



## **TOGETHER ON THE ROAD OF EMMAUS FOR A VIRTUOUS RECEPTION OF THE SYNODAL PATH**

by Rossano Sala SDB

«Brothers and sisters, may the Synod awaken our hearts!

The present, even that of the Church, appears to be full of labors, of problems, of burdens. But faith tells us that it is also the *kairos* in which the Lord comes to meet us to love us and call us to the fullness of life.

The future is not a threat to be feared, but it is the time that the Lord promises us so that we can experience communion with him, with our brothers and sisters with the whole of creation.

We need to rediscover the reasons for our hope and above all to transmit them to young people, which are thirsty for hope; as the Second Vatican Council well affirmed:

"One can legitimately think that the future of mankind is placed in the hands of those who are capable of transmitting to the generations of tomorrow reasons for life and hope» (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 31).  
(FRANCIS, 3 October 2018, Initial address to the Synod Fathers)

From the beginning I was privileged to participate in the preparation of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme "Young people, faith and vocational discernment" and I was also privileged, as Special Secretary, to taking part in the Synodal Assembly which was held from 3 to 28 October 2018.

I still have in my heart the warmth and freshness of an unforgettable experience that has left an indelible mark on my soul. The Church has really tried to "frequent the future", as Pope Francis invited us to do during the first General Congregation. On October 3, in fact, he told us:

Let us therefore commit ourselves to trying to "frequent the future", and to bring out from this Synod not only a document - which is generally read by a few and criticized by many - but above all concrete pastoral proposals, capable of fulfilling the task of the Synod itself, that is, that of making dreams sprout, of arousing prophecies and visions, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind wounds, to weave relationships, to raise a dawn of hope, to learn from one another, and to create a positive imaginary that illuminates minds, warms hearts, gives strength back to hands, and inspires young people – to all young people, no one excluded - the vision of a future filled with the joy of the Gospel.

We ask ourselves, therefore, starting from this enthusiasm and eager to truly create a "positive imaginary" capable of reanimating our educational and pastoral communities: what new pastoral paths does the Synod open? How can we walk with young people in their vocational discernment? How, as a Church, can we really find and transmit to young people the reasons for our hope, involving them in the mission? How can we rejuvenate the face of the Church together with young people?

As far as the synodal journey is concerned, in this last year and a half many things have happened: the *Pre-Synodal Meeting* of Young People (18-24 March 2018), the publication of the *Instrumentum laboris* (8 May - 19 June 2018), the *Synodal Assembly* (3-18 October 2018) culminated in the publication of the *Final*

*Document.* Then, on March 25, 2019, Pope Francis signed the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*.

It would be impossible for me to think only of making a synthesis of all this, because this concentration of production linked to the commitment of the Church with and for young people will need years to be understood in all its prophetic charge and to bear the fruits that we all desire.

In addition to the invitation to attend this small but precious library, I am just trying to give you four keys to understanding the path that has been done. I order some suggestions in four nuclei that are catalyzed by the four principles contained in *Evangelii gaudium* (nn. 222-237). For each of them I point out some strategic themes that come out of the synodal path and that I consider important for the relaunch of our pastoral work.

**First group**  
**«TIME IS GREATER THAN SPACE»**  
**Entering the synodal path**

*“Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces. Time governs spaces, illumines them and makes them links in a constantly expanding chain, with no possibility of return” (EG 223).*

I just reread the synodal path through a few jokes, because it is certainly already instructive for us in itself. To be Church first of all means “to follow the same path together”!

- Choice of theme (6 October 2016)
- *Preparatory document* with questionnaire (13 January 2017)
- International seminar on the condition of young people (11-15 September 2017)
- *Online questionnaire* (June-December 2017)
- Pre-Synodal Youth Meeting (19-24 March 2018)
- *Instrumentum laboris* (8 May 2018)
- *Final document* (28 October 2018)
- Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit* (25 March 2019)

This broad and articulated path is already a style and a method for us: we do not occupy space but we create processes! It is the path we have made together that counts, it is the taking into account of the whole process that renews us.

