different sections for a better understanding of the whole.

#### **Commission of Synthesis**

It has been an intense experience and a considerable privilege to form the commission that has created a synthesis of the Synod responses from the world's religious congregations. The four members of the commission: Maria Cimperman RSCJ, José Cristo Rey García Paredes CMF, Gemma Simmonds CJ and Orlando Torres SJ all have extensive experience of working with their fellow religious around the world. We spent four full days reading and reflecting together on the hundreds of pages of reports in six languages before we could begin to draft the Synthesis.

Our principal task was to synthesise the responses as they were articulated by the respondents. It was not our task to interpret or edit them in any way, but to render as faithful a synthesis as possible. What you are hearing in this report is the freshness and vitality of the synod responses sent into us from the leadership teams and wider membership of religious congregations around the world.

### **High level of consensus**

Some responses reflect the particularity of the situation in which the members live and exercise their ministry, and therefore they differ from responses emerging from an alternative context. Overall, however, we were struck by the high levels of consensus on particular issues that came from all continents and contexts. Religious are speaking with openness and courage about situations that must change if religious life itself and the wider church are to survive and flourish. They offer a vigorous self-critique as well as a critique of oppressive attitudes and practices within the wider Church that prevent religious life from achieving its full potential. They also speak out of their zeal and energy for the signs of hope in the synodal process that they find in every human context and corner of the world. They stress the urgency of action towards greater synodality while knowing that the onus for change falls upon themselves.

At a time when many are drawing attention to the structural diminishment of religious life worldwide, this document, which gives expression to the voices of the world's religious, shows that they have a significant part to play in promoting and living the synodal pathway to which Pope Francis has called the entire Church. We hope that our fellow religious find inspiration from this document towards a more synodal pathway for their own future and that of generations to come.

## **I. EVOKING STORIES AND TALES OF SYNODALITY**

The General Governments began their discussions by recalling experiences or stories of synodality that are or have been present in the missionary and ministerial life of their Institutes. Such stories allow us to understand the meaning of synodality, not so much as an intellectual concept, but as the result of various lived experiences.

### **1. Motivation**

- The shared and manifest conviction is that the foundation of synodality is baptism, not ordination. All the baptised are called to walk the synodal path together, each offering his or her specific contribution.
- It is also recognised that the synodal attitude is rooted in a heart that longs to live in relationship, to share God's love, to discern and make decisions together with others. It requires humility to listen to the Spirit in others, to consider each person's voice as equal and as valuable as our own, and to work as a team in an atmosphere

of trust.

## 2. Stories and tales of synodality (in mission and in life)

- Issues raised and lessons learned during the Covid pandemic, social justice issues related to care for others and creation (Laudato Si), and universal solidarity and friendship (Fratelli Tutti) featured prominently in the stories shared.
- Shared stories and narratives are interwoven with the richness of diversity, of one's own cultural identity, of the universal concerns of each institute and of the realities of the world that challenge us.
- There are stories of conversations between religious and lay people sharing mission and collaborating on projects for the economically vulnerable, the sick, flood victims, networking with groups (e.g. Doctors Without Borders) caring for migrants and refugees in detention centres. These experiences make us aware of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all peoples, strengthen our bonds in community and promote universal sisterhood/brotherhood. In the words of one group: Synodality leads to solidarity.
- Also detectable in the inputs is an invitation to listen to the voices of the impoverished, including migrants and refugees, but also to bring into community conversations those who remain at a distance or do not normally participate in our meetings.
- Another encouraging experience of synodality refers to listening sessions, such as those initiated in a convent of sisters in Washington D.C., which allowed participants to appreciate unity in diversity in the midst of the Black Lives Matter protests. Participants - young and old, African-American, Latino and white, priests, religious and lay - took part in these listening and sharing sessions. The dynamic was truly circular. Listening circles like this also took place on all continents.
- Other stories and initiatives present religious as *missionari dell'ascolto*, whose key verbs are listening, participating, praying, and seeking. This attitude has led to the construction of communication networks with ecumenical and inter-religious groups, starting with *Fratelli Tutti*; to initiatives of contact with Muslims, visits to prisoners, formation of intercultural communities, marches alongside communities on socio-political and economic margins and located on the peripheries, and/or participation in diocesan synodal reflections.
- Religious communities living and working in Latin America mention the exemplary significance that the assemblies of the Latin American Episcopate in Medellin, Puebla, Santo Domingo and Aparecida had for them and for the Church: the participatory and synodal character of these meetings has strengthened the bonds of communion and solidarity in the Latin American Church and has given it an impressive impulse towards a shared mission in the continent.

