



SECRETARIA GENERALIS SYNODI

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (F.A.Q.)

- What is the *Instrumentum laboris*?
- The *Instrumentum laboris* originated from reports that the General Secretariat of the Synod received. Who sent these reports?
- Who wrote the *Instrumentum laboris*?
- How is the *Instrumentum laboris* structured?
- This *Instrumentum laboris* appears, in its structure, somewhat different from the previous one which contained many sheets with many questions, why was this structure chosen?
- The *Instrumentum Laboris* is for the members of the XVI Assembly, but how can local synodal groups and, in general, the faithful who will not participate in the October Assembly use it? How can they contribute to the work in October?
- The *Instrumentum Laboris* mentions a theological subsidy. What is it about?
- What can we expect from the conclusion of the Synod?
- Where can I find the IL?

What is the *Instrumentum laboris*?

As its Latin wording implies, the *Instrumentum Laboris* (IL) is first and foremost a **working tool** for the members of the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. This also justifies its language and the use of theological notions and categories in some of its parts. A theological subsidy, soon to be published, will facilitate its reading and allow for a deeper understanding of the theological notions and categories used.

It stems from the reflections that the Bishops' Conferences, the Oriental Catholic Churches and other international ecclesial realities, as well as the reports presented by the parish priests during the three-day work meeting of the [Parish Priests for the Synod](#), have carried out around the *Synthesis Report* of the First Session (4-29 October 2023) in the light of the indications given by the General Secretariat of the Synod through the document [Towards October 2024](#). The IL thus articulates the syntheses received in order to encourage the Assembly's reflection on the question at the heart of the October assembly: How to be a Synodal Church in Mission.

The IL is not a magisterial document, nor a catechism: it is meant to be a working tool of the XVI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Nor is it a text that offers prefabricated answers, nor a document that intends to address all the issues related to the need to be increasingly "synodal in mission". It is a document, bearing the fruit of listening, discernment and reflection on Synodality that has matured in the course of the synodal process. It is a **basic text**, which is both articulated and essential, conceived above all as a support to the method with which the Assembly will be called to work. It is an instrument meant to encourage **prayer, dialogue, discernment**, and the **maturing of a consensus** starting from some convergences which matured along the way in view of the delivery to the Holy Father of a **Final Document** of the XVI Assembly.

The *Instrumentum laboris* originated from reports that the General Secretariat of the Synod received. Who sent these reports?

In December 2023, the General Secretariat, through the document [Towards October 2024](#), invited the entire Christian community to reflect on the guiding question identified for the Second Session of the XVI Assembly *How to be a Synodal Church in Mission?* by proposing a series of different paths and activities starting from the [Synthesis Report](#), approved by the members of the XVI Ordinary Assembly at the end of the work of the First Session in October 2023. It was a question of keeping synodal dynamism alive by promoting at the local level a reflection on how to enhance the differentiated co-responsibility in mission on the part of all the faithful and, at the same time, to ask the Bishops' Conferences, the Eastern Catholic Churches and the groupings of Churches to reflect on how to articulate the dimension of the Church as a whole and its rooting at the local level, thus gathering the fruits of reflection around the Synthesis Report.

Despite the short time available, as of 30 June 2024, no less than 108 reports had been received from the Bishops' Conferences, 9 from the Oriental Catholic Churches, in addition to the contribution of the USG-UISG (respectively the International Union of Major Superiors and the International Union of Superiors General). In addition to the contribution of some dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the General Secretariat also received more than 200 comments from international entities, university faculties, associations of the faithful or individual communities and persons. Obviously, in drafting the *Instrumentum laboris*, the General Secretariat also took into consideration the reports submitted by the parish priests during the three-day working session of the International Meeting [Parish Priests for the Synod](#), and of some working groups: the five groups set up by the General Secretariat of the Synod for an in-depth theological study of five areas of reflection, in the wake of what was repeatedly requested by the Assembly (the face of the missionary synodal Church; the missionary synodal face of the groupings of Churches; the face of the universal Church; the synodal method; the "place" of the synodal Church in mission), and a specific commission of canon law experts set up to support the work of the theologians.