For this reason, the fundamental references that I will give will be starting from both the *Instrumentum laboris* (IL) and the *Final Document* (DF). It is important to remember that these two texts must be read and studied together with *Christus vivit* (ChV):

I have let myself be inspired by the wealth of reflections and conversations that emerged from last year’s Synod. I cannot include all those contributions here, but you can read them in the Final Document. In writing this letter, though, I have attempted to summarize those proposals I considered most significant. In this way, my words will echo the myriad voices of believers the world over who made their opinions known to the Synod. Those young people who are not believers, yet wished to share their thoughts, also raised issues that led me to ask new questions. (ChV 4).

It is important to clarify the relationship between the *Instrumentum laboris* and the *Final Document*. The first is the unitary and synthetic reference framework that emerged from the two years of listening; the second is the fruit of the discernment made and brings together the generative thematic nuclei on which the Synod Fathers focused with particular intensity and passion. We therefore recognize the diversity and complementarity of these two texts (DF 3).

It becomes important for us, to learn that to create processes that will remain even when we are no longer there, to open roads that we ourselves will not follow. I always like to think of Moses on Mount Nebo, who opens the way to the promised land, but does not set foot there! It is a beautiful biblical image of a path taken with others so that they have access to a full and abundant life!

**FIRST QUESTION**

What are the processes in place in our institutional realities? Are we "managers" in view of the survival of our pastoral activities or are we accompanying paths of renewal capable of putting ourselves at stake with courage and passion?

## AREAS OF WORK

### 1. *Re-appropriate a renewed youth dynamism*

The first chapter of the second part of both the IL (74-84) and the DF (63-76) deal with the question of the singularity of youth as the age of life: in particular the IL from the biblical point of view - much discussed during the synodal discussion - and the DF from the Christological, anthropological and pedagogical point of view. These two chapters, read together, help us to discover that the Synod is truly an appeal to the Church to rediscover within it and in its action a renewed youthful dynamism and its own youth!

All this is taken up and relaunched by the second chapter of the ChV (nos. 22-63).

It is indeed a “generative thematic nucleus” of great interest, especially in Europe where lately we have been very depressed from the social, ecclesial and pastoral point of view! So much humiliated but so little humiliated!

Let us not forget the saints who worked with young people have shaped their own style starting here. For example, on many occasions, Don Bosco affirms that his way of acting among young people was characterized by a true and proper “youthful dynamism”. In other words, from the dynamism of youth, Don Bosco learned the style to accompany young people!

### 2. *Becoming aware of the anthropological and cultural challenges*

The fourth chapter of IL (51-63) is unsurpassed in describing the six anthropological and cultural challenges we are called upon to face in our time: body, affectivity and sexuality; new cognitive paradigms and the search for truth; the anthropological effects of the digital world; institutional disappointment and new forms of participation; decision-making paralysis in the superabundance of proposals; beyond secularisation.

In DF and ChV all these challenges are taken up and faced in different moments in a non-systematic way, but rather scattered and spread. All six challenges are met, with different emphasis and insights. The numbers dedicated to the “digital revolution” underway, which really marks a moment of epoch-making change (cf. DF 21-23.145-146) and those linked to sexuality (cf. DF 37-39.149-150) emerge in a particular way: two truly strategic areas of great topicality. All six of them insert us in the “change of epoch” that we are living.

For us it is clear that these are the real conditions for the exercise of the ecclesial mission today: these challenges must be examined in every context of ours. Those who take care of young people are called upon to address them and to have them clearly defined. We need conferences, studies, in-depth studies so as not to remain out of time and history!

### 3. *The redemption of adults and the qualification of those accompanying them*

In the area of formation, the whole theme of the quality of adults emerges, of the formation of those accompanying them, which has found in the synodal journey a multiplicity of denunciations, expressions and proposals. The fact that adults are too many times adulescent and adulterated is evident to all. That our world canonizes adolescence and youth, fatally forgetting that we must strive for maturity and fullness of adult life also. Yet young people have told us in many ways that they are really a “Telemachus generation”, that is, willing and eager to enter into a positive alliance with a world of authentic adults, which they miss very much from all points of view.

There are many references here too. Just a few references to the profile and training of accompanying persons emerged during the listening phase (IL 130-132: *The qualities of those who accompany*) and substantially confirmed in DF 101-103 (*Quality of accompanying persons*). Everything then refers to the final chapter of the third part (DF 157-164: *Integral Formation*). ChV relaunched the theme at various times (cf. 242-247 and 291-298).

