

## FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE 2024 SYNOD OF BISHOPS. AN IMPORTANT AND PRACTICAL SUMMONS TO REFORM THE PRESENT SYNODAL CHURCH

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**Abstract.** Institution of the Synod of Bishops was established by Pope Paul VI in motu proprio *Apostolica sollicitudo* dated September 15, 1965, in which, among other things, it can be read that it is established and directly subordinated to the Bishop of Rome. Paul VI also indicated that the general aim of the Synod of Bishops is intentional expression by the episcopate of its participation in the obligations of the Bishop of Rome, as well as joint responsibility for the entire Church. Pope Francis himself in his teaching and undertaken decisions very clearly desired to boost the dynamics of the meaning and role of the Synod of Bishops in the present Church even more. This was very explicitly expressed in his practical statements of the *Episcopalis communio* (2018) apostolic constitution. In his final speech on October 26, 2024, delivered during the second session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops Pope Francis communicated that he did not intend to issue an apostolic exhortation due to the completed works of the Synod of Bishops; he indicated that the final document of that Synod of Bishops is sufficient. He ordered to publish it in order to be itself, together with the guides included in it, a handbook for the mission of the present Church that is carried out on various continents and in different contexts. Presentation and analysis of this document that was prepared synodally and that is important for the present Church will be preceded with a short reflection on the role and meaning of the Synod of Bishops in the present Church. That reflection seems to be necessary as in 2025 there is exactly sixty years since that central institution of the Church has been established by Pope Paul VI in 1965, i.e. still during the session of the Second Vatican Council.

**Keywords:** accompanying note; final document; Pope Francis; Synod of Bishops; Synodal Church.

### INTRODUCTION

Synod of Bishops that was held in Rome between October 2 and 27 of 2024, which was the second session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, published its final document titled *Per una Chiesa sinodale*:

*comunione, partecipazione, missione*. The document official text is in Italian. However, successively there appeared translations into other present languages, including the Polish language.

Presentation and analysis of this document that was prepared synodally and that is important for the present Church will be preceded with a short reflection on the role and meaning of the Synod of Bishops in the present Church. That reflection seems to be necessary as in 2025 there is exactly sixty years since that central institution of the Church has been established by Pope Paul VI in 1965, i.e. still during the session of the Second Vatican Council. Taking the perspective of the undertaken main subject matter under consideration this short initial reflection will present the role and meaning of the Synod of Bishops in the post-conciliar Church. It must be stressed here that Pope Francis himself in his teaching and undertaken decisions very clearly desired to boost the dynamics of the meaning and role of the Synod of Bishops in the present Church even more. This was very explicitly expressed in his practical statements of the *Episcopalis communio* (2018)<sup>1</sup> apostolic constitution. That very determined will of Pope Francis to reform the institution of the Synod of Bishops was quickly stressed by his successor Pope Leo XIV in his teaching when shortly addressing the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops on June 26, 2025, directly indicating that Pope Francis gave a new impulse to the Synod of Bishops.<sup>2</sup>

Synthetic analysis of the final document of the latest Synod of Bishops should also be perceived from the perspective of the “church assembly” (*Assemblea ecclesiale in Vaticano*) foreseen to be held in October 2028, the aim of which, most probably, will be analysis of a concrete implementation of the final document of the Synod of Bishops of 2024 in particular churches.

## 1. SYNOD OF BISHOPS – AN INSTITUTION IN CONSTANS DEVELOPMENT

Institution of the Synod of Bishops was established by Pope Paul VI in motu proprio *Apostolica sollicitudo* dated September 15, 1965, in which, among other things, it can be read that it is established and directly subordinated to the Bishop of Rome: *Nostra apostolica auctoritate erigimus ac constituimus hac in alma Urbe stabile Episcoporum consilium pro Ecclesia universa, Nostrae potestati directe atque immediate subiectum, quod nomine proprio Synodum Episcoporum appellamus*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hereinafter: EC.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/it/speeches/2025/june/documents/20250626-consiglio-sinodo.html> [accessed: 11.07.2025].

<sup>3</sup> Paulus PP. VI, Litterae apostolicae motu proprio datae *Apostolica sollicitudo* quibus Synodus Episcoporum pro universa Ecclesia constituitur (15.09.1965), AAS 57 (1965), pp. 775-80.