- Among the accounts of synodality, reference is made to active participation in formation programmes that foster human-spiritual growth and common mission at the inter-congregational level. This participation generates an atmosphere of openness and welcome towards others, those who are different, and prepares everyone to listen and dialogue. It is recognised that, although the processes are certainly slower because they involve more participants, nevertheless, the richness of diversity, complementarity and the perspectives that open up are well worth the time and effort invested.
- Many religious congregations are shaping their chapters and general and provincial assemblies as synodal processes: in all of them, participation and communion are encouraged when important decisions about mission and life have to be taken. Some of the contributions recognise that their renewed Constitutions are also the fruit of an authentic synodal process marked by a praxis of listening and a culture of collaboration.

## II. DISCOVERING THE SEEDS OF SYNODALITY THAT ALREADY EXIST

The second question, posed to the general leaderships, asked them to detect seeds or germs of synodality, even if they have not yet fully germinated. The responses and contributions have been varied.

### 1. Church initiatives regarding consecrated life

Firstly, reference is made to the enthusiasm provoked by the convocation of this Synod and by the synodal style of Pope Francis. It shows the desire to be the inclusive church we want to see. Smallness and fragility are seeds that become leaven for the Kingdom of God. Some seeds of synodality that are detected in the Church are:

- The presence - albeit still a minority - of women in leadership and decision-making roles. One example is the appointment of Sister Nathalie Becquart as under-secretary of the Synod of Bishops.
- The desire to build relationships of dialogue and cooperation: involve co-workers/employees in leadership roles, deliberations and decisions; commission or hand over corporate ministries to an established Public Juridical Person [PJP] to continue the apostolic works of the religious congregation through lay trustees.
- Participation in the establishment of an Emerging Futures Collaborative in Australia to assist religious congregations that are coming to an end. Such situations invite creativity, detachment from institutions and liberation from them in favour of mission.

## 2. Synodal processes in the Institutes

- Congregational and personal processes - of various kinds - have helped to walk together, to deepen relationships, to facilitate meaningful conversations of authentic listening, dialogue and discernment; to learn to be more inclusive, to accept cultural differences and customs: *le palabre* in Africa, *musyawarah* in Indonesia... The principles of subsidiarity, collegiality and solidarity in life and mission are gaining ground in religious life. All processes of personal conversion are seeds of synodality.
- The shift in structures, methods, and leadership: from problem-solving to appreciative enquiry, from power leadership to servant and transformational leadership, has been changing the understanding of obedience as mutual discernment/shared decision-making, communal discernment.
- There are communities that - encouraged by a long tradition of hospitality - welcome those who visit and seek refuge in them; they create a welcoming atmosphere and help people feel free and willing to talk, to share ideas, hopes and experiences; they facilitate spiritual conversation.
- There are seeds of synodality in the clear call to include lay and religious women and men in the formation of seminarians. The presentation of the ordained ministry, not in a clericalist key, but in line with the Second Vatican Council, so that it may influence the emergence of a church of all, more participative and welcoming.
- In the midst of the tragedy of the Covid pandemic, there were also some seeds and fruits: it has enabled online training, sharing of faith formation materials to a large number of people and making them accessible to young people and those far from the Church. Several congregations have also been able to use the internet to create and continue initial and ongoing formation programs.

## 3. Experiences of shared mission, interfaith and interreligious dialogue, solidarity, and inclusion

- Networks are created between people working towards the same purpose or goal: meaningful encounters with others, joint paths of spirituality - prayer/contemplation, interfaith relationships, migration, climate change, seeking the common good.
- The seeds of synodality arise in the search for the meaning of life by people from all walks of life who come together for this purpose; the pandemic situation has made it easier to search together and help each other; thus, small Christian communities have also been born.
- The seed of synodality is also the dialogue with other religions and with other Christian confessions and reaching out to those who do not share the same faith, following the example of Pope Francis; seed of synodality is the interreligious dialogue, understood as contemplative dialogue (listening, sharing, reflecting, acting) and ecumenical and interreligious prayer (prayer to Mary with Muslims and Jews).