### 4. *The request to rehabilitate the liturgy with conviction*

The synodal path started from a lack of theme to a strong rehabilitation of the theme. On the other hand, the liturgy is the first form of ecclesial expression! Not only within the Church, but also as a way of “presentation” visible to all.

The question was not present in the “preliminary” phase (i.e. in the *preparatory Document*). In the phase of listening to the young people, the theme of the liturgy often returned (cf. IL 69). In addition to other IL numbers in which reference is made to the liturgy (72, 178, 184, 192), there are also numbers dedicated specifically to the theme (187-189). Here important things are said.

No. 51 of the DF - entitled *The desire for a living liturgy* - is entirely dedicated to the liturgical theme. In the DF, as in the IL, there are also three numbers consecrated directly and specifically to the liturgy (134-136).

Let us not forget, therefore, that “the liturgical experience is the principal resource for Christian identity” (DF 51) and that the liturgy for youth ministry is an irreplaceable resource. Because it makes us savour the value of silence, contemplation, gratuitousness and prayer. It says the primacy of grace in our lives. That’s no small thing!

**Second group**  
**«UNITY PREVAILS OVER CONFLICT»**  
**Opening up to missionary synodality**

*«In this way it becomes possible to build communion amid disagreement, but this can only be achieved by those great persons who are willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity».*  
(EG 228)

The great acquisition of the synodal journey was the rediscovery of synodality in a missionary key. The young people did not ask us first of all to be “educated” by us. They did not even ask us to “leave them alone”, even if someone did. And not even to organize anything for them. They asked us to be a Church that walks with them. In the episode of Emmaus it is interesting that Jesus walks with the two wayfarers regardless of the direction of the journey, but first of all in the logic of sharing the journey!

No. 118 of the *Final Document*, along with other numbers that come before and after, specifies what this means. The title of this issue already has an enormous scope (*Spiritual, pastoral and missionary conversion*):

Pope Francis often reminds us that this is not possible without a serious journey of conversion. We are aware that it is not just a matter of giving rise to new activities and we do not want to write “expansionist, meticulous and well-designed apostolic plans, typical of defeated generals” (FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 96). We know that to be credible we must live a reform of the Church, which implies purification of the heart and changes in style. The Church must really let herself be given shape by the Eucharist that she celebrates as the summit and source of her life: the form of a bread composed of many ears of corn and broken for the life of the world. The fruit of this Synod, the choice that the Spirit has inspired us through listening and discernment is to walk with the young people going towards all to witness to the love of God. We can describe this process by speaking of synodality for mission, that is, missionary synodality: “The implementation of a synodal church is an indispensable prerequisite for a new missionary impetus that involves the whole People of God” (cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018, no. 9). This is the prophecy of the Second Vatican Council, which we have not yet taken up in all its depth and developed in its daily implications, to which Pope Francis reminded us affirming: “The path of synodality is the path that God expects of the Church in the third millennium” (FRANCIS, *Address for the Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015). We are convinced that this choice, fruit of prayer and confrontation, will allow the Church, by the grace of God, to be and to appear more clearly as the “youth of the world”

**SECOND QUESTION**

How convinced are we that communion among us is the necessary platform, the privileged way and the first form of education and evangelization? How do we make real the idea that all, as baptized, are subjects of the mission of the Church?

## AREAS OF WORK

### 1. The style and method of Emmaus

The synodal discussion on the choice of the biblical icon of reference for the Synod was interesting.

The option on Emmaus was clear and accepted by all: before “speaking to the young”, one must “speak with the young”, giving primacy to conversation, sharing, familiarity and confidence. Starting from a clear and decisive proximity. This, more broadly, concerns our dialogue with the world, towards which we have something to give and something to receive, in a real exchange of gifts to be implemented.

In any case, the story of Emmaus is not a biblical image external to the synodal journey, but it is a fundamental stylistic characterization. The editorial choices of the *Final Document* are clear in this regard and leave no doubt:

In the episode of the disciples of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35) we have recognized a paradigmatic text for understanding the ecclesial mission in relation to the younger generations. This page expresses well what we experienced at the Synod and what we would like each of our particular Churches to be able to experience in relation to the young (DF 4).