Here, it is worth to indicate right away that Pope Paul VI was aware that the new institution of the Church founded by him will improve itself in time, the substantive sign of which are successive new legal norms that regulate the institution of the Synod of Bishops. Also, one cannot leave aside the fact that establishing the Synod of Bishops while the Second Vatican Council was still in progress, and what follows that participants of this undoubtedly decisive ecclesiastical event got familiar with it during the Second Vatican Council, was a very wise decision also from the practical point of view, as fathers of the Council returning to their Churches were not only able to inform about the fact (one cannot forget that sixty years ago communication and transfer of information created a completely different dimension than it is nowadays; it means that transfer of information at that time required relatively significant amount of time and engagement of various means), but they also were aware that this new central institution of the Church will soon be operational.

Defining the new Church institution as synod (*synodus*) must be perceived as reference to other, traditional and proven, and at the same time well known from their long and reach history in the Church, various and meaningful institutions, such as, e.g. diocesan synod, provincial synod or council; Moreover, V. Ferrara indicated that behind choosing the name of synod there stands an intention of distinguishing between the new central institution and other Church institutions, while at the same time stressing legal autonomy of the Synod of Bishops from other central institutions of the Church [Ferrara 1969, 502].

Paul VI also indicated that the general aim of the Synod of Bishops is intentional expression by the episcopate of its participation in the obligations of the Bishop of Rome, as well as joint responsibility for the entire Church. Establishment of the Synod of Bishops shows that the Church has remained open to doctrinal and pastoral issues of the present world and at the same time is able to constantly adjust its structures to the requirements of time in which it conducts evangelization activities.

Canons on the Synod of Bishops were successively put in the structure of the post-conciliar Code of the Canon law promulgated by John Paul II in 1983 after canons on the Bishop of Rome and the College of Bishops, and before canons on the College of Cardinals, as this was the explicit will of Pope John Paul II.<sup>4</sup> We must suppose that it was based on an ecclesiologi-

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<sup>4</sup> See *Invertatur ordo capitulorum, ita ut hoc Caput II («De Synodo Episcoporum») veniat post Caput III («De Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae Cardinalibus»), propter praestantiam munerum quae Collegio Cardinalium committuntur, praesertim ipsa electio Romani Pontificis (tres Patres). R. Animadversio non recipitur. Summus Pontifex de hac quaestione interpellatus est a Praeside Commissionis, in Audientia die 28-3-1981 habita, suumque responsum fuit ordinem systematicum servandum esse uti iacet, "Communicationes" 14, n. 1 (1981), p. 180.*

cal rationale and its goal above all was to highlight a close connection of the institution of the Synod of Bishops with the rule on collegiality of bishops [Górecki 2005, 174].

Generally, it must be indicated that canons on the Synod of Bishops consist of three pillars. In other words, they have three sources that were used by the legislator of the Church to introduce a picture of a code-based institution.<sup>5</sup> These are: the council ecclesiology in the *Lumen gentium* Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *motu proprio Apostolica sollicitudo* of Paul VI and the *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum* dated 1966, together with its consecutive amendments as well as experience gained from the previously held Synods of Bishops.

According to J. P. Schotte, the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops in the years from 1985 to 2004, there are seven code canons (Canons 342-348) that in a synthetic manner provide information about the nature and aim of the Synod of Bishops, that describe authority of the Bishop of Rome in relation to the institution, define types of synodal assemblies, specify selection criteria for its participants, define tasks for specific assemblies, and the subject of work for the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops [Schotte 1992, 289ff].

It must be indicated in this synthetic historic *iter* that for the last few years Pope Francis also undertook the task to reform the Synod of Bishops, in particular when it comes to its practical functioning and playing a more dynamic role in the life of the present Church, specifically in local communities. It must be assumed that Pope Francis wanted the Synod of Bishops to have a more specific influence on the life and functioning of particular Churches. This is due to his decision that the latest assemblies of the Synod of Bishops had two phases. This was true for e.g. the Synod of Bishops on family. This means that first of all there was held a Third Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (from 5 to 19 October, 2014) and successively the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (from 4 to 25 October, 2015) or for the latest meeting of the institution on synodality, where the first stage of the Synod of Bishops took place from 4 to 29 October, 2023 and the second from 2 to 27 October, 2024. This creates a new practice when it comes to executing the Synod of Bishops and it seems that this is an important *novum* from the practical point of view that should have effects in a better work of the Synod.

