



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION

*EPISCOPALIS COMMUNIO*

OF THE HOLY FATHER  
FRANCIS

ON THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

1. Episcopal communion (*episcopalis communio*), with and under Peter, is manifested in a particular way in the Synod of Bishops. Instituted by [Paul VI](#) on 15 September 1965, the Synod of Bishops is one of the most precious fruits of the [Second Vatican Council](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Ever since then, the Synod – new as an institution but ancient in its inspiration – has provided an effective support to the Roman Pontiff, through channels that he himself established, in matters of greater importance; that is to say, those requiring special knowledge and judgment for the good of the whole Church. In this way the Synod of Bishops, “representing the entire Catholic episcopate, demonstrates the fact that all the Bishops are in hierarchical communion in solicitude for the universal Church”.<sup>[2]</sup>

For over fifty years, the Synod Assemblies have proved a valuable instrument of shared knowledge among the Bishops, of common prayer, honest exchange, deepening of Christian doctrine, reform of ecclesiastical structures and promotion of pastoral activity throughout the world. In this way, not only have these Assemblies served as a privileged locus of interpretation and reception of the rich conciliar Magisterium, but they have also given a significant impetus to subsequent papal Magisterium.

Today, too, at a point in history when the Church is embarking upon a “new chapter of evangelization”<sup>[3]</sup> requiring her to be “throughout the world... permanently in a state of mission”,<sup>[4]</sup> the Synod of Bishops is called, like every other ecclesiastical institution, to become ever more “suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation”.<sup>[5]</sup> Above all, recognizing that “the task of proclaiming the Gospel everywhere in the world falls

primarily on the body of Bishops”, the Synod needs, in the words of the Council, to “give special consideration to missionary activity, which is the greatest and holiest task of the Church”.<sup>[6]</sup>

2. It is providential that the Synod of Bishops was instituted in the context of the last Ecumenical Council. In fact, the Second Vatican Council, following in the footsteps of the First Vatican Council,<sup>[7]</sup> deepened the doctrine of the episcopate within the authentic ecclesiastical Tradition, focusing particularly on its sacramentality and its collegial nature.<sup>[8]</sup> It emerged very clearly that each Bishop possesses simultaneously and inseparably responsibility for the particular Church assigned to his pastoral care and solicitude for the universal Church.<sup>[9]</sup>

This solicitude, which expresses the supra-diocesan dimension of the episcopal *munus*, is exercised in solemn form in an Ecumenical Council and is also expressed in the united action of Bishops dispersed throughout the world, when this action is proclaimed as such or freely accepted by the Roman Pontiff.<sup>[10]</sup> It must be remembered that it pertains to him, according to the needs of the People of God, to select and promote ways in which the College of Bishops can exercise its proper authority over the universal Church.<sup>[11]</sup>

In the course of the conciliar discussions, alongside the doctrine on episcopal collegiality, the request also emerged several times for some Bishops to be associated with the universal ministry of the Roman Pontiff via a permanent central body, distinct from the dicasteries of the Roman Curia; it was hoped that this body, beyond the solemn and extraordinary form of the Ecumenical Council, would manifest the solicitude of the College of Bishops for the needs of the People of God and for communion among all the Churches.

3. On 14 September 1965, in response to these requests, Paul VI announced to the Council Fathers, gathered for the opening of the fourth session of the Ecumenical Council, the decision, taken on his own initiative and by his own power, to institute a body known as the Synod of Bishops. This body “composed of Bishops, appointed for the most part by the Episcopal Conferences, with our approval, will be summoned by the Roman Pontiff, according to the needs of the Church, for consultation and collaboration when, for the general good of the Church, he deems it opportune”.