In addition to the Proem just mentioned, each of the three parts is introduced by a significant biblical passage with respect to “recognizing”. (First part, No 5), 'interpret' (Second part, No 58) and 'choose' (Third part, No 114). Theologically speaking, this style that makes accompaniment a way of being Church is rooted in the Eucharistic practice of sharing bread, from which the word “accompaniment” itself derives in a significant way:

As the story of the disciples of Emmaus teaches us, accompanying requires a willingness to make together a stretch of the road, establishing a meaningful relationship. The origin of the term “to accompany” refers to the broken and shared bread (*cum pane*), with all the human and sacramental symbolic richness of this reference. Therefore, the community as a whole is the primary subject of accompaniment, precisely because in its bosom is developed that web of relationships that can support the person in his journey and provide points of reference and orientation. Accompaniment in human and Christian growth towards adult life is one of the forms by which the community shows itself capable of renewing itself and the world (DF 92).

### 2. Prophecy of fraternity in pastoral organization

The great key of interpretation offered for ecclesial renewal was that of “missionary synodality” (cf. DF 115-127). This perspective was the answer to the question on the form of the Church expressed in the first chapter of the third part of the IL (138-143). The young people, with their presence and their word, have reopened the *Dossier* on Synodality in the Church of the Third Millennium: n. 118 of the DF is the perspective center for reading the entire Document as a whole and for understanding the path that awaits us in the third millennium.

Concretely, this challenges us in the way in which we work together in the animation of youth ministry: IL n. 209 invited us to move *towards an integrated ministry* and DF n. 141 asked us to move *from fragmentation to integration*. In the Dioceses, and even in some Episcopal Conferences, these questions are of dramatic relevance. Because the specialization and atomization of the different pastoral areas risks destroying the pastoral unity of the Church. The passage decided on from “office” work to “project” work was hoped for by many at the Synod. We know that the office tends to separate and the project creates unity instead.

These are the great challenges to be taken up for a true and proper “Institutional Conversion” (cf. IL 198).

### 3. Co-responsible and virtuous planning

The theme of pastoral planning did not come out very strongly in the *Synodal Assembly*. It was much more present in the phase of listening to the individual Episcopal Conferences.

IL at numbers 206-208 raised the double question, strongly emphasized, of improvisation and pastoral incompetence on the one hand and on the other of the not always easy relationship between extraordinary events and daily life. The questions were asked in a very clear and precise form.

In the DF only the second theme was addressed in n. 142. The fact remains that the first, at Church level, remains dramatic: incompetent planning, a sign of the inability to work as a team, is at the root of many failures in youth ministry. We are not always able to create a collaborative and co-responsible climate, and we willingly replace it with a verticalism now unacceptable to the younger generations (cf.

the “clericalism” mentioned in IL 199, an issue dedicated to “youth protagonism”), creates a climate of distraction and discouragement. That the young people in a top-down and pyramidal system of the Church are no longer with us emerged with great clarity at the Synod!

#### 4. The need to work in a network

The question of “missionary synodality” is central and creates two very precise movements: a centripetal one - that is, the true interior, that is, in the ecclesial environments and in the collaboration between us - and a centrifugal one - that instead goes outwards, capable of involving and creating collaboration with all those who care about young people. Two movements that are both necessary and never reducible to the other.

Many times we realize - with great sadness and shame - that it is easier to work with third parties (civil and social) than between us (various levels of the Church, different offices and various agents)! In fact, the need to work in a network needs strong relational virtues and the ability to involve oneself widely and articulated. The numbers 204-205 of the IL posed the question with clarity.

The Synod also realized that the Church lives in a territory with which she must enter into dialogue for a true and proper exchange of gifts (DF 132) and that the preparation of new formators must include specific competence in networking (DF 159) and in teams in all fields (DF 103.124.163).

