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## Synod18 – First General Congregation: Speech of Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, General Secretary

At 16.30 this afternoon, in the presence of the Holy Father Francis, in the Vatican's Synod Hall, the First General Congregation of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops began, on the theme *Young people, the faith and vocational discernment* (3-28 October 2018).

The following is the speech His Eminence Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, general secretary of the Synod of Bishops, delivered at the inauguration of the Synod:

### Speech of Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri

Most Holy Father,  
Eminences, Beatitudes, Excellencies,  
Brothers and sisters,

With joy and emotion I speak at the beginning of the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, dedicated to "*Young people, the faith and vocational discernment*". On behalf of the Synod Fathers and the other participants, I would like to thank Your Holiness wishing to entrust the Synod with reflection on such an important and transversal theme, which concerns those who are in the heart of the Church and constitute the great hope for the present and also for the future of humanity. In fact, as Blessed Paul VI declared on the occasion of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, the Church "has been working to rejuvenate her image in order to respond the better to the design of her Founder, the great Living One, the Christ who is eternally young. At the term of this imposing re-examination of life, she now turns to you. It is for you, youth, especially for you that the Church now comes through her council to enkindle your light, the light which illuminates the future, your future" [1]. These words still retain their full validity as evidenced by the fact that Your Holiness recalled them in his inaugural speech of the pre-Synodal meeting held in March this year. He then said: "The Second Vatican Council's splendid Message to Youth comes to mind. Today too it is a stimulus to combat all selfishness and to courageously build a better world. It is an invitation to seek new paths and to journey along them boldly and trustfully, keeping our gaze fixed on Jesus and opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit, to rejuvenate the very

countenance of the Church. Because it is in Jesus and in the Spirit that the Church finds the strength to continuously renew herself, carrying out a living review of her way of being, asking forgiveness for her frailties and inadequacies, sparing no effort in placing herself at the service of all, with the sole intention of being faithful to the mission that the Lord has entrusted to her: living and announcing the Gospel” [2]. Therefore, this Synodal Assembly, which today enters its celebratory phase, is a real challenge for the whole People of God, pastors and flocks, and for all the young people of the world, in view of the construction of the long-dreamed-of civilization of love. It is opportune to remember what the Holy Father affirmed from the beginning of the Synod journey “the Church wants to listen to the voice, sensitivities, the faith and also some of the doubts and criticism of the young” [3] So, not only do we have to listen to young people first of all, but also – and for this we are gathered here! – respond with a pastor’s heart to their challenges through appropriate proposals and good advice to the Holy Father.

I would like to extend a respectful greeting to the Members and to the other participants in this 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, who have come from all the particular Churches to address this issue of paramount importance for the future of the Church and society. As you well know, this is the third Synodal Assembly convened by Pope Francis. In fact, the first was the Third Extraordinary General Assembly, and the second was the 14th Ordinary General Assembly, both on the family.

These two Assemblies were followed by the publication of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, which widely availed itself of the results of the Synodal works, projecting them at the same time towards further horizons. Indeed, the final documents of the two synodal Assemblies constituted, the fundamental basis of the pontifical document: the *Relatio Synodi* 2014 is mentioned 52 times, while the *Relatio Finalis* 2015 is cited 84 times, for a total of 136 citations. In this way, the Holy Father has shown that he attaches particular importance to collegial and synodal work, welcoming and integrating it.

The *Amoris Laetitia* has undoubtedly constituted an obligatory point of reference for the renewal of the pastoral care of marriage and family, to which many Episcopal Conferences have been prepared, as well as many dioceses and parishes. The fulcrum of this renewal can be found in chapter IV, in which the Holy Father, applying the Hymn to the Charity of St. Paul to married life, presents the characteristics of a mature love, which finds its highest expression in Christ.

