



Rome, 29 November 2021

*“It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects
of the Church of the third millennium.”
(Pope Francis)¹*

Dear Superiors General,

On the occasion of the opening of the Synod, the Presidents of the two Unions of Superiors General addressed a letter to all of you, inviting you to actively participate in the synodal process.

In that letter they mentioned the creation of a Commission formed by two religious sisters and two religious brothers to prepare a synthesis of the contributions received and present it to the UISG-USG Executive Councils. Now, the members of this Commission would like to offer you some guidelines for your conversations on the theme of synodality, in order to facilitate your work and ours.

The fundamental question of the consultation is:

In a synodal Church, which announces the Gospel, everyone “walks together”: how is this “walking together” carried out today in your local Church/Congregation? What steps is the Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow in our “walking together”?

In fact, it is a question of discerning together *what is - from the perspective of consecrated life - the way of synodality that God expects from the Church in this historical moment.*

A possible method

Although the *traditional method* of synodal consultations has been based on questionnaires and responses, we believe that the

¹ Pope Francis, *Ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 15 October 2015, AAS 107 (2015), 1139.

‘conversational’ method is more appropriate and in line with the synodal theme. *Well-conducted conversations are a good practice of synodality.*

We suggest the following topics for your conversations:

- ✓ *Sharing short stories about the experience of synodality* (in communities, institutions, pastoral meetings, other experiences outside of the religious context ...)
- ✓ *Seeds of synodality* that we detect among us, in the Church, in today’s world, which should bear fruit.
- ✓ The *weeds* that, when mixed with the good wheat, threaten synodality and render it unworkable or inoperable: these are the unhealthy situations in which synodality has been denied or misused.
- ✓ *Discern what is God’s dream for synodality in the global, particular and local Church.*
- ✓ *Finally, to identify the consequences for our consecrated life today as well as for the Church in general and, possibly, a proposal for action, so that God’s dream can become a reality.*

We believe that, particularly when dealing with points 4 and 5, the method of *spiritual conversation* could be used, as described in the *Vademecum* prepared by the Secretariat of the Synod, and which we enclose as an appendix.

Since the first phase of the Synod has been extended until August 15, the Secretariats of the UISG and USG have also extended the deadline for the submission of contributions until **March 27, 2022.**

The fruit of your work can be submitted through an online form (<https://forms.gle/4JBu1rQ52sJ6rx3V7>), whose questions can also be found in Appendix 1.

We are at your disposal, inviting you to place your Institutes “in a Synodal mode” and to take some time with your leadership teams to reflect about synodality and make proposals, from the perspective of consecrated life, which will help the synodal discernment.

In communion,

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3 annexes follow



APPENDIX 1

Questions from the online form

<https://forms.gle/4JBu1rQ52sJ6rx3V7>

1. What stands out from the small stories of synodality that you have shared?
2. What are the main seeds of synodality that you detect in yourselves, in the Church, in today's world?
3. What are the main "weeds" that, mixed with the good wheat, threaten synodality and render it unworkable or inoperative?
4. What is the fruit of your discernment on God's dream of synodality in the global, particular and local Church?
5. What are the consequences for our consecrated life today so that God's dream can become a reality? Any concrete proposals for action?
6. Are there changes that the Church must bring about in order to become more synodal?
7. We invite you to upload an image that expresses the experience of the process of synodality as lived by the group.

APPENDIX 2

What do we understand by SYNODALITY

It is important to focus the theme of the conversations clearly, avoiding *different understandings of the concept* of ‘synodality’. ‘Synodality’ is a call to all the members of the People of God; it does not exclude anyone. It implies that God reveals his mysteries to the least and simple. It also takes into account the evolution of human consciousness or “the new consciousness” emerging in our time, thanks to the Spirit who acts in the signs of the times. Synodality can be understood in three dimensions:

- *Human synodality*: The desire to “walk together” is characteristic of *every people*. This is how cultures, languages, traditions emerge. We also dream of a “journey together” of *all peoples* in “our common home”; “another world is possible”, “Fratelli Tutti”. Today, in the third millennium, we are especially sensitive to “walking together” with Mother Earth and with all forms of life that dwell within her (“Laudato Sì”). This is the *fundamental synodality*.
- *‘Christian’ synodality*: the Church following Jesus, the Way; the Church with different forms of life and vocations, graced with different ‘charisms’ and ‘ministries’. The Church feels called to count on everyone, because we all share the same Love (1 Cor 13), the same Spirit (1 Cor 12), and because we all form one single Body (1 Cor 12:9). This is the *ecclesial, ecumenical and interreligious synodality*.
- *Synodality in consecrated life*: There is also a *synodality in consecrated life*, which is evident in general chapters, assemblies, community meetings, and has a special visibility in intercongregational projects. This is the *synodality of consecrated life*.

APPENDIX 3

The Spiritual Conversation

A suitable method for group dialogue which resonates with the principles of synodality can be used. For instance, the Spiritual Conversation method promotes active participation, attentive listening, reflective speaking, and spiritual discernment.

Participants form small groups of about 6-7 persons from diverse backgrounds. This method takes about at least an hour and comprises three rounds.

1. In the first round, everyone takes an equal turn to share the fruit of his or her prayer, in relation to the reflection questions circulated beforehand. There is no discussion in this round and all participants simply listen deeply to each person and attend to how the Holy Spirit is moving within oneself, within the person speaking, and in the group as a whole. This is followed by a time of silence to note one's interior movements.
2. In the second round, participants share what struck them most in the first round and what moved them during the time of silence. Some dialogue can also occur, and the same spiritual attentiveness is maintained. Once again this is followed by a time of silence.
3. Finally, in the third-round participants reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation and what moved them most deeply. New insights and even unresolved questions are also noted. Spontaneous prayers of gratitude can conclude the conversation. Usually each small group will have a facilitator and note-taker. (A detailed description of this process is provided on the Synod website.)

(Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality, Appendix B, point 8)