**Third group**  
**«REALITY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE IDEA»**  
**Living the condition of youth**

*«Ideas – conceptual elaborations – are at the service of communication, understanding, and praxis. Ideas disconnected from realities give rise to ineffectual forms of idealism and nominalism, capable at most of classifying and defining, but certainly not calling to action. What calls us to action are realities illuminated by reason» (EG 232).*

Through the Synod we became aware that the vital listening to the reality of youth is the first step towards being signs and bearers of God's love for young people. To empathize with their world, their dreams, their existential condition is decisive for not acting outside of history, proposing “pre-packaged recipes” that no longer make sense! Starting from reality, listening to situations in which young people are growing up, sharing with them the joys and hopes. Engaging emotionally with them, making our hearts vibrate on the wavelength of the challenges that young people are facing is once again decisive.

Pope Francis in ChV 75-76 sums this up in the “gift of tears”, what Don Bosco had when he got out of prison and at various times in his life. The Holy Father says in n. 76:

Perhaps “those who lead a life more or less without necessity do not know how to cry. Certain realities of life can only be seen with eyes cleansed of tears. I invite each of you to ask yourselves: Have I learned to cry? When I see a hungry child, a child drugged in the street, a homeless child, an abandoned child, an abused child, a child used as a slave for society? Or is mine the whimsical cry of those who cry because they would like to have something more?”. Try to learn to cry for young people who are worse off than you. Mercy and compassion also express themselves by crying. If it doesn't come to you, ask the Lord to allow you to shed tears for the suffering of others. When you know how to cry, only then will you be able to do something for others with the heart.

And these tears, when they are true, clean our eyes, that is, they purify our gaze, they make us see things in a different way. Also on this Pope Francis has words that are good for us and that should be heard again, because he invites us to look at things in a positive way, with a truly evangelical look:

Today we adults run the risk of making a list of disasters, of defects of the youth of our time. Some may applaud us because we seem to be experts in identifying negative aspects and dangers. But what would be the result of this attitude? Increasing distance, less proximity, less mutual help.

The attentive gaze of those who have been called to be the father, pastor and guide of the young consists in identifying the small flame that continues to burn, the reed that seems to break but has not yet broken (cf. Is 42:3). It is the ability to identify paths where others see only walls, it is the ability to recognize possibilities where others see only dangers. This is the gaze of God the Father, capable of valuing and nourishing the seeds of good sown in the hearts of young people. The heart of every young person must therefore be considered “sacred land”, bearer of the seeds of divine life and before which we must “take off our sandals” in order to be able to approach and deepen the Mystery (ChV 66-67).

**THIRD QUESTION**

How to I look at young people? How do I try to empathize with their condition? When was the last time I was really moved and shed tears of emotion at the situation of so many children, adolescents and young people who are suffering today?

## **AREAS OF WORK**

### **1. Empathetic listening to young people**

The synodal debate, from the beginning, has become aware that the path of preparation has denounced a Church “in debt of listening”. Pope Francis already affirmed this in his initial speech to the Synod:

The path of preparation for this moment has highlighted a Church “in debt of listening” also to young people, who often feel that the Church does not understand their originality and therefore is not accepted for what they really are, and sometimes even rejected.

The question of listening is more radical than one might think: it comes from afar, that is, from an inability to listen to God and his Spirit who continually speak and act in history. It is the fruit of that “spiritual superficiality” and that “spiritual abyss” of a Church that speaks too much: arrogant enough to be able to learn something from someone; very superb in thinking of it as the sole repository of truth.

Many passages of the IL and of the final DF refer to listening: it is enough to take a look at the fifth chapter of the first part of the IL (64-72) and at the first chapter of the first part of the DF (6-9) to realize it.

Listening “is the way in which God himself relates to his people” (DF 6) and therefore has a theological value, rather than pedagogical and pastoral! Many interventions have confirmed that we are called to regain, through listening, that empathetic capacity capable of abandoning our own point of life and literally entering into the point of view of the other, seeing and hearing things from the heart of the other.

### **2. Privileged attention to poor and abandoned young people**

Both in the listening phase (cf. IL 41-50: *In the culture of waste*; IL 166-171: *Vicinity and support in distress and marginalization*) and in the synodal assembly phase, the need to give more to those who had less was highlighted. This is a very urgent point in our time, where there is no shortage of poor young people.

It is enough to go and see some numbers of the DF to realize this: migrants (25-28 and 147), abuses (29-31), various forms of vulnerability (40-44), wounded young people (67).