Di notevole importanza è anche il capitolo VII, in cui si parla dell’educazione dei figli. Esso offre degli spunti molto interessanti, che possono gettare luce anche su diverse tematiche che ci prepariamo ad affrontare in questa XV Assemblea Generale Ordinaria, che è appunto la terza del Pontificato di Papa Francesco, dedicata al tema *I giovani, la fede e il discernimento vocazionale*. È evidente che queste Assemblee sinodali sono collegate da un filo conduttore che è il rinnovamento della Chiesa e della società a partire dalle sue categorie più essenziali, ovvero la famiglia e i giovani.

Also of great importance is chapter VII, which speaks about the education of children. It offers some very interesting ideas, which can also shed light on various issues that we are preparing to face in this 15th Ordinary General Assembly, which is indeed the third of Pope Francis’ papacy, dedicated to the theme *Young people, the faith and vocational discernment*. It is evident that these Synodal assemblies are connected by a common thread that is the renewal of the Church and of society starting from its most essential categories, namely the family and the young.

#### **A - The Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio***

Before entering into the life of this Ordinary General Assembly, it is right to mention an event of great historical significance for the synodal institution and for the whole Church. I refer to the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* recently promulgated by the Supreme Pontiff.

Since the beginning of this pontificate, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, by the express wish of Pope Francis, has embarked on a long journey of revision of the institution and in particular of the Synod methodology. This revision process was crowned by the promulgation of the aforementioned Apostolic

Constitution. I thank the Holy Father for this important document of his papal magisterium, made public at the press conference held on 17 September 2018.

The text of the Apostolic Constitution is divided into two large sections: a doctrinal section, composed of 10 paragraphs, and a disciplinary section, composed of 27 articles. It can be considered that there are four keys to reading this document.

The first is the reference to the Second Vatican Council, the generative “womb” of the Synod of Bishops, whose reference to the last ecumenical assise is an opportunity to resume and explore on behalf of the Pope some crucial theological cornerstones of the Council, particularly in the ecclesiological field.

The second key to reading refers to the theme of the renewal of the Church. Pope Francis, looking at the Second Vatican Council, wants to inaugurate - as we read in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* – “a new chapter of evangelization“ (1), placing the Church “throughout the world ... permanently in a state of mission” (25).

The third key to understanding the document is to consider the Synod as an organism within the framework of a constitutively synodal Church, as proposed in the Holy Father’s address for the fiftieth anniversary of the Synod of Bishops.

The fourth and final interpretation is provided by the ecumenical dimension (cf. no.10), which takes its cue from the aforementioned address of the Holy Father, in which it was reiterated that “the commitment to build a synodal Church ... has significant ecumenical implications”.

The disciplinary section, is divided into five titles, for a total of 27 articles. The structure of this section highlights a fundamental novelty of the Constitution, which that foresees the preparatory phase and the implementation phase which are firmly incorporated in the synodal journey, transforming the Synod from a “regular event” to a “process that unfolds through time”.

In this process, the preparatory phase actually acquires its own particular role. The activities and initiatives can be multiple and varied. The Constitution provides, *inter alia*, for the possibility of convening a pre-Synodal Meeting (Article 8), based on the model of the one celebrated last March, as an instrument for extending direct listening to the People of God.

The implementation phase is also important. The synodal conclusions, received by the Pope, which he will be able to take into account for the Post-Synodal Exhortation, remain a necessary point of reference. The Dicastery of the Roman Curia competent on the theme will work in harmony with the Synod for implementation.

The celebrative phase undoubtedly remains the central and fundamental moment of the synodal journey. It should be noted that the Apostolic Constitution provides for the possibility of celebrating, according to judgement of the Roman Pontiff, the Synod Assemblies in several distinct periods.

Two other documents follow the Apostolic Constitution: the “Instruction on the celebration of the Synodal Assemblies and the activity of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops” and a specific Rule concerning the development of the Synodal works. The Instruction came into force on 1 October 2018, the date of publication. The Regulations, drawn up for this Ordinary General Assembly in its various language versions, are available to the Synod Fathers and to the other participants in this Synod. It replaces the *Vademecum*.

