

Glossary of Terms

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Authority - Baptism and Confirmation - Charisms - Church - Communion - Consensus - Consultation - Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting - Diocesan Synodal Team - Discernment - Ecclesial - Episcopal - Instrumentum Laboris - Local Church - Listening - Mission - Parrhesia - Participation - People of God - Power - Sensus fidei - Signs of the times - Synod - Synodal Process - Synodality - Vocation of All the People of God - Vademecum - Vatican II

Authority

The New Testament uses a specific term to express the power Jesus received from the Father to grant salvation, which He exercises over all creatures in the power (δύναμις) of the Holy Spirit: ἐξουσία (authority). It consists in imparting the grace that makes us "children of God" (cf. John 1,12). The Apostles receive this ἐξουσία from the risen Lord, who sends them to teach the nations by baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe all He has commanded (cf. Matthew 28,19-20). By virtue of baptism, every member of the People of God is given a share in this authority, having received the "anointing of the Holy Spirit" (cf. 1 John 2,20.27), having been taught by God (cf. John 6,45) and having been guided "to the complete truth" (cf. John 16,13). (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 17)

There is to be no distance or separation between the community and its Pastors - who are called to act in the name of the only Pastor - but a distinction between tasks in the reciprocity of communion. A synod, an assembly, a council cannot take decisions without its legitimate Pastors. The synodal process must take place at the heart of a hierarchically structured community. In a diocese, for example, it is necessary to distinguish between the process of decision-making through a joint exercise of discernment, consultation and co-operation, and decision-taking, which is within the competence of the Bishop, the guarantor of apostolicity and Catholicity. Working things out is a synodal task; decision is a ministerial responsibility. A correct exercise of synodality must contribute to a better articulation of the ministry of the personal and collegial exercise of apostolic authority with the synodal exercise of discernment on the part of the community. (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 69)

Baptism and Confirmation

Baptism is the sacrament by which we enter into the People of God, freed from original sin and adopted as sons and daughters of God in Christ. Baptism is the fundamental identity of all the faithful, including priests, religious, and lay people. Pope Francis describes the mission of every baptised person as that of being a missionary disciple in the midst of the People of God, to bring the light of the Gospel to every corner of the world.

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptised, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelisation, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelisation to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelisation calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptised. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelisation; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples". If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: "We have found the Messiah!" (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him "because of the woman's testimony" (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, "immediately proclaimed Jesus" (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for? (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 120)

Confirmation is the sacrament by which the faithful receive the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In Confirmation, we become fully equipped for the mission entrusted to us at our baptism. The Spirit poured out upon us enables us to live ever more deeply our primordial vocation as sons and daughters of God who cry out "Abba, Father!" (Romans 8:15) We are not only called to live out our call as sons and daughters of God, but also to invite others into this filial relationship with the Father in Christ, of which the Holy Spirit makes us partakers.

Charisms

The Lord's ἐξουσία (authority) is expressed in the Church through the variety of spiritual gifts (τα πνευματικά) or charisms (τα χαρίσματα) the Spirit shares out among the People of God for the upbuilding of the one Body of Christ. In exercising them we need to respect an objective τάξις, so that they can develop in harmony and bear the fruit they are meant to bear for the good of all (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,28-30; Ephesians 4,11-13). The Apostles have the first place among them - with a special and pre-eminent role being attributed by Jesus to Simon Peter (cf. Matthew 16,18ff., John 21,15ff.): they, in fact, are entrusted with the ministry of guiding the Church in fidelity to the *depositum fidei* (1 Timothy 6,20; 2 Timothy 1,12.14). But the term χάρισμα also evokes the gratuitous and varying character of the free initiative of the Spirit, who grants each one his or her own gift with a view to the general good (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,4-11; 29-30; Ephesians 4,7), always in terms of mutual submission and service (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,25): since the highest gift, the one that regulates them all, is love (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,31). (ITC, Syn., no. 18)

Church

Taking up the ecclesiological perspective of Vatican II, Pope Francis sketches the image of a synodal Church as "an inverted pyramid" which comprises the People of God and the College of Bishops, one of whose members, the Successor of Peter, has a specific ministry of unity. Here the summit is below the base.

"Synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretative framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself.... Jesus founded the Church by setting at her head the College of Apostles, in which the Apostle Peter is the 'rock' (cf. Matthew 16,18), the one who

must "confirm" his brethren in the faith (cf. Luke 22,32). But in this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located below the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called 'ministers', because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all"[68]. (ITC, Syn., no. 57)

Consensus

Consensus in the context of the Synodal Process does not mean uniformity or a democratic majority. This would ignore the fact that the Holy Spirit can speak through the words of one single member of the People of God or a small group. Rather, consensus in synodal key refers to the process of listening to one another in order to discern the common path that God is calling us to in a spirit of communion, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Consultation

In previous Synods, consultation was sought by means of questionnaires that were circulated among the faithful prior to a gathering of the Synod of Bishops in Rome on a particular topic. This current Synod seeks to broaden the experience of "consultation" in order to move towards a more synodal Church that more fully listens to and engages the entire People of God. In this way, "consultation" is now taking the form of a wider "participation." The Synod of Bishops in Rome is no longer the sum total of the experience of Synodality in the Church, but rather the culmination of a long process by which the voice of the Spirit resounds throughout the whole Church, at the diocesan, national, continental, and universal levels.

Communion

Synodality is a living expression of the Catholicity of the Church as communion. In the Church, Christ is present as the Head united to His Body (Ephesians 1,22-23) in such a way that she receives from Him the fullness of the means of salvation. The Church is Catholic also because she is sent to all, in order to gather the entire human family in the richness of the plurality of cultural forms, under the Lordship of Christ and in the unity of His Spirit. The synodal path expresses and promotes her Catholicity in two ways: it shows the dynamic way in which the fullness of faith is shared by all members of the People of God and it assists in handing it on to all people and all peoples. (ITC, Syn., no. 58)

Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting

Each local Church culminates the diocesan phase with a Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting. This gathering provides the opportunity for diverse members of the diocese to come together for a liturgical celebration, to pray together, to reflect on their experience of the Synodal Process in the diocese, to listen the feedback that has been raised, to dialogue about the current reality of the local Church and the signs of the times, and to discern the Spirit's call for the diocese in relation to its growth in synodal conversion. While much of the consultation process during the Diocesan Phase might have occurred within specific communities of the local Church, such as parishes, ministries, youth and other groups, the objective of the Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting is to bring together a representative cross-section of the *whole* diocese, including minority groups and those on the peripheries, and enable participants to listen, reflect, and discern together. Thereafter the outcome of the meeting should be part of the diocesan synthesis, as described in Part 4 of the *Vademecum*.

Diocesan Synodal Team

The role of the Synodal team is to implement, coordinate, and oversee the diocesan phase of the Synodal Process under the leadership of the local Bishop, collaborating with the Diocesan Contact Person(s). The synodal team must plan the listening sessions to be carried out on the local level to ensure the widest participation possible including those on the margins. Special efforts must be made to engage those who are seldom listened to in the Church. The Synodal team organises any gatherings, events, and meetings that coincide with the Synodal Process. The goal is to create an authentic experience of synodality at the local level. Upon the completion of the listening sessions, the Synodal team is responsible for elaborating the diocesan synthesis on the basis of the experiences and feedback received from all those who participated.

Discernment

The Synodal Process entails a discernment process oriented towards consensus. We listen to each other in order to discern what God is saying to all of us. This kind of discernment is not only a one-time event, but ultimately a way of life, grounded in Christ, following the lead of the Holy Spirit, living for the greater glory of God. Communal discernment helps to build flourishing and resilient communities for the

mission of the Church today. Discernment is a grace from God, but it requires our human involvement in simple ways: praying, reflection, paying attention to one's inner disposition, listening and talking to one another in an authentic, meaningful, and welcoming way. Discernment in this spiritual key plants seeds that can bear the fruits of fraternity, healing, communion, mission, and more. God comes to lead and inspire us as we seek to discern His will.