How does this attention find its place in the pastoral proposals and initiatives of our realities? How can we better focus on these “natural recipients” of a Church that truly cares for the poverty of our time? How are we today “signs and bearers of God's love” to these poorest young people? Think only of young migrants, or unaccompanied minors.

### **3. Vocational qualification of youth ministry**

The Synod as a whole had this as a specific focus and therefore as an emergency to be addressed: to move from a youth ministry of entertainment to a youth ministry in a vocational key. It is a perspective that places us in an epoch-making change! It will take time, patience, and courage to enter!

There are many references: at the center is the second chapter of the second part of both IL (85-105) and DF (77-90). There are too many references and it is not possible to make a synthesis in brief, because the subject is strategic and fundamental, both from a theoretical and practical point of view: thinking of vocation as the personalizing expression of the life of faith of every baptized person sets in motion a whole series of long-term consequences that would take us a long way forward. This theme would suffice for a week of study!

In a specific way we could start from n. 139 (*Vocational animation of pastoral work*) and 140 (*Vocational pastoral work for young people*) of the DF, and then collect the many elements that come out of all the synodal texts.

This, properly, seems to me to be the fundamental “generative thematic nucleus” set in motion by the whole synodal movement of the last three years.

#### 4. Renew the idea and practice of the oratory starting from the “oratorian Criterion”

The oratory and the oratorian criterion are truly an Italian and Salesian dynamic par excellence, a specific gift that we carry in our hearts and that we are called to give to the whole Church. It is evident that for us to say oratory means transforming the Church into a house for young people, according to the beautiful statement of the DF 138:

Only a pastoral ministry capable of renewing itself starting from the care of relationships and the quality of the Christian community will be significant and attractive to young people. In this way the Church will be able to present herself to them as a house that welcomes, characterized by a family atmosphere of trust and confidence. The yearning for fraternity, which has often emerged from the synodal listening of young people, asks the Church to be “mother for all and home for many” (FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 287): pastoral work has the task of achieving in history the universal motherhood of the Church through concrete and prophetic gestures of joyful and daily welcome that make it a home for young people.

In this sense, after clarifying what I like to call the “oratorian criterion” (characterized by four pillars: house that welcomes, parish that evangelizes, school that leads to life and courtyard to meet with friends) we also speak of the oratory and youth center as a specific pastoral place. It was done in passing in IL at n. 180 and it is done at n. 143 of the DF, asking to “dynamize” the youth centers making them become privileged tools for a Church coming out. How to do it? How do we think the physiognomy of the oratory of the third millennium? How can we transform our pastoral environments into “homes and “families”?

**Fourth group**  
**«THE WHOLE IS SUPERIOR TO THE PART»**  
**Learning to discern**

*«The whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts. There is no need, then, to be overly obsessed with limited and particular questions. We constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all... We can work on a small scale, in our own neighbourhood, but with a larger perspective» (EG 235)..*

Today we live in a great complexity and in a continuous transformation of our condition. For this reason, discernment, which is above all a spiritual practice of putting one's life in order, is at the top of the priorities of our time.

In the synodal process we started from the need to help young people in their vocational discernment and gradually we realized that the Church herself was in a certain sense in “debt of discernment”: not being able to discern, the Church does not have the possibility of helping young people to do so. Entering into the dynamics and process of discernment has become step by step a requirement of the synodal journey. There is a need to understand, deepen, clarify and practice discernment in the form of a shared journey, which later became the synodal style. As the Holy Father told us on October 3, 2018,

The Synod is an ecclesial exercise of discernment. Openness in speaking and openness in listening are fundamental for the Synod to be a process of discernment. Discernment is not an advertising slogan, it is not an organizational technique, nor is it a fashion of this pontificate, but an inner attitude that is rooted in an act of faith. Discernment is the method and at the same time the objective that we set ourselves: it is based on the conviction that God is at work in the history of the world, in the events of life, in the people I meet and who speak to me. That is why we are called to listen to what the Spirit suggests to us, in ways and in directions that are often unpredictable.

The “method of discernment” has therefore directed the synodal process from within. The silence of three minutes every five interventions during the Synodal Assembly was a strong sign of this.