In the Motu Proprio *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, promulgated the following day, Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops, “whereby Bishops chosen from various parts of the world are to offer more effective assistance to the supreme Pastor of the Church”. The Synod would be “constituted in such a way that it is 1) a central ecclesiastical institution; 2) representing the whole Catholic episcopate; 3) of its nature perpetual; 4) as for structure, carrying out its function for a time and when called upon”.<sup>[12]</sup>

The Synod of Bishops, whose name evokes the Church’s ancient and very rich synodal tradition, held in particular esteem by the Eastern Churches, would normally exercise a consultative role,

offering information and counsel to the Roman Pontiff on various ecclesial questions, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, the Synod might also enjoy deliberative power, should the Roman Pontiff wish to grant this.<sup>[13]</sup>

4. When instituting the Synod as a “special permanent council of sacred Pastors”, [Paul VI](#) knew that “like every human institution, [it] could be further improved with the passage of time”.<sup>[14]</sup> Its later development has been fed on the one hand by ongoing reception of the fruitful conciliar teaching on episcopal collegiality and on the other hand by the experience of the numerous Synodal Assemblies held in Rome since 1967, when the *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum* was first published.

Likewise, after the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, which made the Synod of Bishops part of universal law,<sup>[15]</sup> the Synod continued to gradually evolve, until the latest edition of the *Ordo Synodi* was promulgated by [Benedict XVI](#) on 29 September 2006. In particular, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, consisting of the General Secretary and a special Council of Bishops, was instituted and gradually strengthened in its proper functions, so that the structural stability of the Synod might be better maintained during the periods between the various Synodal Assemblies.

In these years, noting the effectiveness of synodal action vis-à-vis questions that require timely and united intervention from the Church’s Pastors, there has been a growing wish for the Synod to become more and more a specific manifestation and effective implementation of the solicitude of the episcopate for all the Churches. [John Paul II](#) stated that “perhaps this instrument can be further improved. Perhaps the collegial pastoral responsibility can be expressed in the Synod even more fully”.<sup>[16]</sup>

5. For these reasons, since the beginning of my Petrine ministry, I have paid special attention to the Synod of Bishops, confident that it can experience “further development so as to do even more to promote dialogue and cooperation among Bishops themselves and between them and the Bishop of Rome”.<sup>[17]</sup> Underpinning this work of renewal must be the firm conviction that all Bishops are appointed for the service of the holy People of God, to whom they themselves belong through the sacrament of Baptism.

It is certainly true, as the [Second Vatican Council](#) teaches, that “when Bishops engage in teaching, in communion with the Roman Pontiff, they deserve respect from all, as the witnesses of divine and catholic truth; the faithful must agree with the judgment of their Bishop on faith and morals, which he delivers in the name of Christ; they must give it their adherence with religious assent of the mind”.<sup>[18]</sup> But it is also true that “for every Bishop the life of the Church and life in the Church is the condition for exercising his mission to teach”.<sup>[19]</sup>

Hence the Bishop is both teacher and disciple. He is a teacher when, endowed with the special

assistance of the Holy Spirit, he proclaims to the faithful the word of truth in the name of Christ, head and shepherd. But he is a disciple when, knowing that the Spirit has been bestowed upon every baptized person, he listens to the voice of Christ speaking through the entire People of God, making it “infallible *in credendo*”.[20] Indeed, “the universal body made up of the faithful, whom the Holy One has anointed (cf. 1 Jn 2:20, 27), is incapable of erring in belief. This is a property which belongs to the people as a whole; a supernatural sense of faith is the means by which they make this property manifest, when ‘from Bishops to the last of the lay faithful’, they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals”.[21] So the Bishop is called to lead his flock by “walking in front of them, showing them the way, showing them the path; walking in their midst, to strengthen them in unity; walking behind them, to make sure no one gets left behind but especially, never to lose the scent of the People of God in order to find new roads. A Bishop who lives among his faithful has his ears open to listen to ‘what the Spirit says to the churches’ (Rev 2:7), and to the ‘voice of the sheep’, also through those diocesan institutions whose task it is to advise the Bishop, promoting a loyal and constructive dialogue”.[22]