## **B – The 15th Ordinary General Assembly**

### **1. Participants in the Synodal Assembly**

According to the Synodal Practices, confirmed and updated by the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio*, the Ordinary General Assembly will be attended by the Heads of the *sui iuris* Eastern Catholic Churches, the Bishops elected by the Synods of the Bishops and the Councils of the Hierarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Bishops elected by the Episcopal Conferences, ten Religious elected by the Union of Superiors General, and the heads of the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia.[4] To these are added some Members appointed by the Holy Father.[5]

Thus, as a whole, 267 Synodal Fathers take part in this Assembly: 32 *ex officio* (15 Patriarchs, Major Archbishops and Metropolitans of the *sui iuris* metropolitan Churches of the Eastern Catholic Churches, 16 heads of the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the General Secretary and Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, 15 Members of the XIV Ordinary Council), 182 elected by the Episcopal Conferences [166], by the Eastern Churches [6] and by the Union of Superiors General [10] and 41 Members *ex nominatione pontificia*.

Among the members there are 51 Cardinals (including two Patriarchs and 3 Major Archbishops), 6 Patriarchs, 1 Major Archbishop, 45 Archbishops, 102 Residential Bishops, 37 Auxiliaries, 6 Apostolic Vicars and 1 Bishop Prelate), 10 Religious representing the Union of Superiors General and 10 non-honoured members of the episcopal order, both diocesan and religious.

Ours is a broad and composite Assembly, an admirable fresco of the catholicity of the Church, in which the sensibilities and voices of the different continents and cultural spheres are reflected and resound. In fact, this Synodal Assembly is a peculiar manifestation of the unity of the Catholic Church that acts *cum Petro and sub Petro*, the disciple chosen by the Master to “confirm” the brothers in the one faith (see *Lk 22, 32*).

I also take this opportunity to cordially greet the eight Fraternal Delegates, representatives of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and a special guest, whose presence revives in us the will to work together to achieve the full visible unity of the Church of Christ, in awareness that even on the theme so relevant to young people all Christians are called to find and follow a common path, so that their shared witness may be credible in the eyes of the world.

Thanks also to the 23 experts, appointed by virtue of their skills to contribute to the Synodal work as collaborators of the Special Secretaries, and to the 49 Auditors and Auditors, also coming from all over the world. Among them there are not only specialists and youth ministry workers, but above all the presence of 34 young people from different cultures and geographical areas that bring the voice of the institutions of local churches emerges.

Lastly, a special thanks to the assistants, the translators, the technical staff, as well as the consultants, the officials and the collaborators of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, who – thanks to the competent coordination of the under-secretary, His Excellency Msgr. Fabio Fabene – have worked diligently in the preparation of the Assembly and will be called, throughout its duration, to lend a steady and generous work.

## **2. The preparation of the Synod Assembly**

The present Synodal Assembly takes place at the end of a long journey, which began with the decision of the Holy Father, on 6 October 2016, to convene the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: *Young people, the faith and vocational discernment*. The purpose of this Synodal Assembly was well explained by the Pope himself with the following words: “*to accompany young people on their existential journey towards maturity so that, through a process of discernment, they can discover their project of life and realize it with joy, opening up to the encounter with God and with men and to participate actively in building up the Church and society*”.

Starting from this convocation the General Secretariat together with the 14th Ordinary Council and a group of experts began the process of preparation with the drafting of the Preparatory Document, a text that was discussed and approved during the second Meeting of the Ordinary Council in days 21-22 November 2016. This document was published on 13 January 2017 together with a Letter for young people from Pope Francis, in

which he invited all young people not to be afraid and to “listen to the Spirit Who [...] suggests bold choices”, not to linger when their “conscience [...] asks to follow the Master”, because the Church wishes to listen to their voice, their sensitivity, their faith; even their doubts and their criticisms. And he exhorted them: “*Make your cry heard, let it resound in the communities and let it reach the pastors*”.