Furthermore, on 15 September, 2018, Pope Francis published his Apostolic Constitution on the Synod of Bishops titled *Episcopalis communio* as well as the

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<sup>5</sup> Pontificia Commissio Codici Iuris Canonici Authentice Interpretando, *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus fontium annotatione et indice analytico-alphabetico auctus*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1989, pp. 96-98.

General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops successively published Instructions on conducting the Synod of Bishops and functioning of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops that is an integral part of the new legal picture of the institution described in the aforementioned Apostolic Constitution (*Istruzione sulla celebrazione delle Assemblee Sinodali e sull'attività della Segreteria Generale del Sinodo dei Vescovi*).

## 2. *EPISCOPALIS COMMUNIO* APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION OF POPE FRANCIS AND ITS MEANING FOR THE PRESENT OF SYNOD OF BISHOPS

J.I. Arrieta notices that legislative initiative of Pope Francis that was synthetically fulfilled by the *Episcopalis communio* Apostolic Constitution has a significant influence on restructuring the Synod of Bishops, it means, that central institution of Church and describes it as one of the most important initiative undertaken by Pope Francis [Arrieta 2019, 275].

On the other hand, G. Ghirlanda indicates that by publishing the “*Episcopalis communio*” Apostolic Constitution Pope Francis expressed the necessity of renewing functioning of the Synod of Bishops by developing dialogue and cooperation among bishops and between the bishops and the Bishop of Rome [Ghirlanda 2019, 621]. Why? Because in the view of Pope Francis the Synod of Bishops remained an institution that was too static [ibid.]. Undoubtedly, we must agree with this point made by Pope Francis, as experience gained from recent years shows that reception of the Synod of Bishops in particular Churches was rather insignificant. Moreover, the reform of the Synod of Bishops wants to accommodate present ecclesiological requirements that ought to be characterized by mutual stepping forward, which was so greatly stressed by Pope Francis [ibid., 648].

A glance on the sixty-year-long history of the institution of the Synod of Bishops from the perspective of a great outline educates at the same time that it is on its way of evolutionary growth to meet the needs of the Church that at that time, especially in the post-conciliar period, was undergoing numerous changes as well as adjusting to various situations, in which it must have spread the Gospel all over the world. At present, the institution of the Synod of Bishops must be perceived not only as an important ecclesiastical event that would have a static character, it means that the synod had place, but the present Synod of Bishops must be seen as a dynamic process, in which the held synodal assembly plays a fundamental role, which is not its only role; nowadays, having the new vision of the institution, the Synod of Bishops must be perceived as an event that will be executed in a progressive manner in line with the passing time. This is especially true for the particular Churches [Visioli 2021, 181].

There is no doubt that the legislative thought of Pope Francis concerning the institution of the Synod of Bishops is not only a simple amendment; as, here, we face a new method of developing jointly made decisions that should be specifically executed in particular Churches. Therefore, that reform has set new tasks not only for the Bishop of Rome but also for the entire episcopate.

When discussing the practical aspect of the Synod of Bishops and specific execution of its decisions, we must indicate and call-in selected elements of the Pope Francis' reform that are as follows: "*Redaction and Approval of the Final Document*. The conclusions of the Assembly are brought together in a Final Document. For the redaction of the Final Document, a special Commission is set up, consisting of the Relator General, who chairs the Commission, the General Secretary, the Special Secretary and some members elected by the Synod Assembly taking due account of the various regions, as well as others appointed by the Roman Pontiff. The Final Document is submitted for the approval of the members, in accordance with particular law, with a view to obtaining moral unanimity insofar as this is possible" (EC 17 § 1-3).

"*Delivery of the Final Document to the Roman Pontiff*. Once the approval of the members has been obtained, the Final Document of the Assembly is presented to the Roman Pontiff, who decides on its publication. If it is expressly approved by the Roman Pontiff, the Final Document participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter. If the Roman Pontiff has granted deliberative power to the Synod Assembly, according to the norm of cano. 343 of the Code of Canon Law, the Final Document participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter once it has been ratified and promulgated by him. In this case, the Final Document is published with the signature of the Roman Pontiff together with that of the members (EC 18 § 1-2).