It was important to recognize that the “young subject” and the “Church subject” found themselves in the same situation: not only must young people discern to reach their vocation, but also the Church must do this to live with wisdom and prudence in our time. Thus the indications on discernment produced during the synodal journey (cf. *Preparatory Document* 11,2; *Instrumentum laboris* 1,2,4,73,137-139; *Final Document* 62,104-105,110-113,124) are in a sense “interchangeable”: what is said for young people is valid for the Church and vice versa.

**FOURTH QUESTION**

Are we carrying out processes of discernment in the Spirit with respect to what we are living? Do we feel equipped to accompany our educational and pastoral works in discerning what the Lord is asking of us today?

**AREAS OF WORK**

**1. The relationship between the Community and the personal level**

Accompaniment and discernment are the insights of the third and fourth chapters of the second part of the DF (91-113), which find new light with respect to IL (106-136), because at the center was placed

the Church as the home of accompaniment and environment of discernment. In fact, it is interesting to note the double shift in the external and internal order of these two chapters with respect to the IL: in the latter one spoke first of discernment and then of accompaniment, while in the DF it becomes clear that one accompanies for discernment, and that therefore the objective of accompaniment is discernment; then again in the IL it was proposed a first personal and then communal reading of both accompaniment and discernment, while the Synodal Assembly overturned the perspective, inserting the personal sphere into the communal one.

The outcome of the synodal discussion clearly proposed three concentric circles, one within the other: first the accompaniment of the environment, then the group and finally the personal one. It is important to recover this order in our pastoral realities, maintaining the presence of these three levels of animation.

## **2. Creating suitable environments for discernment**

Every pastoral educational community is called to assume the habitus of discernment in its way of thinking, planning and carrying out its mission. For this reason we are called to create environments suitable for discernment.

I would like to quote in full DF 124, which is very specific about this, because it touches the exercise of authority as a service to community discernment:

The experience of “walking together” as the People of God helps us to better understand the sense of authority from the perspective of service. Pastors are required to be able to increase collaboration in witness and mission, and to accompany processes of community discernment in order to interpret the signs of the times in the light of faith and under the guidance of the Spirit, with the contribution of all the members of the community, starting with those on the margins. Ecclesial leaders with these capacities need a specific formation in synodality. It seems promising from this point of view to structure common formation paths among young lay people, young religious and seminarians, especially with regard to issues such as the exercise of authority or teamwork.

## **3. The strategic link between generous service and vocational discernment**

Throughout the synodal journey, there has been a growing awareness of the truly strategic link between experiences of generous service and vocational discernment, that is, between mission and vocation. This has emerged from the beginning and is a thought that has gradually been strengthened.

The IL 194-195 summarizes many experiences presented by many Episcopal Conferences. If we think only of the many experiences of service and volunteerism that we offer, perhaps we should ask ourselves whether they are then taken up again in the context of vocational discernment. Perhaps here lies one of our defects linked to pastoral activism: we have many experiences but we are hasty in accompanying them and taking them up again from a vocational point of view, that is, of conversion and formation. In this way we do nothing but nourish in many young people the “collection of experiences” typical of our time. Instead, the young people have asked us to accompany them not only in their experience, but also and above all in their discernment, which needs adequate time, suitable spaces and a favourable climate to resume the experience made from the spiritual and vocational point of view.

The theme of *diakonia* (DF 137) is truly generative for the Church and for young people, but it is better articulated and as a “thematic nucleus” to be deepened in its roots and in its consequences for pastoral care.

## **4. Forming young people by forming with them**

For youth ministry, perhaps the greatest provocations of the Synod concern the accompaniment of young people towards a Church characterized by a “missionary synodality” in which all are called to be subjects of the mission. Mission is always entrusted to the Church as a whole and never to some of its

members in an exclusive way. All this originates from the powerful intuition of the introduction and first chapter of the third part (DF 115-127).

In this sense it is important for us to take as our starting point numbers 160 and 161 of the DF to discern what we are called to propose in view of the formation of young people in the mission. 160 invites the establishment of “centers of formation for evangelization intended for young people” and 161 asks each local Church to offer to young people who so desire a time destined for the maturation of adult Christian life, which

should be built around at least three indispensable cornerstones: a fraternal life experience shared with adult educators that is essential, sober and respectful of the common house; a strong and meaningful apostolic proposal to be lived together; an offering of spirituality rooted in prayer and sacramental life. In this way there are all the necessary ingredients so that the Church can offer to the young people who want it a profound experience of vocational discernment.