Ecclesial

Synodality is the path of journeying together that corresponds to the deep nature of the Church. In this sense, any Synodal Process is deeply *ecclesial* since it is rooted in the nature of the Church and necessarily involves the common journey of the People of God. Walking together in a synodal way calls us to deeper communion with one another, moving towards an ever fuller participation in the mission we share. For this journey together, a vital principle is "*sentire cum Ecclesia*: to feel, sense and perceive in harmony with the Church. This is required not just of theologians, but of all the faithful; it unites all the members of the People of God as they make their pilgrim journey. It is the key to their 'walking together.'" (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 56) We do not walk the synodal path alone, as isolated individuals, parishes, or dioceses. Rather, synodality is the journey of the entire Church all together, which is experienced and lived out across the whole of God's people.

Episcopal

The greek term *episkopos* is used in the New Testament to refer to one who has "oversight" of the flock of God. The leaders in the early Christian communities were the successors of the apostles, and this apostolic succession continues to this day in the bishops who are appointed in the Catholic Church. "Bishops exercise their specific apostolic authority in teaching, sanctifying and governing the particular Church entrusted to their pastoral care at the service of the mission of the People of God." (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 56) "Episcopal" thus refers to the mission of the bishop, who guides the flock of Christ entrusted to his care amid the communion of the entire Church. The bishop is not meant to be the summit of a pyramid, but rather the servant of the faithful entrusted to his care. Episcopal conferences are the collegial body of bishops at a national or international level to promote fraternity among bishops and unity across local Churches.

Instrumentum Laboris

The *Instrumentum Laboris* is the “Working Document” that is used as the basis for the discussions, interventions, and exchanges that take at the Synod of Bishops. It is a document published by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. Unlike previous Synods, the current Synodal process will involve two versions of the *Instrumentum Laboris*. One version will be published after the listening phase at the diocesan level has been synthesized at the national level. This first draft will then serve as the “Working Document” for the meetings that will take place at the continental level. Based on the work of the continental phase, a second draft of the *Instrumentum Laboris* will then be published, which will serve as the basis for the meeting of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023.

Local Church

In the context of the Synodal Process, “local Church” refers to each diocese, eparchy, ordinariate, and equivalent ecclesial body. The local Church is the first level on which synodality is exercised, encompassing parishes, ministries, movements, and other communities. Here “the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation of all God’s holy People in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which the Bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers”[90]. (ICT, *Syn.*, no. 77)

The historical, linguistic and cultural links that mould interpersonal communication in the local Church and describe its particular features facilitate the adoption of a synodal style in its daily life and are the basis for effective missionary conversion. In the local Church Christian witness is embodied in specific human and social situations, which allows for an incisive initiation of synodal structures which serve mission. As Pope Francis has emphasized, “only to the extent that these organizations keep connected to the ‘base’ and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape”[91]. (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 77)

Listening

Pope Francis has affirmed that: “A synodal Church is a Church which listens. [...] The faithful People, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other; and all listening to the Holy Spirit.” The International Theological Commission explained this

central role of listening as follows (ICT, *Syn.*, no. 111): Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate where one speaker tries to get the better of the others or counters their positions with brusque arguments, but about expressing whatever seems to have been suggested by the Holy Spirit as useful for communal discernment, at the same time being open to accepting whatever has been suggested by the same Spirit in other people’s positions, “for the general good” (1 Corinthians 12,7).

Mission

The dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* sets out a vision of the nature and mission of the Church as communion, with the theological presuppositions of a suitable re-launch of synodality: the mystical and sacramental conception of the Church; her nature as People of God on pilgrimage through history towards the heavenly homeland, in which all her members are by virtue of baptism honoured with the same dignity as children of God and appointed to the same mission; the doctrine of sacramentality of the episcopate and collegiality in hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome. (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 40)

Parrhesia

Parrhesia refers to the boldness that the coming of the Holy Spirit brought about in the hearts of the apostles at Pentecost. It is the inner courage that sent them out to proclaim the Good News that Jesus is Lord without fear in the days of the Early Church. The Spirit offers us this same boldness to carry out the mission of the Church today. *Parrhesia* is required in the Synodal Process so that we can speak boldly and listen humbly, inspired by the Holy Spirit as we journey forward towards this “new phase of evangelization” to which God calls us (cf. ITC, *Syn.*, no. 121)