Formally ended assembly of the Synod of Bishops initiates an executive phase of the synodal assembly that, specifically, is expressed as follows: "*Reception and Implementation of the Conclusions of the Assembly*. The diocesan or eparchial Bishops see to the reception and implementation of the conclusions of the Synod Assembly, once they have been accepted by the Roman Pontiff, with the help of the participatory bodies provided for by law. The Synods of Bishops of the Patriarchal Churches and Major Archbishoprics, the Councils of Hierarchs and the Assemblies of Hierarchs of the Churches *sui iuris* and the Episcopal Conferences coordinate the implementation of the aforementioned conclusions in their territory, and to this end they may set up common initiatives (EC 19 § 1-2).

### 3. THE 2024 SYNOD OF BISHOPS FINAL DOCUMENT – FORMAL AND LEGAL ASPECT

In his final speech on October 26, 2024, delivered during the second session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops Pope Francis communicated that he did not intend to issue an apostolic exhortation due to the completed works of the Synod of Bishops; he indicated that the final document of that Synod of Bishops is sufficient. He ordered to publish it in order to be itself, together with the guides included in it, a handbook for the mission of the present Church that is carried out on various continents and in different contexts.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, he stated that he is aware that the document – a gift for all people of God – will not be read by everyone. For this reason, he made it public that these are especially the participants of the latest Synod of Bishops who are tasked to promote its content in individual local Churches, adding their own testimony about the synodal experience they had.<sup>7</sup>

There is no doubt that nowadays, also in the context of what was presented in the synthetic manner at the beginning of the presented deliverance, we must also look at the Synod of Bishops, especially on its ecclesiastical role and meaning, most of all in the context of its latest meeting held in October

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<sup>6</sup> “For this reason, I do not intend to publish an ‘Apostolic Exhortation’: what we have approved is enough. The Document already contains very substantial indications which can guide the mission of the Churches, on different continents, and in particular contexts: hence I am making it available to everyone straight away; hence I have asked for it to be published. In this way, I want to acknowledge the value of the synodal journey which has been made, and which, by means of this Document, I entrust to the holy faithful People of God. Time is needed in order to arrive at decisions and choices that involve the whole Church on some aspects of the life of the Church to which the Document draws attention, and on the themes entrusted to the ten ‘Study Groups’, which need to work freely in order to offer me proposals. I shall, therefore, continue to listen to the Bishops and the Churches entrusted to them. This is not the classic way of putting decisions off for ever. It is what corresponds to the synodal style with which the Petrine ministry, too, is to be exercised: listen, convene, discern, decide and evaluate. Pauses, silence and prayer are necessary at every one of these steps. It is a style we are learning together, a little at a time. The Holy Spirit calls us and supports us in this way of learning, which we need to see as a process of conversion. The General Secretariat of the Synod and all the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia will help me in this task,” <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2024/october/documents/20241026-sinodo-vescovi.html> [accessed: 22.07.2025].

<sup>7</sup> “The Document is a gift to the whole faithful People of God, in all its various forms. It is obvious that not everyone will set about reading it: it will be you, above all, together with many other people, who will make what it contains accessible in the local Churches. Without the witness of the experience acquired, the text would lose much of its value,” <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2024/october/documents/20241026-sinodo-vescovi.html> [accessed: 22.07.2025].



2024. This means that we must see it in the context of synodality that becomes a priority topic and a universal challenge in the present Church.

Specifically, when reading the final document from the latest Synod of Bishops approved on October 26, 2024, i.e. *Documento Finale della Seconda Sessione della XVI Assemblea Generale Ordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi (2-27 ottobre 2024): Per una Chiesa sinodale: comunione, partecipazione, missione*, we can get to a conclusion that through this document we can find current universal and very strong call for an intensive evangelisation and multidimensional reform of the present Church.

This, without any question, is “the work” that the present Church must complete on every level. Hence, this document must be defined as “priority” for the work and mission of the present Church, the more that it not only was developed jointly, but also jointly approved by participants of the Synod of Bishops, and Pope Francis added, so to say as a supplementation, that he will not publish any apostolic exhortation, stressing at the same time the great meaning and importance of that document.