6. Similarly, the Synod of Bishops must increasingly become a privileged instrument for *listening* to the People of God: “For the Synod Fathers we ask the Holy Spirit first of all for the gift of listening: to listen to God, that with him we may hear the cry of the people; to listen to the people until breathing in the desire to which God calls us”.[23]

Although structurally it is essentially configured as an episcopal body, this does not mean that the Synod exists separately from the rest of the faithful. On the contrary, it is a suitable instrument to give voice to the entire People of God, specifically via the Bishops, established by God as “authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church”.[24] demonstrating, from one Assembly to another, that it is an eloquent expression of synodality as a “constitutive element of the Church”.[25]

Therefore, as John Paul II declared, “Every General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is a powerful ecclesial experience, even if some of its practical procedures can always be perfected. The Bishops assembled in Synod represent in the first place their own Churches, but they are also attentive to the contributions of the Episcopal Conferences which selected them and whose views about questions under discussion they then communicate. They thus express the recommendation of the entire hierarchical body of the Church and finally, in a certain sense, the whole Christian people, whose pastors they are”.[26]

7. The history of the Church bears ample witness to the importance of consultation for ascertaining the views of the Bishops and the faithful in matters pertaining to the good of the Church. Hence, even in the preparation of Synodal Assemblies, it is very important that consultation of all the particular Churches be given special attention. In this initial phase, following the indications of the General Secretariat of the Synod, the Bishops submit the questions to be explored in the Synodal Assembly to the priests, deacons and lay faithful of their Churches, both individually and in

associations, without overlooking the valuable contribution that consecrated men and women can offer. Above all, the contribution of the local Church's participatory bodies, especially the Presbyteral Council and the Pastoral Council, can prove fundamental, and from here "a synodal Church can begin to emerge".[27]

During every Synodal Assembly, consultation of the faithful must be followed by discernment on the part of the Bishops chosen for the task, united in the search for a consensus that springs not from worldly logic, but from common obedience to the Spirit of Christ. Attentive to the *sensus fidei* of the People of God – "which they need to distinguish carefully from the changing currents of public opinion"[28] – the members of the Assembly offer their opinion to the Roman Pontiff so that it can help him in his ministry as universal Pastor of the Church. From this perspective, "the fact that the Synod ordinarily has only a consultative role does not diminish its importance. In the Church the purpose of any collegial body, whether consultative or deliberative, is always the search for truth or the good of the Church. When it is therefore a question involving the faith itself, the *consensus ecclesiae* is not determined by the tallying of votes, but is the outcome of the working of the Spirit, the soul of the one Church of Christ".[29] Therefore the vote of the Synod Fathers, "if morally unanimous, has a qualitative ecclesial weight which surpasses the merely formal aspect of the consultative vote".[30]

Finally, the Synod Assembly itself must be followed by the implementation phase, so as to initiate the reception of the Synod's conclusions in all the local Churches, once they have been accepted by the Roman Pontiff in the manner he judges most appropriate. Here it must be remembered that "cultures are in fact quite diverse, and every general principle... needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied".[31] In this way, it can be seen that the synodal process not only has its point of departure but also its point of arrival in the People of God, upon whom the gifts of grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit through the gathering of Bishops in Assembly must be poured out.

8. The Synod of Bishops, which is "in some manner the image" of an Ecumenical Council and reflects its "spirit and method",[32] is composed of Bishops. Nevertheless, as also happened at the Council,[33] certain others who are not Bishops may be summoned to the Synod Assembly; their role is determined in each case by the Roman Pontiff. In this connection, special consideration must be given to the contribution that can be offered by members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Besides the members, certain invited guests without voting rights may attend the Synod Assembly. These include Experts (*Periti*), who help with the redaction of documents; Auditors (*Auditores*), who have particular competence regarding the issues under discussion; Fraternal Delegates from Churches and Ecclesial Communities not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church. To these may be added further special guests (*Invitati Speciales*), chosen because of their acknowledged authority.