Here our educational-pastoral communities are put at stake in their capacity to recover a real closeness to the younger generations. Here we are called to be creative and innovative, involving adults, communities, lay people and young people in a project of common formation. Is this a utopia or a prophecy? How can we start some “pilot experience”? Or support and strengthen those experiences that already go in this direction?

## Conclusion

### «BUT THEN WHAT ARE WE TO DO, FATHER?»

I would like to tell you, in conclusion, that we are only at the beginning!

Pope Francis in n. 103 of the ChV says: “I exhort the communities to carry out with respect and seriousness an examination of their own closest youth reality, so as to be able to discern the most appropriate pastoral paths”. This is the task that awaits us in the coming years. It is a bit of a review of life to be more appropriate to the task that God has entrusted to us. On November 10, 2015, he addressed the participants of the Conference of the Italian Church in Florence with words that were in many ways similar: “But then what should we do, Father? - you will say. What is the Pope asking of us? It is up to you to decide: people and pastors together. Today I simply invite you to raise your head and contemplate once again the Ecce Homo that we have on our heads”. In the ChV Pope Francis invites us to contemplate the living Christ who acts in history and who asks for our collaboration and our synergy with the younger generations to attend the future with them.

In Florence, among other things, he had also asked the young people for this:

I appeal above all “to you, young people, because you are strong”, said the Apostle John (1 Jn 1:14). Young people, overcome apathy. Let no one despise your youth, but learn to be models in speaking and acting (cf. 1 Tim 4:12). I ask you to be builders of Italy, to put yourselves to work for a better Italy. Please do not look at life from the balcony, but commit yourselves, immerse yourselves in the broad social and political dialogue. Let the hands of your faith rise up to heaven, but let them do so while they build a city built on relationships in which God's love is the foundation. And so you will be free to accept the challenges of today, to experience change and transformation.

It is therefore clear that we are not asked to “apply” binding magisterial indications. The pastoral field is never applicative, but it is always a space of living discernment, that is, of creative fidelity (cf. CV 103). And in a change of age like ours this ability to imagine renewal together becomes ever more decisive. It is nothing more, to put it in the words of the Second Vatican Council, than to make that journey of “updating” that makes us friends with the young people who exist today and also contemporary with that God who is always alive and present among us.

It is a question, first of all, of regaining proximity with the young generations of today. It is then a matter of immersing ourselves in the mystery of the living God, because Jesus is the true, continuous and eternal novelty of history. Finally, it is a question of reactivating the youthful dynamism that should characterize a Church that feels that it is “the youth of the world”, as the Message to young people of the Second Vatican Council of 8 December 1965 declared well.

Because what happens to a person's life could and should happen to all of us at the beginning of the third millennium, because

In every moment of life we can renew and increase our youth. When I began my ministry as Pope, the Lord broadened my horizons and gave me renewed youth. The same can happen to a married couple who have been for many years, or to a monk in his monastery. There are things that need to settle down over the years, but this maturation can live with a fire that is renewed, with a heart that is always young (ChV 160).

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From what we have shared, it is very clear that the first and most important fruit of the synodal journey is to assume a “way of being and working together” that makes the difference. It is that “prophecy of fraternity” of which Pope Francis spoke to us at the end of the *Synodal Assembly*:

The fruits of this work are already “fermenting”, as does the grape juice in the barrels after the harvest. The Synod of Young People was a good harvest, and promises good wine. But I would like to say that the first fruit of this Synodal Assembly should lie precisely in the example of a method that was tried to follow, right from the preparatory phase. A synodal style that does not have as its main objective the drafting of a document, which is also valuable and useful. More important than the document, however, is the spread of a way of being and working together, young and old, in listening and discernment, to arrive at pastoral choices that respond to reality (FRANCIS, 28 October 2018, Angelus).

I therefore hope that this way of living and working together will become the normal and daily way of being disciples of the Lord and apostles of the young!