The aforementioned decision made by Pope Francis and communicated very officially during the latest session of the Synod of Bishops in 2024 may astonish some people, however it seems to be logical and connected with the new image of the institution of the Synod of Bishops.

Since the execution phase of the Synod of Bishops is introduced as its important stage, it is a logical thing that such an execution must be undertaken promptly, without unnecessary waiting for a new papal post-conciliar document, as it had place in the past when the entire Church was awaiting a new post-conciliar apostolic exhortation.

Moreover, the mentioned decision of Pope Francis raises the status of the aforementioned synodal document in the sense that it remains a sole document of the Synod of Bishops ended in 2024 that was developed and approved by the commune. Any post-conciliar apostolic exhortation would only “overshadow” it and automatically destined it for oblivion, because then the Church itself as well as mass media would focus on the document issued by the pope.

Undoubtedly, the above mentioned synodal dynamics that is foremost connected with its proposals must be substantially executed in individual particular Churches and without any unnecessary delay. Thus, there appears a specific question that will be worth to ask after some period of time: how did the 2024 Synod of Bishops influenced functioning of individual particular Churches and other institutions of the Church, especially through its final documenta?



#### 4. THE 2024 SYNOD OF BISHOPS FINAL DOCUMENT – SUBJECT MATTER ASPECT

It is worth to cite some selected positions from the approved synodal document *Documento Finale della Seconda Sessione della XVI Assemblea Generale Ordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi (2-27 ottobre 2024): Per una Chiesa sinodale: comunione, partecipazione, missione*.

To start with the initial point of “Introduction” we can read that every new stage in life of the Church should be perceived as a return to the source, namely the experience of meeting of the Resurrected with His disciples that took place in the Cenacle on the Passover evening. That meeting, enriched by the presence of the Holy Spirit, was also an inspiration for the Synod of Bishops that was finished in 2024.<sup>8</sup>

Continuation is a very important issue, as the initiated synodal process does not end when the assembly of the Synod of Bishops is finished or closed, but it also includes its successive phase, namely the execution phase, that is based on introducing into life things that had been previously discussed and proposed. Hence, the final document proposes that all local Churches perform synodal conversion of various realities of the Church based on the synodal methodology. Specifically, we can read in the document: “The synodal process does not conclude with the end of the current Assembly of the Synod of Bishops but also includes the implementation phase. As members of the Assembly and as synodal missionaries within the communities from which we come, we feel it is our responsibility to promote this process. The local Churches are asked to continue their daily journey with a synodal methodology of consultation and discernment, identifying concrete ways and formation pathways to bring about a tangible synodal conversion in the various ecclesial contexts (parishes, Institutes of consecrated life and Societies of apostolic life, movements of the faithful, dioceses, Episcopal Conferences, groupings of Churches, etc.). Planning for an evaluation of the progress made in terms of synodality and the participation of all the Baptised in the life of the Church should also occur. [...] The Final Document expresses awareness that the call to mission is, at the same time, the call to the conversion of each local Church and of the whole Church, in line with the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (cf. EG 30) (FD 9, 11).

In the holy People of God, that is the Church, community of faithful (*communio Fidelium*) and at the same time community of Churches (*communio Ecclesiarum*) can be seen through the community of bishops (*communio Episcoporum*). That was preached by saint Cyprian who presented that doctrine

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<sup>8</sup> See [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26\\_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf) [accessed: 22.07.2025]. Final Document [hereinafter: FD].

during the last decades as his magisterium of the Second Vatican Council, specifically in the *Lumen gentium* dogmatic constitution on the Church (cf. FD 18). The referred document of the last Synod of Bishops also explains the concept of present synodality and its meaning as well as the way it is supposed to serve the harmonic unity of the Church (cf. FD 28, 32, 36, 37). Among other things, the document states as follows: "Synodality is not an end in itself. Rather, it serves the mission that Christ entrusted to the Church in the Spirit. To evangelise is "the essential mission of the Church. It is [...] the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity" (EN 14). By being close to all without distinction of persons, preaching and teaching, baptising, and celebrating the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, all the local Churches and the whole Church respond concretely to the Lord's command to proclaim the Gospel to all nations (cf. Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-16). By appreciating all charisms and ministries, synodality enables the People of God to proclaim and witness to the Gospel to women and men of every place and time, making itself a 'visible sacrament' (LG 9) of the fellowship and unity in Christ willed by God. Synodality and mission are intimately linked: mission illuminates synodality and synodality spurs to mission" (FD 32).