In this sense, the *Instrumentum laboris* can truly be considered a document of the Church that has been able to dialogue with various sensitivities and different pastoral spheres.

Who wrote the *Instrumentum laboris*?

Like any other document of the General Secretariat of the Synod related to the synodal process, the *Instrumentum laboris* (IL) is the fruit of a work that involved a large number of people from different parts of the world and with different competences. First of all, a [group of theologians](#) (men and women, bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, and lay people) from different continents, but also the members of the [XV Ordinary Council](#) of the General Secretariat of the Synod accompanied by some Consultors of the same Secretariat.

An initial version of the document was then also sent to about seventy people, representing the entire People of God (priests, consecrated men and women, lay people, representatives of ecclesial realities, theologians, pastoral workers and a significant number of pastors) from all over the world, of various ecclesial sensitivities and from different theological 'schools'. This wide-ranging consultation was done to remain consistent with the principle of circularity (what comes from the grassroots, goes back to the grassroots) that animated the entire synodal process. This verification of the material prepared

in the light of the reports received was also an exercise, on the part of the General Secretariat, of that accountability which characterises the synodal Church.

Finally, after due modifications, the IL returned to the Ordinary Council which, after a series of amendments, approved it and transmitted it to the Holy Father for final approval.

How is the *Instrumentum laboris* structured?

The *Instrumentum laboris* consists of five sections. After the **Introduction**, the IL opens with a section dedicated to the **Foundations** of the understanding of synodality, which re-proposes the awareness matured along the way and sanctioned by the First Session. **Three closely interwoven Parts** follow, illuminating the missionary synodal life of the Church from different perspectives: (I) **the perspective of Relationships** - with the Lord, between brothers and sisters and between Churches - which sustain the vitality of the Church far more radically than its structures; (II) **the perspective of Paths** which support and nourish in concreteness the dynamism of relationships; (III) **the perspective of Places** which, against the temptation of an abstract universalism, speak of the concreteness of the contexts in which relationships are embodied, with their variety, plurality and interconnection, and with their rootedness in the wellspring of the profession of faith. Each of these Sections will be the subject of prayer, exchange and discernment in one of the modules that will mark the work of the Second Session.

A summary of the IL is available at www.synod.va

This *Instrumentum laboris* appears, in its structure, somewhat different from the previous one which contained many sheets with many questions, why was this structure chosen?

The Assembly is an evolving reality and the *Instrumentum laboris* is at the service of the Assembly and not vice versa! If in the First Session it was necessary to bring out convergences in the face of the many questions that emerged from the broad consultation of the People of God at the local, national and continental levels, it is now necessary that from these convergences a consensus can be reached. While in the First Session the members were asked to choose the thematic area in which they wished to make their contribution, in the Second Session, all the members will address the same text and discuss the same proposals.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* is for the members of the XVI Assembly, but how can local synodal groups and, in general, the faithful who will not participate in the October Assembly use it? How can they contribute to the work in October?

The *Instrumentum laboris* is mainly addressed to the members of the Second Session of the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. However, it is also a valuable tool for individual groups at the diocesan and national level who wish to continue their journey of reflection and discernment on how we walk together as a Church; and to carry out ecclesial initiatives.

For example, the IL can be a special occasion for a meeting - even a virtual one - among members of the Assembly and, at least, the national team in the phase of preparation for the October meeting, also through the synodal method of Conversation in the Spirit. In this way, the representative function of the individual members of the Assembly can be made tangible.

In any case, it is important that those who are interested in the synodal conversion of the Church with a view to mission, continue their commitment so that the ecclesial dynamism initiated with the

consultation of the People of God in 2021, does not wane, and that the exercise of co-responsibility in the mission of the Church continues to develop at the local level, as is already the case. Moreover, the IL will certainly help to understand how important it is for the faithful to accompany the work of the Assembly with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit - the true protagonist of the work in October - to support the great task entrusted to the members of the Assembly.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* mentions a theological subsidy. What is it about?