- There are seeds of synodality where we present the inclusive and non-exclusive face of the Church and denounce racist or sexist attitudes and actions: through consultation, dialogue, joint reflection, self-examination.
- There are seeds of synodality where we break new ground in solidarity: securing a future of racial and ethnic justice and peace for black, brown, Asian and Native American brothers and sisters (United States); connecting in depth with indigenous and native sisters and brothers (Americas); opening new avenues of presence of religious sisters in diverse movements; alliance with like-minded groups to address key social issues (such as climate change, refugees and asylum seekers, homelessness), or issues of specific nations (in Australia, the Heart of Uluru statement, in Ireland the We Must Speak series, or women sharing their experience in the Church or the voices of those women inspiring decision-making and change in the Church, or the Restorative Justice movement and the Action Plan for Reconciliation with First Nations (Canada).
- There are seeds of synodality wherever we hear the cry of the poor and vulnerable of the earth, and of the survivors of abuse (sexual, of conscience, of power...).
- A seed of synodality is the increasingly felt and urgent need for an eco-theology that recognises the holiness of creation, that makes us celebrate the liturgy of life - as a sacramental blessing - in the encounter with the earth, cultures and people; and that leads us to witness to the ecological dimension of the evangelical counsels.

### III. DETECTING THE WEEDS THAT THREATEN THE SEEDS OF SYNODALITY

The third question, posed to the general leaderships, asked them to discover the weeds that can appear next to the good seed and threaten it, according to Jesus' parable (Mt 13,24-30).

#### 1. The rooted weeds: obstacles in the synodal path

- There are weeds where the synodal purpose of Pope Francis and the impulses of the Second Vatican Council are not transmitted with conviction, enthusiasm and interest by clergy and laity, because they oppose it or because they approach synodality with language and questionnaires that are alien to the life and ecclesial experiences of the Christian faithful.
- The seed of synodality is stifled by the climate of division and polarisation in some churches, which manifests itself in dogmatism, pride, hypocrisy, envy and jealousy, petty slander. Some express scepticism that critical voices can be heard without being censored in certain dioceses or parishes.
- Theological, moral, social and even liturgical fundamentalism (among various rites) stifles the seed of synodality. Such fundamentalist movements - supported by political, economic and media groups - (for example in the USA and even present in

some sectors of the episcopate) try to regain patriarchal power and establish a pre-Vatican II model of seminary formation.

- Pernicious cultural influences, affecting not a few, but above all the clergy, can stifle the seeds of synodality, such as: the caste system, tribalism, regionalism, nationalism, elements of a Confucianist culture and Fear groups of the RSS (a Hindu fundamentalist organisation in India)

## 2. Gender imbalances and discrimination as weeds

- Women, who represent at least 50% of the world's population, should be heard; but this is not happening in much of the Church: they are silenced and prevented from promoting cultural change; and, if they express their ideas, they risk being excluded from their responsibilities and jobs. Situations like this foster a strong scepticism towards the synodal proposal.
- Sexism in decision-making and church language is prevalent in the Church, especially in Africa and some other countries. 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 baptised Christian faithful, women and men.
- It is denounced as weeds, the lack of respect and commitment towards groups considered marginal (divorced, LGBTQ+, etc.) and excluded from access to the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. .

## 3. The weeds of clericalism

- There is a patriarchal and hierarchical model - which is not that of Vatican II - that still prevails in the theological and practical understanding of ministry and the *tria munera*. Such a model favours clericalism and disregards the fundamental dignity of every baptised person. The historical - social and cultural - supremacy of the masculine considers the clergy as a race apart and motivates an arrogant and disrespectful treatment of the laity and prevents forms of collaboration and mutual relationship. The emergence of young ultra-conservative priests, who are not at all inclined to listen to alternative voices, is striking. The deficient initial and ongoing theological and psycho-sexual formation of seminarians and clergy gives rise to a toxic clericalism, which is adorned with grandiose titles: Holy Father, His Eminence, His Excellency, Superior....
- Synodality is seriously undermined when the Eucharist and other sacraments are used as a weapon of discrimination and division: exclusion and fear are promoted

from the pulpit, stifling alternative and responsible views on ethical and moral issues, which should be taken into account: particular sisters or groups are excluded from sacramental life.