The *parrhesia* of the Spirit required the People of God on its synodal journey is the trust, frankness and courage to “enter into the expanse of God’s horizon” in order to “ensure that a sacrament of unity exists in the world and that man is therefore not destined for dispersion and confusion”[169]. The lived and enduring experience of synodality is, for the People of God, a source of the joy promised by Jesus, a catalyst of new life, the springboard for a new phase of missionary commitment. (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 121)

Participation

A synodal Church is a Church of participation and co-responsibility. In exercising synodality she is called to give expression to the participation of all, according to each one's calling, with the authority conferred by Christ on the College of Bishops headed by the Pope. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit. The authority of Pastors is a specific gift of the Spirit of Christ the Head for the building up of the entire Body, not a delegated and representative function of the people. (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 67)

The distinction between deliberative and consultative votes must not allow us to underrate the opinions expressed and votes made in various synodal assemblies and councils. The expression *votum tantum consultivum*, which indicates the weight of evaluations and proposals in such august assemblies, is inadequate if it is understood according to the *mens* of civil law in its various expressions [81].

The consultation that takes place in synodal assemblies is actually different, because the members of the People of God who take part in them are responding to the summons of the Lord, listening as a community to what the Spirit is saying to the Church through the Word of God which resonates in their situation, and interpreting the signs of the times with the eyes of faith. In the synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will. So, in coming to formulate their own decisions, Pastors must listen carefully to the views and experiences of the faithful. Canon law stipulates that, in certain cases, they must act only after having sought and obtained the various opinions according to juridically established procedures [82]. (ICT, *Syn.*, no. 68) At the same time, the path of synodality requires much wider participation than only that which is required by the law.

People of God

The Second Vatican Council focused on the Church as the "People of God." This makes clear that the Church is not only a hierarchical structure, but a people on

pilgrimage together, guided by God on its journey. God brings us into unity with one another as He draws us into union with Himself: "God does not make men and women holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness." (*Lumen Gentium*, 9) This people was first made manifest in Israel, whom God chose as His own and with whom he established his first covenant. In Jesus Christ, entry into the People of God has been extended to every people and nation: "Go therefore, make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). God invites all peoples to be part of the people that is particularly his own: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10) The mission of the Church is to gather the People of God throughout its journey through history in view of the Kingdom of God. In this sense, the Church is the sign and instrument of "intimate union with God and the unity of the entire human race" (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). The Church is at the service of the mission of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who brings all of humanity together in himself: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:16)

Power

The New Testament uses a specific term to express the power Jesus received from the Father to grant salvation, which He exercises over all creatures in the power ($\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$) of the Holy Spirit: $\acute{\epsilon}\xi\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$ (authority). It consists in imparting the grace that makes us "children of God" (cf. John 1,12). The Apostles receive this $\acute{\epsilon}\xi\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$ from the risen Lord, who sends them to teach the nations by baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe all He has commanded (cf. Matthew 28,19-20). By virtue of baptism, every member of the People of God is given a share in this authority, having received the "anointing of the Holy Spirit" (cf. 1 John 2,20.27), having been taught by God (cf. John 6,45) and having been guided "to the complete truth" (cf. John 16,13). (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 17)

In terms of re-vitalising synodal practice on the level of the universal Church, Blessed Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops. It is a “permanent Council of Bishops for the universal Church”, directly and immediately subject to the power of the Pope, “providing information and offering advice”, which “can also enjoy the power of making decisions when such power is conferred upon it by the Roman Pontiff”[41]. This institution aims to continue to extend to the People of God the benefits of communion lived during the Council. (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 41)

Sensus fidei

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is manifested in the *sensus fidei* of the faithful [65]. “In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The People of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo*. This means that it does not err in faith, even when it cannot find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of His mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith – *sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively”[66]. This connaturality shows itself in a “*sentire cum Ecclesia*: to feel, sense and perceive in harmony with the Church. This is required not just of theologians, but of all the faithful; it unites all the members of the People of God as they make their pilgrim journey. It is the key to their ‘walking together.’”[67] (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 56)