The Synod of Bishops meets in various types of gathering.<sup>[34]</sup> If circumstances so suggest, a single Synodal Assembly may be spread over more than one session. Each Assembly, whatever its format, is an important opportunity for collective listening to what the Holy Spirit “is saying to the churches” (*Rev* 2:7). In the course of the synodal deliberations, then, particular importance should be attached to liturgical celebrations and other forms of common prayer, so as to invoke the gifts of discernment and harmony upon the members of the assembly. It is also right and just, following an ancient synodal tradition, that the Book of the Gospels be solemnly enthroned at the start of each day, symbolically reminding all the participants of the need for docility to the divine word, which is the “word of truth” (*Col* 1:5).

9. The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops – consisting of the General Secretary, who chairs it, the Undersecretary, who assists the General Secretary in all his activities, and some special Councils of Bishops – is chiefly concerned with implementation of the preceding Synodal Assembly and preparation for the following one. In the phase preceding the Assembly, it chooses the themes to be discussed in the Synod Assembly from those proposed by the episcopate, it sees to their precise determination in relation to the needs of the People of God, and it initiates the consultative process and the drafting of the preparatory documents, incorporating the results of the consultation. In the phase following the Assembly, on the other hand, together with the competent dicastery of the Roman Curia, it sees to the implementation of the synodal recommendations approved by the Roman Pontiff.

Among the Councils that make up the General Secretariat, giving it its particular structure, special mention should be made of the Ordinary Council, consisting for the most part of diocesan Bishops elected by the Fathers of the Ordinary General Assembly. Ever since it was instituted in 1971 for the preparation and implementation of the Ordinary General Assembly, it has amply demonstrated its usefulness, responding as it were to the desire of the Council Fathers who asked for some Bishops to be co-opted from among those with pastoral responsibilities in various parts of the world, as long-term collaborators of the Roman Pontiff in his ministry as Universal Pastor. In addition to the Ordinary Council, other Councils may be set up within the General Secretariat, so as to prepare and implement Synodal Assemblies other than the Ordinary General Assembly.

At the same time, the General Secretariat is at the constant disposal of the Roman Pontiff for whatever he may wish to ask of it, so as to avail himself of the sure counsel of Bishops in daily contact with the People of God, even outside the context of synodal gatherings.

10. Another fruit of the Synod of Bishops is that it highlights more and more the profound communion that exists in Christ’s Church both between the Pastors and the faithful (every ordained minister being a baptized person among other baptized persons, established by God to feed his flock), and also between the Bishops and the Roman Pontiff, the Pope being a “Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time – as Successor of Peter – to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches”.<sup>[35]</sup> This prevents any one subject from existing



independently of the other.

In particular, the College of Bishops never exists without its Head;<sup>[36]</sup> but likewise, the Bishop of Rome, who possesses “full, supreme, universal power over the Church, and... is always able to exercise it without impediment,”<sup>[37]</sup> “is always joined in full communion with the other Bishops, and indeed with the whole Church.”<sup>[38]</sup> In this regard, “there is no doubt that the Bishop of Rome is in need of the presence of his Brother Bishops, of their guidance and of their prudence and experience. Indeed, the Successor of Peter must proclaim to all who ‘Christ, the Son of the Living God’ is, and at the same time he must pay attention to what the Holy Spirit inspires on the lips of those who — accepting the word of Jesus who declares: ‘you are Peter’ (cf. *Mt* 16:16-18) — fully participate in the Apostolic College.”<sup>[39]</sup>

Moreover, I am confident that, by encouraging a “conversion of the Papacy... which can help make the exercise of my ministry more faithful to the meaning which Jesus Christ wished to give it and to the present needs of evangelization,”<sup>[40]</sup> the activity of the Synod of Bishops will be able to make its own contribution to the reestablishment of unity among all Christians, according to the will of the Lord (cf. *Jn* 17:21). By doing so, it will help the Catholic Church, according to the desire expressed years ago by John Paul II, to “find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation.”<sup>[41]</sup>

In accordance with canon 342 of the Code of Canon Law and with the above considerations in mind, I hereby decree and establish the following:

## I. Synod Assemblies

### Art. 1

#### *Presidency and Format of the Synod Assemblies*

§1. The Synod of Bishops is directly subject to the Roman Pontiff, who is its President.