The document of the Synod of Bishops greatly accentuates richness of individual particular Churches that enrich the universal Church that was already very strongly taught by the Second Vatican Council. Specifically, the document of the Synod of Bishops states that: "In addition, the synodal process highlighted the spiritual heritage of the local Churches, in which and from which the Catholic Church exists and the need to combine their experiences. By virtue of catholicity, 'the individual parts bring their own gifts to the other parts and to the whole Church, in such a way that the whole and individual parts grow greater through the mutual communication of all and their united efforts towards fullness in unity' (LG 13). The ministry of the successor of Peter "safeguards legitimate differences while taking care that what is particular not only does no harm to unity but rather is conducive to it" (ibid., cf. AG 22) (FD 37).

From the formal point of view, it is also worth to draw our attention to relations existing between synodality and the organisms of participation that have been very clearly indicated based on the existing Latin and Eastern codes (cf. FD 103, 108).

Hence, in the present ecclesiastical reality the synodal form is very important. Above all, it is based on the understanding that "Formation in synodality and the Church's synodal style will make people aware that the gifts received in Baptism should be put to use for the good of all: they cannot be hidden or remain unused" (FD 141).

The mentioned final document of the latest Synod of Bishops *Documento Finale della Seconda Sessione della XVI Assemblea Generale Ordinaria del Sinodo*

*dei Vescovi (2-27 ottobre 2024): Per una Chiesa sinodale: comunione, partecipazione, missione* acquires special meaning due to the “Accompanying note” signed by Pope Francis on the Solemnity of Jesus Christ, King of Universe on November 24, 2024, which in its very title refers to the mentioned final document *Nota di accompagnamento del Documento finale della XVI Assemblea Generale Ordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi del Santo Padre Francesco, 25.11.2024.*

The above-mentioned note fully corresponds with formal decision of Pope Francis in the subject of the Synod of Bishops as well as direction of setting out new tasks and new church-recognized meaning of the institution.

We can read in it that: 1) the final document of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops collects fruits of the synodal path; it was approved by the synodal assembly in respect to all its points. Moreover, it was also approved by Pope Francis who signed it and ordered it to be published, thus remaining in unity with the entire assembly of the Synod of Bishops;<sup>9</sup> 2) the document must be perceived as an authentic guide post for the life of the Church and execution of its mission;<sup>10</sup> 3) the final document of that Synod of Bishops takes part in a regular magisterium of the Bishop of Rome and, as explicitly stated by Pope Francis, it must be accepted as such having in mind inter alia provisions of the apostolic constitution *Episcopalis communio* on the Synod of Bishops (see 18 § 1);<sup>11</sup> 4) apart

<sup>9</sup> “The Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops gathers the fruits of a journey marked by listening to the People of God and by the discernment of Pastors. The whole Church, allowing itself to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, was called to review its own experience and identify the steps to be taken to live communion, realise participation and promote the mission that Jesus Christ entrusted to the Church. The synodal journey began in the local Churches and then proceeded through the national and continental phases, leading to the celebration of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in the two sessions of October 2023 and October 2024. Now, the journey continues in the local Churches and their groupings, treasuring the Final Document that was voted on and approved by the Assembly in all its parts on 26 October. I, too, approved it and, signing it, ordered its publication, joining the ‘we’ of the Assembly, which, through the Final Document, addresses the holy faithful People of God,” [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26\\_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf) [accessed: 22.07.2025].

<sup>10</sup> “Acknowledging the value of the synodal journey undertaken, I now hand over to the whole Church all that is contained in the Final Document restoring to the Church what has matured over these years through listening and discernment and as an authoritative orientation for the Church’s life and mission,” [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26\\_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf) [accessed: 22.07.2025].