And here we are, having come from the five continents to hear the voice of the young and to respond to them with a pastor’s heart! The first phase of listening to the voice of young people took place through wide-ranging consultation by means of the Questionnaire contained in the Preparatory Document, sent to the Episcopal Conferences, the Oriental Churches and others competent to receive it. To this first phase, three other important moments organized by the General Secretariat were added: an online questionnaire, the International Seminar on the Status of Youth, and the pre-Synodal Meeting with the participation of young people from all over the world.

#### *a) The online questionnaire*

This is an important space for listening to young people through the *website www.synod2018.va*, which was opened on 14 June 2017, with the aim of involving young people from all over the world in the Synod journey and of showing them that they are in some way protagonists. The site included an *ad-hoc* online questionnaire, different from that of the Preparatory Document, with questions more suited to their existential situation, their difficulties and their desires. It was welcomed favourably by young people. Many evaluated the initiative as “interesting”, “useful”, “good”, “brilliant” and “a wonderful opportunity” (these are the words they themselves used ...).

To interact with them even further, three profiles were opened on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram under the name *Synod2018*, so as to be able to enter directly into the world of young people. This digital initiative has been a winning experience that can be used in different ways – preserving confidentiality – even in upcoming Synodal works.

The website, which I mentioned above, remains open, while the online questionnaire was closed at the end of December 2017. In six months it received about 221,000 contacts. Overall, there were 100,500 young people who answered all the questions asked: 58,000 girls and 42,500 boys. Almost 51,000 participants, corresponding to 50.6% of completed questionnaires, were boys between the ages of 16 and 19, showing that younger ones proved more sensitive to the initiative. However, it is important to note that the country from which the largest number of responses to the questionnaire arrived is Uganda, with more than 16,000 complete answers.

#### *b) International seminar on the state of youth*

In September 2017 an international seminar on the state of youth was held, attended by about fifty experts and about twenty young people from all continents. The seminar not only had an international dimension, with contributions reflecting the youth situation in different geographical areas, but also assumed a multidisciplinary character, as different disciplinary sectors, which rarely have the opportunity to enter in contact, were involved in the reflection. The participation of young people was particularly fruitful. They contributed to the work of the seminar with creativity and originality.

The importance of listening to young people was clearly emphasized by Pope Francis in the homily of the Prayer Vigil in preparation for this year’s World Youth Day, celebrated in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major: “A Synod from which no young person should feel excluded! [...] The Synod is meant to be the Synod *for* and *of* all young people. Young people are its protagonists. [...] Every young person has something to say to others. He or she has something to say to adults, something to say to priests, sisters, bishops and even the Pope. All of us need to listen to you!”

The themes developed during the Seminar concerned young people and identity, young people and projects, young people and otherness, young people and technology, young people and transcendence. The proceedings of this seminar have been published by the General Secretariat and are available to all the Synod Fathers and

other participants in this Synodal Assembly.

### c) *The pre-Synodal Meeting*

From March 19 to 24, a pre-Synodal Meeting was held in Rome, attended by over 300 boys and girls, accompanied by experts, educators and trainers. About half of the young participants were chosen by the Synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Episcopal Conferences. Another part consisted of boys and girls coming from the Seminaries and from the Houses of formation to the religious life; from members of associations, movements and new ecclesial communities; from representatives of Catholic schools and universities. In addition, young people from the world of art (music, dance, literature, theatre) and professions (journalism, research, information technology), politics, economics, military service, sport, voluntary service, disability, trafficking in persons, etc. Finally, some young representatives of other Christian Confessions, of other religions and non-believers participated.

In addition to the young physically present here in Rome, as many as 15,000 young people were able to take part in the reunion, connected through six Facebook pages, one for each of the main languages. They were able to send their opinions in real time on the same issues that were discussed by their peers present in Rome.