§2. It is to meet:

1° in Ordinary General Assembly, when matters are discussed which pertain to the good of the universal Church;

2° in Extraordinary General Assembly, when the matters under discussion, pertaining to the good of the universal Church, require urgent consideration;

3° in Special Assembly, when matters are discussed which pertain principally to one or more particular geographical areas.

§3. If he considers it opportune, especially for reasons of an ecumenical nature, the Roman Pontiff may summon a synodal Assembly according to other formats established by himself.

## Art. 2

### *Members and other Participants in the Synod Assemblies*

§1. The members of the Synod Assemblies are those listed in canon 346 of the Code of Canon Law.

§2. According to the theme and the circumstances, certain others who are not Bishops may be summoned to the Synod Assembly; their role is determined in each case by the Roman Pontiff.

§3. The designation of members and other participants for each Assembly takes place according to the norms of particular law.

## Art. 3

### *Sessions of the Synod Assembly*

§1. According to the theme and the circumstances, the Synod Assembly may be conducted in separate periods, held at different times, at the discretion of the Roman Pontiff.

§2. During the time between periods, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, together with the General Relator and the Special Secretary of the Assembly, has the task of promoting further reflection on the theme or on some aspects of particular importance that emerge from the work of the Assembly.

§3. The members and other participants remain in office uninterruptedly until the closure of the Synod Assembly.

## Art. 4

### *Phases of the Synod Assembly*

Each Synod Assembly unfolds in a series of phases: the preparatory phase, the discussion phase and the implementation phase.

## II. Preparatory Phase of the Synod Assembly

## Art. 5



### *Start and Purpose of the Preparatory Phase*

§1. The preparatory phase begins when the Roman Pontiff officially opens the Synod Assembly, assigning one or more themes to it.

§2. Coordinated by the General Secretariat of the Synod, the preparatory phase has at its purpose the consultation of the People of God on the theme of the Synod Assembly.

### Art. 6

#### *Consultation of the People of God*

§1. The consultation of the People of God takes place in the particular Churches, through the Synods of Bishops of the Patriarchal Churches and the Major Archbishops, the Councils of Hierarchs and the Assemblies of Hierarchs of the Churches *sui iuris* and through the Episcopal Conferences.

In each particular Church, the Bishops carry out the consultation of the People of God by recourse to the participatory bodies provided for by the law, without excluding other methods that they deem appropriate.

§2. The Unions, the Federations and the male and female Conferences of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life consult the Major Superiors, who in their turn may approach their own Councils and other members of the Institutes and Societies in question.

§3. In the same way, the Associations of the Faithful recognized by the Holy See consult their own members.

§4. The dicasteries of the Roman Curia offer their contribution, taking account of their respective particular areas of competence.

§5. The General Secretariat of the Synod may identify other forms of consultation of the People of God.

### Art. 7

#### *Transmission of the Preparatory Contributions to the General Secretariat of the Synod*

§1. Each particular Church sends its own contribution to the Synod of Bishops of the Patriarchal Churches and the Major Archbishops, or to the Council of Hierarchs or the Assembly of

Hierarchs of the Churches *sui iuris*, or to the Episcopal Conference of its own territory.

The aforementioned bodies, in their turn, transmit a résumé of the texts they receive to the General Secretariat of the Synod.

The Union of (male) Superiors General and the International Union of (female) Superiors General do likewise with the contributions prepared by the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

The dicasteries of the Roman Curia transmit their contributions directly to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

§2. The right of the faithful, individually or in association with others, to submit their contributions directly to the General Secretariat of the Synod, remains intact.

