Vatican Diary

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Vatican releases Synod Preparatory Document

It points out some concrete steps on listening without prejudice; speaking out with courage; dialoguing with the Church, with society, and with other Christians

By La Croix International staff | Vatican City

The General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops has released the Preparatory Document and "vademecum" – or handbook – to indicate the guiding principles that will direct the path of the Synod on Synodality.

The opening of the Synod will take place in Rome on October 9-10, and in the particular Churches on October 17. It will conclude in the Vatican in 2023 with the assembly of bishops from around the world.

The Preparatory Document, released September 7, is intended to facilitate the first phase of listening and consultation of the People of God in the particular Churches, which will take place from October 2021 to April 2022.

"It constitutes a sort of construction site or pilot experience that makes it possible to immediately begin reaping the fruits of the dynamic that progressive synodal conversion introduces into the Christian community," the document reads.

The text begins with a question:

"How does this 'journeying together,' which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?"

In response, it points out some concrete steps.

First of all, it is necessary to live "a participative and inclusive ecclesial process that offers everyone—especially those who for various reasons find themselves on the margins—the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard"; and then to recognize and appreciate "the wealth and the variety of the gifts and charisms that the Spirit liberally bestows… for the benefit of the whole human family."

It says it is necessary to examine "how responsibility and power are lived in the Church, as well as the structures by which they are managed, bringing to light and trying to convert prejudices and distorted practices that are not rooted in the Gospel."

The document invites us to look at how the Christian community can be a credible and reliable partner "in paths of social dialogue, healing, reconciliation, inclusion and participation, the reconstruction of democracy, the promotion of fraternity and social friendship"

It asks how we can regenerate relationships among Christians, with representatives of other Christian confessions, and with other social groups, with the organizations of civil society, and with popular movements.

These concrete steps will take place "within an historical context marked by epochal changes in society," beginning with the "global tragedy" of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led pre-existing inequalities and injustices "to explode."

The document recognizes that the synodal process is being undertaken in which "the Church herself must face the lack of faith and the corruption even within herself," emphasizing that

"we cannot forget the suffering experienced by minors and vulnerable people 'due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power, and the abuse of conscience" committed by clergy.

It also calls for "new languages of faith" and "new paths" flourish, in order to found anew "the path of Christian and ecclesial life."

The document reiterates that all the baptized "are active participants in evangelization"; and so it is essential that on the synodal path, pastors "not be afraid to listen to the Flock entrusted to them."

In a synodal Church, it insists, quoting Pope Francis, that "the faithful, the bishops, and even the Bishop of Rome himself" – has something to learn, "all listening to each other, and all listening to the Spirit of truth."

For more about the 2023 Synod on Synodality, visit the official website.