This meeting resulted in a very rich text, which was approved by the young participants on Saturday 24 March and delivered to the Holy Father the next day, on the occasion of the Eucharistic Celebration of Palm Sunday, the 33rd World Youth Day.

The young people, speaking in the first person, define themselves in the text as “the young Church”. Indeed, there is a Church of young people that does not stand “in front of” or “in opposition” to an adult Church, but “inside” the one Church like leaven in pasta. The document is a great help to understand that young people are a vital part of the Church and not simple interlocutors of an institution that is external to them.

Ultimately, young people demand an “extrovert” Church, engaged in dialogue with advancing modernity, especially with the world of new technologies, whose potentialities must be recognized and the correct use guided. They want to be protagonists of the ecclesial renewal taking place: together with pastors and adults they wish to contribute to building a more evangelical, courageous, more participatory and more missionary Church. The Final Report of the Pre-Synodal Meeting is a lively expression of the voice of young people, one of the most important sources of the consultation.

### d) *The Instrumentum laboris*

This document was prepared by the General Secretariat with its Ordinary Council and with the collaboration of qualified experts on the Synod theme. It was made public at the Press Conference on 19 June.

The Working Document or *Instrumentum laboris* brings together and summarizes all the material received from the consultation conducted by the General Secretariat. For this purpose, the General Secretariat availed itself of the collaboration of a group of experts for the reading and synthesis of the material resulting from the consultation, which arrived in six languages: English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and German.

Five sources have been used for the elaboration of the *Instrumentum laboris*. The first and fundamental source is provided by the answers to the final Questionnaire of the Preparatory Document. Overall, the responses of 6 Synods of the Bishops of the Eastern Churches arrived (40%) and of 78 Episcopal Conferences (68.4%). This number, which does not differ from the average of the consultations carried out for past Synods, corresponds roughly to two-thirds of the bodies called upon. To these answers are added those received from 6 Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, from the Union of Superiors General and also from 2 International Meetings of Episcopal Conferences.

The second, third and fourth sources are respectively represented by the results of the online questionnaire

proposed to young people; from the conclusions of the international seminar on the condition; and from the Pre-Synodal Meeting. To these sources it is also necessary to add a fifth source represented by the free contributions on the Preparatory Document by individuals and ecclesial bodies.

Starting from these sources, the General Secretariat with the help of qualified experts prepared a text that was discussed, modified and approved during the Fourth Meeting of the Ordinary Council, held from 7 to 8 May of the current year.

The text, quite broad and articulate – I would like to emphasize this – was drawn up following the “method of discernment”, that process that Pope Francis, in *Evangelii gaudium* 51 presents with three verbs: to *recognize*, to *discern*, and to *choose*.

The Eminent General Rapporteur will talk about it extensively in his Report.

### 3. The synodal method

This morning, with the solemn Eucharistic celebration presided over by the Holy Father in Saint Peter’s Square, the second stage of the Synod itinerary began: the 15th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. In the 25 days of the works beginning today, the *Instrumentum laboris* constitutes not only the starting point for reflection and debate, but also the basic text for the elaboration of the final Document, which at the end of the works will gather together the results attained by this Synodal Assembly.

What we are about to experience becomes the culmination of a long journey, which will take into account the valuable heritage of ideas and reflections that have emerged so far, with a view to deeper study, to achieve the objectives of this Synodal Assembly, including that of making the whole Church more aware of her task of accompanying each young person towards the joy of love, which Jesus offers to future generations; that of widening the traditional concept of vocation, to favour the comprehensive formulation, employed by the Preparatory Document, of “vocational youth pastoral”; and finally, that of the renewed youthful dynamism of the Church, which the Synod intends to bring about in connection with that “urgent ecclesial renewal” of which Pope Francis speaks programmatically in *Evangelii gaudium* (27).