- The abuse of power at various levels and its persistence: parish priests who impose themselves as lords, without transparency or accountability to others; priests who take possession of the sacred, who do not respect parish groups and who demand obedience to their criteria. Consecrated life in Africa insists on denouncing this clericalist mentality, which ignores the voice of the Holy Spirit. More than a few women religious bear witness to abuses of power that have led to racism, sexism, mismanagement of Church property and other forms of discrimination. There is competition for supremacy between rival ecclesial groups (diocesan priests versus religious; vocational competition between congregations...). Excessive interest in what is 'mine' to the exclusion of what is 'ours'
- Clergy sex scandals, the cover-up and protection of offenders by bishops or superiors, rather than caring for those who have suffered abuse, have caused many to leave the Church.
- The seduction of economic power: one detects in some members of the hierarchy and in some dioceses and parishes and communities, a model of administration of material goods and financial resources, guided by greed, corruption and injustice and not by the Gospel. In such cases there is no specific sensitivity to the issues of Justice, Peace, and Care for Creation. The pulpit becomes a place to claim donations; sacramental and pastoral actions become means to raise money; the Church appears more as a business than as a sacrament of God.
- Failures in leadership: Church leadership is disappointing when it is focused only on the internal life of the church and not on a church in the midst of the world. Leadership fails when it does not listen and only speaks and commands; when it is governed by the criteria that it has always been done this way and refuses to pour new wine into new wineskins. Leadership that uses rational intelligence instead of emotional intelligence; leadership of control and distrust towards the laity; leadership that does not provide to prepare the laypeople for new responsibilities in the Church.

#### **4. Weeds in consecrated life**

- In religious life there are still areas where authoritarianism, exclusion, intimidation, rigid imposition of uniformity, outdated mental and structural models, old wounds and unhealed and unresolved tensions persist.
- The formation of young people in consecrated life in an exclusively intimate spirituality (me and Jesus) does not favour community discernment, listening to others, collaborative ministry and is an obstacle to synodality.

- Religious people also have blind spots, which prevent them from recognising hidden attitudes of resistance, denying painful realities, and discovering the truth. The inability to accept our vulnerability and limitations blocks the potential for growth from our brokenness.

#### **IV. THE SYNODALITY DREAMED BY GOD FOR THE CHURCH AND CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM**

The General Governments of the UISG and the USG - in their discernment on the Synodality dreamed by God for the Church and Consecrated Life of the third millennium (Pope Francis) - have offered important contributions to a theology and spirituality of synodality. Some of the responses speak directly of the synodality dreamed by God, others of the synodality dreamed by our Institutes, with the conviction that God's dream can be detected in our dreams and in the seeds detected.

##### **1. Biblical basis for the synodality dreamed of by God.**

The responses of the General Governments to the question of the synodality that God desires for the Church and consecrated life in the third millennium point to several texts of Sacred Scripture that support it:

- the experience of the Exodus, as liberation from Egypt and the way to the promised land,
- the request of Jesus that all may be one (Jn 17:21-23),
- the example of the Master who went about doing good and healing all (Acts 10:37-38),
- the principal command of the Covenant to love with all your heart, soul and strength (Mk 12:30),
- the proclamation of the Beatitudes (Mt 5,3-12),
- Jesus' question about who his family is (Lk 11,27-28),
- the desire of the Good Shepherd that all be gathered into one flock (Jn 10,16),
- or God's plan for a Church with a diversity of charisms and ministries, but forming one Body, the Body of Christ, always animated by the Holy Spirit (chapters 12 and 13 of 1 Corinthians).
- Jesus' dream of synodality is expressed in his proclamation of the Beatitudes when he longs for a land of all and for all, in justice, dignity, respect, peace and love and in his teaching of our responsibility for this to happen (Mt 5:1-12; Lk 6:17-26).

##### **2. Synodality, God's dream for the Church today**

- Now is the time of God's dream for the Church. Relationships are the key. Now is the time to build bridges. God's dream is a global and synodal Church that lives unity in

diversity. God is preparing something new, and we must collaborate.

- We are called to move forward together as disciples of the way, who offer a radical witness and have a heart without exclusion.
- We are a synodal church when everyone in the church - without distinction - has a voice and is heard; when we work together to make the world one family in our common home; when we are a simple, fraternal/brotherly, pilgrim, open church, attentive to the signs of the times, welcoming diversity and defending the dignity and equality of all; when the different churches listen to each other and walk together on the pilgrimage of life.