To accompany the relatively concise *Instrumentum laboris*, the General Secretariat of the Synod deemed it opportune to offer some guide lines to the theological and canonical insights (Insights) into the themes present in the IL. This theological subsidy is meant to help the members of the Assembly in the first place - without however excluding a wider circle of recipients - to recognise and understand the roots and implications of what is contained in the IL. "Deepening" from a theological point of view means: highlighting the reference of the individual topics to Sacred Scripture, to the Tradition of the Church, to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, to the recent Magisterium of the Bishop of Rome of the world episcopates. To 'deepen' *from the canonical point of view* means: to show how discernment with respect to individual topics can be translated into regulated and verified practices also through the normative instrument.

Rather than an organic text, the subsidy will be presented as a series of "glosses" to the IL. In fact, an updated version of the IL will contain some references to the Subsidy in the margins of the individual chapters.

What can we expect from the conclusion of the Synod?

The celebration of the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will not mean the conclusion of the synodal process. The Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* (EP), which governs the entire synodal process, reminds us that the synod is basically made up of three phases: consultation of the faithful, discernment by the pastors and the implementation phase. These three phases are not only to be understood in a chronological sense. In fact, with the celebration of the XVI Ordinary Assembly, according to EP, we would be in the phase of discernment of the pastors, which would be followed by the time of reception of the work of the Assembly by the local communities. However, the discernment of the pastors accompanied almost the entire synodal process (i.e. already in the consultation phase, which in fact already saw the discernment of the pastors at the local, national and continental level). Moreover, it can be attested that the 'implementation' phase already began immediately after the first meetings. The synodal 'fruits' are already numerous: many are the testimonies of those ecclesial realities that have changed their ecclesial actions in a synodal sense with a greater co-responsibility of all the baptised faithful. Therefore, the conclusion of the Second Session will not be the end of the synod process, but only an important moment in the pastors' discernment.

On the other hand, in previous synods, a final document was approved and delivered to the Holy Father. This document contained some indications that the Assembly wished to deliver to the Pope. The latter, usually after a few months, would deliver to the entire Church a document called a *Post-Synodal Exhortation* containing some provisions related to the topic addressed. It can be expected that this Assembly would also produce a final document to be handed over to the Holy Father for possible exhortation. It is that the purpose of the Synodal Assembly is to offer guidance to the Pope. The Synod is consultative and not deliberative.

Some topics have been entrusted to the 10 working groups set up by Pope Francis. How should this decision be interpreted? Is it a way of removing these themes from the Assembly's debate?

From the beginning, Pope Francis insisted that this Synod is not about this or that theme, but about synodality, about how to be a missionary Church on a journey. The October Assembly and all the theological questions and pastoral proposals for modifications on certain issues have this as their purpose. The Assembly must therefore be a time in which each participant, placing oneself within a journey that began in 2021 and bringing the "voice" of the people of God from which one comes, will invoke the help of the Holy Spirit and that of their brothers and sisters to discern God's will for His Church: it is not an opportunity to impose one's own vision of the Church.

At the same time, Pope Francis welcomed the convergence that the members of the Assembly had expressed during the First Session around a series of relevant issues concerning the life and mission of the Church in a synodal perspective on which the Assembly had reached a consistent consensus, almost always above 90%, by setting up 10 *ad hoc* working groups. These are major issues, some of which require to be dealt with at the level of the whole Church and in collaboration with the Dicastries of the Roman Curia. It is therefore not a matter of removing certain issues from the debate of the Assembly, which has already expressed a convergence as to their importance, but rather of providing useful elements from a theological and canonical point of view to offer to the ministry of Peter. These groups are therefore already to be considered a fruit of the synodal journey. These groups are involving experts and Bishops from different parts of the world, identified on the basis of their expertise and respecting the variety of geographical origins, disciplinary backgrounds, gender and ecclesial condition necessary for an authentically synodal approach. They are collecting and enhancing existing contributions on the topics assigned to them. The Groups should complete their work if possible by the end of June 2025.

Where can I find the IL?

The *Instrumentum laboris* can be found in various languages on the official website of the General Secretariat of the Synod (www.synod.va) where an *ad hoc* section has been created for the work of the Second Session of the XVI Assembly. In addition to the IL, this section also contains a FAQ, Infographics, and other documents useful not only for the preparation of the members of the assembly but also for any other person or group wishing to deepen their understanding of the Synodal Church.