In light of the above, I now wish to briefly explain the methods by which the work will take place, referring you for further details to the *Regulation* handed to all the Synod Fathers and to the other participants in the Assembly, which also includes the calendar of works. Prepared by the General Secretariat on the basis of the Instruction, this *Regulation* contains complete and detailed information on assembly activities and is therefore an indispensable tool in follow its work.

During the first General Congregation an overview of the *Instrumentum laboris* will be presented, together with the testimony of a young auditor. After this presentation, the interventions in the Hall of the Synodal Fathers will begin on the first part of the aforementioned Document, according to the order of presentation of the requests received through the form of the *petitio loquendi*. Each Synodal Father has the faculty of speaking only once during the Assembly, choosing the part and the paragraph number of the *Instrumentum laboris* he prefers. Furthermore, as in the past, some General Congregations foresee moments, lasting one hour each, dedicated to free interventions by the Fathers. Since the number of those having the right to speak is high (267 between Fathers, 49 Auditors and 8 Fraternal Delegates) and having given more space to the working groups, the *Circuli minores* (12 sessions), each person will be allowed to intervene in the Chamber for a maximum of four minutes, while in the *Circuli* there will be the possibility to do so extensively.

Synodal work will take place in three blocks of work, respecting the three parts of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the basic text. There will obviously be flexibility in the times and ways of proceeding on the basis of the interest and requests to intervene by the Synod fathers.

Once the interventions – distributed in the three work units, of which I have spoken – have come to an end, each

time we will pass to the working groups divided according to language, whose collective *modi* elaborated from the basic text (*Instrumentum laboris*) will then be delivered to the Secretariat General on the day and time established in the calendar. Subsequently, in a specially provided General Congregation, each working group, through its Speaker, will present a summary of its work in the Chamber.

The interventions of the Synodal Fathers, the collective modes of the *Circuli minores* and the Relations of the Circles will be collected and summarized in a text, which will constitute an integrative development of the *Instrumentum laboris*. In each “work unit” – corresponding to each of the three parts of the *Instrumentum laboris* – the examination of the *modi* will take place with the coordination of the General Rapporteur, with the collaboration of the two special secretaries and various experts.

As was the case in the last General Assemblies on the family, a Commission will be set up to draft the final document. It will be composed of the General Rapporteur (who presides), the General Secretary, the Special Secretaries and eight Synodal Fathers (five of them elected by the Assembly representing each Continent, and three appointed by the Holy Father). Also in the light of the experience gained in the recent past, this commission will have the task of coordinating and supervising the elaboration of the Synodal texts, in their various stages of advancement up to the Final Document of the Synod. In fact, at the end of each “work unit”, after receiving the *modi* presented by the *Circuli minores*, by the General Rapporteur and the special secretaries, this Commission will meet to proceed with the revision of the text of the relevant section of the *Final Document*.

Once the third “work unit” is over, the Commission will meet again to draw up the plan for the final document, the fruit of the collegial work which, starting from the *Instrumentum laboris*, will have benefited from the constructive contribution of the interventions in the Hall by the Synod Fathers, the collective *modi* drawn up by the *Circuli minores*, and the hearings with the auditors and the fraternal delegates.

Desidero ancora segnalare che, trattandosi di un'Assemblea Generale Ordinaria, l'*Istruzione* prevede che nel corso dei lavori si proceda all'elezione del nuovo Consiglio Ordinario della Segreteria Generale del Sinodo, il XV, che resterà in carica fino alla prossima Assemblea Generale Ordinaria. L'elezione avverrà nella Congregazione pomeridiana di martedì 26 ottobre secondo le normative e le modalità che saranno indicate alla bisogna.

Papa Francesco ci ha ricordato più volte che «il Sinodo non è un parlamento», ma «è uno spazio protetto affinché lo Spirito Santo possa operare». Ciò che avviene è «un confronto tra i Vescovi [...] dopo un lungo periodo di preparazione», che poi prosegue «in un altro lavoro, per il bene delle famiglie, della Chiesa e della società. È un processo, è il normale cammino sinodale»[7]. Queste parole ci offrono indicazioni preziose anche per ciò che concerne l'informazione sulle attività del Sinodo.