<sup>11</sup> “The Final Document is part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter (cf. EC 18 § 1; CCC 892), and as such, I ask that it be welcomed and received. It represents a form of exercise of the authentic teaching of the Bishop of Rome that has some novel features but which, in fact, corresponds to what I had the opportunity to point out on 17 October 2015, when I affirmed that synodality is the appropriate interpretative framework for understanding hierarchical ministry,” [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26\\_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf) [accessed: 22.07.2025].

from indicating the nature of the final document of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, the note of Pope Francis also explains that it is in the strict sense a normative document; nevertheless, individual Churches are called to follow it, whereas final conclusion of the Synod of Bishops do not end the synodal process;<sup>12</sup> 5) the final document contains guidelines that are to be executed in individual Churches; moreover, every bishop in his successive relations related to the *ad limina* visit is obliged to address the execution of the Final Document decisions by the particular Church entrusted to him; however, the executive phase of the latest Synod of Bishops was entrusted to both the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and the Roman Curia Dicasteries.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, it should be indicated in the summary that due to raising the status of the final document of the Synod of Bishops from 2024, we deal with a vital novelty concerning functioning of the Synod of Bishops

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<sup>12</sup> "In approving the Final Document on 26 October, I said that it 'is not strictly normative' and that 'its application will need various mediations'. This does not mean that it does not commit the Churches from now on to make choices consistent with what is stated in it. The local Churches and groupings of Churches are now called upon to implement, in their different contexts, the authoritative proposals contained in the Document through the processes of discernment and decision-making provided for by law and by the Document itself. In my Final Greeting, I also added that 'time is needed in order to arrive at decisions that involve the whole Church'. This is particularly true for the topics entrusted to the ten study groups, to which others may be added as necessary decisions are made. The conclusion of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops does not put an end to the synodal process," [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26\\_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf) [accessed: 22.07.2025].

<sup>13</sup> "The Final Document contains proposals that, in the light of its basic orientations, can already now be implemented in the local Churches and groupings of Churches, taking into account different contexts, what has already been done, and what remains to be done so that the style proper to the missionary synodal Church can be ever-better learned and developed. In many cases, it is a matter of effectively implementing what is already provided for in existing law, both Latin and Eastern. In other cases, it will be possible to proceed, through a synodal discernment and within the framework of the possibilities outlined in the Final Document, to the creative activation of new forms of ministeriality and missionary action, experimenting and testing or verifying these experiences. In the report envisaged for the *ad limina* visit, each bishop will take care to report what choices have been made in the local Church entrusted to him in relation to the indications in the Final Document, what difficulties have arisen, and what fruits have resulted. The task of accompanying the 'implementation phase' of the synodal path, on the basis of the guidelines offered by the Final Document, is entrusted to the General Secretariat of the Synod together with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia (cf. EC 19-21)," [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26\\_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf) [accessed: 22.07.2025].

throughout the last sixty years by specifically referring to its very important stage of updating it in individual Churches. Up to this moment, in practice no attention was drawn to conclusions made by individual Synods of Bishops, instead of that foremost it was drawn to individual post-conciliar documents of the Bishops of Rome. Thus, great engagement of Pope Francis himself and successively the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in specific fulfilment of proposals of the Synod of Bishops by individual particular Churches must be emphasized. Furthermore, in the provided context it is necessary to refer to the letter of the Secretary General of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, card. Mario Grech, on the update of decisions of the latest Synod of Bishops, dated March 15, 2025 (Secretaria Generalis Synodi, *Letter on the Accompaniment Process of the Implementation Phase of the Synod*, Vatican, 15 March 2025 Prot. No. 250062<sup>14</sup>). Generally speaking, this letter addressed to the entire catholic episcopacy indicates the route that individual particular Churches should take and finish before the meeting that is scheduled to be in Rome in October 2028, and that must be perceived as summary of the updating stage of the Synod of Bishops from 2024, in particular recommendations provided for in the final document. Therefore, it is not a surprise that at the very beginning of his letter card. Mario Grech indicates that he writes the letter in the spirit of joint responsibility for proper updating of the final document of the Synod of Bishops held in 2024. Without any doubt, the starting point for this very important stage of functioning of the present Church is still the most thorough familiarity with the *Per una Chiesa sinodale: comunione, partecipazione, missione* document and undertaking specific initiatives in the perspective of its practical and specific updating.

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<sup>14</sup> See [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2025-03-15\\_letter\\_process2028/ENG\\_Letter\\_To\\_the\\_Bishops\\_-\\_implementation\\_phase\\_of\\_the\\_Synod.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2025-03-15_letter_process2028/ENG_Letter_To_the_Bishops_-_implementation_phase_of_the_Synod.pdf) [accessed: 22.07.2025].