Signs of the times

The Second Vatican Council took a decisive step forward towards the importance of the Church reading the “signs of the times.” This means that the Church does not carry out her mission in a vacuum, detached from the realities of the world around her. Rather, the Church is sent out in the midst of the world, in order to unite men and women of every time and place to God and one another. The Church must therefore be attentive to the needs, realities, and concerns of the world in every era in order to carry out her mission in the service of humanity. The Church must thus read the signs of the times in the light of the faith, in order to discern how God is calling her to respond amid the circumstances and events of every period of time. Ultimately, reading the signs of the times is a means of realising the profound solidarity between the Church and humanity: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and

the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1)

Synod

The Synod is “the programme of those synodal events in which the Church is called together by the competent authority in accordance with the specific procedures laid down by ecclesiastical discipline, involving the whole People of God in various ways on local, regional and universal levels, presided over by the Bishops in collegial communion with the Bishop of Rome, to discern the way forward and other particular questions, and to take particular decisions and directions with the aim of fulfilling its evangelising mission.” (ITC, *Syn.*, no. 70)

Synodal Process

Synodality is not so much an event but an ongoing path and process. The Synodal Process that is currently being undertaken by the Church involves the entire People of God. It begins with a diocesan phase, which has been detailed in this *Vademecum*, followed by a national phase, continental phase, and finally a culminating phase of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome.

Synodality

Synodality, as defined by the International Theological Commission in 2018, is “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.”

Pope Francis describes a synodal Church as a “listening Church knowing that listening is more than feeling. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. We must all listen to the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Truth to know what the Spirit is saying to the Church. [...] This is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium.” (*Address at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015)

Synodality creates the opportunity to listen to all and provide opportunities to listen to the Holy Spirit and the People of God in order to discern together and walk forward on a common path. Pope Francis understands this as walking together and accompanying each other on the spiritual journey to live out our call to mission in communion with one another.

Vocation of All the People of God

This vocation of all the People of God, the community of believers in Jesus Christ, is to bring about the Kingdom of God. All members of the Church, laity, religious, and clergy according to their proper charisms and roles collaborate in the responsibility for fulfilling its mission. Vatican Council II urged active involvement in the life of the church by emphasising the principles of collaborative responsibility, consultation and lay participation.

The laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church, their activity is so necessary within church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness. (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10)

Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary they understand that it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their service and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart. (*Lumen Gentium*, 30)

Vademecum

The *Vademecum* is a handbook to support the efforts of all of the People of God to contribute to the listening and discernment that is the foundation for the Synod on Synodality. It is a stimulus and a practical guide offering ideas for those appointed as a diocesan (or parish) contact person or team, mindful that each local Church has its own culture, traditions, recent history, and resources.

Vatican II

Pope John XXIII convoked the twenty-first ecumenical council in the history of the Church, which gathered all the bishops of the world between 1962 and 1965 at the Vatican. In the opening address of the Council, John XXIII characterised its purpose in this way:

What is necessary today is that the whole of Christian doctrine, with no part of it lost, be received in our times by all with a new fervour, in serenity and peace, in that traditional and precise conceptuality and expression which is especially displayed in the acts of the Councils of Trent and Vatican I. [...] What is needed is that this certain and unchangeable doctrine, to which loyal submission is due, be investigated and

presented in the way demanded by our times. For the deposit of faith, the truths contained in our venerable doctrine, are one thing; the fashion in which they are expressed, but with the same meaning and the same judgement, is another thing. This way of speaking will require a great deal of work and, it may be, much patience: types of presentation must be introduced which are more in accord with a teaching authority which is primarily pastoral in character. (*Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, 11 October 1962)

- Pope Paul VI brought the Council to its conclusion and implemented many of its reforms, including the use of the vernacular in the liturgy as well as promoting unity between Christians and within the entire human family. Some of the decisive turning points of the Second Vatican Council include: a new openness to dialogue and unity with non-Christians and Christians who are not Catholic (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*); a new approach to the relationship between the Church and the world (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*); and a renewed understanding of the nature of the Church, particularly as the "People of God" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*). The Synod of Bishops was instituted in 1975 as a way of continuing the fraternal and collegial experience of the Second Vatican Council, to continue discerning the signs of the times in each successive era in a spirit of communion and mission.