On the morning of Wednesday 24 October, this project will be presented in the Hall and given to the Synod Fathers for their evaluation. In the afternoon General Congregation it will be possible for the Fathers to further intervene on the project, both in oral form and by presenting their texts in writing to the General Secretariat. Bearing in mind that the project of the Final Document will result from the composition of three texts that have already received the collective *modi* of *Circuli minores* – whose reports have been read and published – further interventions will need to be advanced in conformity with the collegial work conducted so far.

Subsequently, the aforementioned Commission will oversee the preparation of the final text of the *Final Document*, which will be presented in the Hall on Saturday 27 October and submitted to the Synod Assembly for the afternoon. In accordance with the nature of the Synod, this *Document*, the result of Synodal work, will finally be delivered to the Supreme Pontiff, who is responsible for any decision on the matter[6].

I would like to point out that, since it is an Ordinary General Assembly, the *Instruction* requires that during the work of the Synod, the election of the new Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod be conducted. This council, the 15th, will remain in office until the next Ordinary General Assembly. The election will take place in the afternoon Congregation on Friday October 26, following the regulations and procedures that will be indicated as necessary.



Pope Francis has reminded us several times that “the Synod is not a parliament”, but rather “a protected space for the Holy Spirit to work”. What happens is “a comparison among bishops ... after lengthy preparations”, which then continues to “work further for the good of families, of the Church and of society”. It is a process, it is the normal Synodal path”[7]. These words offer us valuable indications also with regard to information on the activities of the Synod.

Therefore, the service of media coverage of the news related to the work of the assembly work will be provided by the Dicastery for Communication, chaired by the prefect, Dr. Paolo Ruffini, who in turn will be the president of the Synodal Commission for information. Furthermore, this Commission will be composed of its secretary, the Rev. Fr. Antonio Spadaro, the general secretary and the under secretary of the Synod of Bishops, the director of the Press Office, and five members elected from among the Synod Fathers.

The main source of information will be the daily briefings coordinated by the prefect of the Dicastery for Communication: these appointments will be attended by the Synod Fathers and other participants of the Synod indicated from time to time by the Commission for information. Moreover, through the social networks (*Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram*) of *Vatican News* and the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, information on the progress of the Synod will be disseminated and shared. It is also suggested that the hashtag # Synod2018 be used for all languages in order to obtain a global overview of Synod news.

The Synod Fathers will be free to give interviews outside the Synod Hall as well as generally communicate with the media at their discretion and responsibility, obviously in a personal capacity, maintaining the necessary confidentiality on the debates in the assembly and in the *Circuli minores*. In order to guarantee the confidentiality required for the Synod, during the work, both in the assembly and in the *Circuli minores*, the participants must not interact with the outside world via social networks. The reports presented by the *Circuli minores* will be published from time to time, while the various stages of preparation of the final document will remain confidential, considering that the text is susceptible to continuous development until the final draft.

## Conclusion

It remains only for me to wish to all fruitful synodal work in the service of the Church and of the young, invoking the protection of the Virgin Mary, a young woman who was courageous ever since her first “yes” at the annunciation, until the foot of the cross, Mother of the beloved Disciple who is still waiting today to be received as the Mother of mercy by so many young people in the world.

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[1] Paul VI, Message to young people, 8 December 1965.

[2] Francis, *Address at the opening of the pre-Synodal Meeting*, 19 March 2018.

[3] Francis, *Catechesis of the General Audience*, 4 October 2017.

[4] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio*, Art. 2; *Instruction* Art 2.

[5] Cf. *Instruction* Art 6.

[6] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio*, Art. 18; *Instruction* Art. 1 § 4° e 5°, Art. 35 § 5.

[7] Francis, *General Audience*, 10 December 2014.