### **3. Sinodality: God's dream for Consecrated Life today**

God's dream of synodality in consecrated life emerges when:

- We all walk together in the same direction and with the same purpose, without disregarding the rich variety of our charisms.
- We believe that our institutes continue to exist because that is the will of God, who wishes to act in humanity and in the Church through our charisms and ministries.
- We are like the Good Samaritan, who does not abandon the weak and needy he encounters on life's journey and strives for an inclusive (intergenerational, interreligious, intercultural, human-diverse) society.

### **4. We believe that our dream of the Church is also God's dream.**

- Consecrated life hopes that the Second Vatican Council will continue to transform the whole Church from the perspective of communion and participation and that the magisterium of Pope Francis of a Church poor and for the poor will become more and more a reality.
- We dream of a Church going out, taking new paths of communion with the world: living from below, inclusive, bold, compassionate, open to participation, a table for all; a missionary Church that reaches out to the ends of the earth and to the geographical and existential peripheries.
- We dream of a church of equal participation: where all the baptised feel that we are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ; where we are in solidarity and merciful towards one another.
- We dream of a Church that is more open to dialogue, to participation: especially of women (including in the ministry of the diaconate), and in which all the laity - increasingly responsible - occupy their rightful place. And we also dream of a clergy who are humble, poor and who recognise themselves - as the Gospel says - as unprofitable servants (Lk 17:10).
- We dream of a Church of collaborative and communal discernment: where the most important issues are resolved in consultation with the greatest number of people

involved and where those who are different, those who denounce and proclaim are listened to.

- We dream of a Church of participation and communion: sharing bread, welcoming immigrants, and native peoples, committed to the visible participation of women and the formation of all lay people, and involved in the defence of life; a Church in which we walk listening to the steps of others; and open to other cultures; a Church that engages in a journey of healing (eg. in relation to survivors of abuse).

## **5. We believe that our dream of consecrated life is also God's dream.**

- We feel called to live synodality, walking together, recognising the dignity of the other, listening to their stories, their ideas, their desires, thanking God for such gifts.
- Synodality leads us not to give importance to titles or positions, but to give more importance to direct and transparent relationships, based on the value of the person.
- The spirit of synodality unites us to the threefold cry of Jesus: at Lazarus, when relationships die; at Jerusalem, when division continues to threaten; in Gethsemane, when we experience abandonment and loneliness.
- Consecrated life dreams of being part of a more inclusive church: with the responsible participation of women, families - also LGBTQ.

## **6. Features of a synodal church - and of the consecrated life in it**

- The synodal Church is a Church going out, which always has its doors open not only to go out, but also to welcome the small and vulnerable, the most needy, everyone.
- It is an innovative church, networked with other social actors, striving for a more humane world in terms of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus.
- It is a Church in collaborative discernment because whoever does not connect with others will not find the true path.
- It is a Church without clericalism, where all together welcome the leaders that the Spirit raises up, especially among young people and women.
- The synodal Church looks at reality with the eyes of God and is constituted on the basis of the common vocation of all the faithful: to be children of God and brothers and sisters to one another: The Church of Jesus is the People of God and not the people of God's clerics (sic).
- The Church of a new paradigm, not pyramidal but circular and horizontal: participatory, witnessing, compassionate, inclusive, unified, transforming Church; listening Church, Church of the people.
- Churches in Africa and other parts of the world hope and dream for respectful leaders who, by the example of their lives, give true witness to the Gospel of Christ.
- Church in transformation through listening, tolerance, inter-religious collaboration,

inclusion and communion.

- Ecclesial synodality asks us all to live in sisterhood and brotherhood, renouncing self-referentiality. This dream of synodality requires a conversion to the Holy Spirit, a Church guided by the Spirit and walking with the Spirit.
- We are aware that there is still a long way to go to live and proclaim the joy of the Gospel, to achieve universal brotherhood and sisterhood lived in right relationship and responsive to the call of integral ecology.

## V. IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

The dreams of synodality have important and demanding consequences for consecrated life in our time, which the various general governments of the UISG and USG have highlighted:

### 1. The necessary rootedness in the Spirit

- The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church and of consecrated life: The Spirit shows us the risen Jesus as the Way and urges us to follow. Synodality requires a change of heart, which will be possible under the guidance and presence of the Spirit. Synodality thus becomes our path of formation and spirituality.

### 2. The call for a new kind of mutual relations

- The Covid-19 pandemic, which has isolated us so much, has at the same time been a stimulus to open up new spaces for communication, thanks to the new technologies at our disposal. A special model of intercommunication and synodality has thus emerged.
- We have detected - more strongly than before - the importance of meaningful conversations among ourselves. Many Institutes make a clear call for listening and dialogue between cultures and generations. We are increasingly aware of the need to train ourselves for this. Its impact on the way we exercise our ministries will be evident. Sharing has created spaces for naming wounds and expressing desires for healing and reconciliation at many levels.

### 3. Openness to collaboration

- Consecrated life - on all continents - expresses the desire for greater collaboration and partnership with all lay people, to include them in more roles within their charismatic Institutes and families. The aim is greater mutual appreciation and the possibility of enriching and learning from each other. This is something we still need to investigate and concretise. There are deeper and fuller ways of collaborating that we have not yet imagined, and we must work together to achieve this.
- Given the desire to collaborate in the projects of the Kingdom of God, synodality

teaches that it is not necessary to duplicate them, but to find forms of inter-congregational convergence. Working together offers more effective witness and responses to needs. At the same time, ways of ecclesial convergence - with diocesan clergy and bishops - are also necessary. We must go beyond our disappointments and remain in relationship with all members of the Church.

- The cry of religious women, unjustly treated, discriminated against, and even mistreated in the dioceses of some countries, is crying out to be heard and heeded.

#### **4. Formation for synodality**

- Synodality must shape initial and ongoing formation in consecrated life. Educating in synodality requires wisdom, openness, exercise and apprenticeship; virtues such as generosity, openness to others, participation, collaboration, humility and renunciation of self-reference are necessary. Synodality must be integrated into seminary formation in order to prevent the spread of patriarchy and clericalism.
- Synodality opens new horizons in the way we understand and shape today the evangelical counsels of obedience, celibacy and poverty, the configuration of our community life and spirituality, and the way we integrate our ministries - according to charism - within the one mission of the Church.

#### **5. Leadership and governance**

- Synodality in consecrated life affects discernment and decision-making. Although communal discernment has been practised in our Institutes, there is room for improvement. Membership in a body requires participation. Good leaders consult and are affected by mutual listening and sharing. Discernment takes time; it requires patience for all to participate in the process.
- A shared desire is the establishment - both in the life of the Church and in the consecrated life - of a circular (participative) and less hierarchical and pyramidal style of governance. It is also desired that our charismatic ministries - as consecrated life - find an adequate relocation within the Church -universal and local-.
- Synodality challenges ministries that are not located in areas of need but in comfort zones. The cry of the poor and vulnerable on all continents must be heard. There is also a cry from the existential peripheries that begs to be heard, recognised, and responded to in the light of the Gospel.
- Synodality tells us that, as religious, we are global citizens and our life and mission occur in a world community, which does not adhere to the North-South paradigm, to the cultural patterns of East and West... We are called to build bridges across the divides of cultures, nationalities and races, so that encounters occur, prejudices diminish, and reconciliation grows. The call to unity must embrace the complexities and diversities that are all gifts of God's bountiful creation.



## VI. CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CHURCH - PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

Dreams of synodality have important and demanding consequences for the Church. The various general governments of the UISG and the USG point to important aspects.

### 1. Fundamental convictions and criteria

- If, according to *Lumen Gentium*, there is a radical equality between all the baptised (LG 10-13; 40-41), we are all co-responsible, we are all invested with the same dignity within the priestly, royal, and prophetic people. This co-responsibility becomes viable in the synodal journey.
- The Church is called to dialogue with all: ecumenical dialogue between Christian denominations, inter-religious dialogue, dialogue with atheism and indifference. Dialogue with those on the socio-political or economic margins of society is a priority.
- There is an ethical imperative for the Church not to seek to be served but to serve. Small communities must respond to this imperative through new ways of sharing and serving.
- The Church must seek how to integrate the various human generations without having to renounce its own values.
- It is fitting for the Church to forgive, and we must do so to those who in many ways have offended and marginalised us. But it is also fitting for the Church - and for consecrated life within it - to ask forgiveness for our historical mistakes and all the evil we have done in society and in people.

### 2. Leadership and structures

- Shared and collaborative leadership must be the synodal model of leadership; and this implies an adult and proactive participation of all God's people in the ecclesial community, thus overcoming clericalism and authoritarianism. This requires collaborative decision-making processes rooted in spiritual discernment; decisions are not made by closed and partial groups.
- There is a need to change certain rules and structures of canon law (e.g. the system of appointment of bishops and parish priests, of the heads of the dicasteries of the See of Rome, compulsory celibacy for ordained ministers...) which no longer respond to the needs of society and of the people in the Church.
- The opinion of dioceses and parish communities, which often feel neglected, must be given a voice. To this end, models of circularity must be sought so that the structures of governance do not contradict the synodal proposal.
- It is also necessary to ensure that the communitarian, formative and spiritual structures of consecrated life do not prevent a greater contact with the reality of the suffering people they are called to serve.

### 3. Ecclesial style: sorority-fraternity and community

- The ecclesial and evangelical style requires a Church that wisely welcomes the different ways of living Christianity, the different charisms, and ways of confessing our faith. We must not see each other as competitors, but as companions and pilgrims in the seeking of God and Jesus Gospel. Cultures also contribute to the splendid diversity of living the Catholic faith.
- The Church must be characterised by a life of fraternity-sorority that is less rigid and bureaucratic and more shared, less individualistic and more communitarian... like the first Christian communities.
- The church must apologise for the harm caused to people who - for various reasons - have felt excluded from the church (e.g. because of their convictions, because of situations considered irregular).

### 4. Communication

- The Church needs to update its language and bring the value of its symbols up to date, because words create realities. Certain names, titles, ways of appearing that express greatness and power do not resonate in a synodal key...
- Synodality requires striving for adequate and better communication throughout the Church, and the need for a more rapid translation of its main texts to inspire all Christian communities.

### 5. Style and spirituality

- Synodality demands that the Church adopt a style of greater simplicity, closeness and transparency,
- In the face of the tendency of bishops and pastors to make decisions without listening to or consulting the laity, and to have the last word, synodality calls here for all voices to be heard, especially those that are rarely or never heard.
- Even in challenging circumstances, the synodal Church must reach out to those who remain closed, listen to their concerns and dreams and share with serenity, empathy and patience, like Jesus with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The Lord always gives the gift of the Spirit to those who ask for it.
- Synodality must oppose the abuse of power in all its forms - attitudes, gestures, actions, (including clothing used to create distance rather than closeness and service to the people: "It shall not be so among you" (Mk 19, 43-45).
- Synodality demands teaching and practising deep prayer: feeling and knowing ourselves to be part of the total Christ, witnessing and preaching Jesus with our life and words.

## 6. The space of the laity (women, brothers...)

- Women religious have often suffered from the effect and abuse of clericalism. This calls for a revision of the vocation of women within the Church: the possibility of the diaconate needs to be opened to them; and their participation in the life and leadership of the Church needs to be embraced from new perspectives.
- The allocation of women to secondary roles in the Church must end as soon as possible. Synodality demands in a special way a greater participation of women in academic spaces, in the formative processes of the people of God and of the seminaries, shaping the processes of spirituality.
- It is necessary to value the vocation of the religious or consecrated brother or sister within the Church and the local churches. Within any institute (whether lay or so-called clerical) they should be able to exercise leadership positions without restrictions, to avoid intra-congregational clericalism.

## 7. Formation

- The key to synodality tells us that the formation of seminarians or candidates for ordained ministry is often inadequate: they are not prepared to be ordained ministers with the capacity for synodality, to foster the free and adult participation of the whole people of God. We must offer a formation that avoids the pursuit of privilege, bureaucracy and economic power.
- Synodality requires a special formation to understand the reality of all the members of the Church: knowledge of cultural, religious, political and social realities, in order to be able to communicate with all.
- What the *Ratio Formationis* already calls for, namely the participation of women and lay people in the various formation processes, must become a reality.
- Priests and seminarians need to be trained in the particularity of consecrated life in all its forms.
- There are outstanding questions in the formation of God's people, such as how to reconsider in this Church of the third millennium relationships and areas of sexuality that have not yet found their healthy and liberating place in our norms and pastoral care.

## CONCLUSION

The desire to strengthen the synodal model - to walk together as the people of God and as consecrated persons - appears in all the conversations summarised here. From this synthesis each Institute and community will be able to continue its reflection and its commitment and efforts in favour of synodality. This movement of the Spirit calls for greater communication and collaboration among all members of the UISG and the USG and its institutes. This will further connect us on the synodal journey to all God's people and to our Common Home. Alleluia!

Respectfully submitted,

Members of the UISG-USG Synod Commission:

Maria Cimperman, RSCJ

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

Gemma Simmonds, CJ

Orlando Torres, SJ

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