## Art. 8

### *Convocation of a Pre-Synodal Meeting*

§1. According to the theme and the circumstances, the General Secretariat of the Synod may propose the convocation of a Pre-Synodal Meeting, with the participation of some members of the faithful chosen by the Secretariat, so that they too, in their diverse circumstances, may offer their contribution to the Synod Assembly.

Certain others may also be invited.

§2. Such a Meeting may be held at regional level, involving the Synods of Bishops of the Patriarchal Churches and Major Archbishops, the Councils of Hierarchs and the Assemblies of Hierarchs of the Churches *sui iuris* and the Episcopal Conferences of the territory concerned, as well as the respective International Meetings of Episcopal Conferences, so as to take account of the particular historical, cultural and ecclesial features of the various geographical areas.

## Art. 9

### *Involvement of Institutes of Higher Education*

Institutes of Higher Education, especially those that possess special competence with regard to the theme of the Synod Assembly or specific questions related to it, may offer studies either on their own initiative or at the request of the Synods of Bishops of the Patriarchal Churches and Major Archbishops, of the Councils of Hierarchs and Assemblies of Hierarchs of the Churches *sui iuris* and of the Episcopal Conferences, or at the request of the General Secretariat of the

Synod.

These studies may always be transmitted to the General Secretariat of the Synod.

#### Art. 10

##### *Constitution of a Preparatory Commission*

§1. For further exploration of the theme and for the redaction of any documents that may be issued prior to the Synod Assembly, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops may avail itself of a Preparatory Commission, made up of experts.

§2. This Commission is appointed by the General Secretary of the Synod, who chairs it.

#### III. Discussion Phase of the Synod Assembly

#### Art. 11

##### *President Delegate, Relator General and Special Secretary*

Before the Synod Assembly begins, the Roman Pontiff appoints:

1° one or more Presidents-Delegate, who preside over the Assembly in his name and with his authority;

2° a Relator General, who coordinates the discussion on the theme of the Synod Assembly and the elaboration of any documents to be submitted to the Assembly;

3° one or more Special Secretaries, who assist the Relator General in all his activities.

#### Art. 12

##### *Experts, Auditors, Fraternal Delegates and Special Guests*

§1. The following may be invited to the Synod Assembly, without voting rights:

1° Experts, who cooperate with the Special Secretary by virtue of their competence on the theme of the Synod Assembly, to whom may be added some Consultants of the General Secretariat;

2° Auditors, who contribute to the work of the Assembly by virtue of their experience and knowledge.

3° Fraternal Delegates, who represent the Churches and the Ecclesial Communities not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church.

§2. In particular circumstances certain Special Guests may be designated, who are recognized as particular authorities on the theme of the Synod Assembly, without enjoying voting rights.

### Art. 13

#### *Opening and Closing of the Synod Assembly*

The Synod Assembly begins and ends with a Mass celebrated by the Roman Pontiff, in which the members and the other participants in the Assembly take part according to their various circumstances.

### Art. 14

#### *General Congregations and Meetings of Small Groups (circuli minores)*

The Synod Assembly gathers in plenary sessions, called General Congregations, in which the members, the Experts, the Auditors, the Fraternal Delegates and the Special Guests take part, or else in meetings of Small Groups, in which the participants in the Assembly are grouped together according to the norms of particular law.

### Art. 15

#### *Discussion of the Theme of the Synod Assembly*

§1. In the General Congregations the members make their interventions according to particular law.

§2. Periodically, a free exchange of views takes place among the members on the matters under discussion.

§3. The Auditors, Fraternal Delegates and Special Guests may also be invited to speak on the theme of the Synod Assembly.

### Art. 16

#### *The Establishment of Study Commissions*

According to the theme and the circumstances and respecting particular law, some Study Commissions may be established, consisting of members and other participants in the Synod

Assembly.

## Art. 17

### *Redaction and Approval of the Final Document*

§1. The conclusions of the Assembly are brought together in a Final Document.

§2. For the redaction of the Final Document, a special Commission is set up, consisting of the Relator General, who chairs the Commission, the General Secretary, the Special Secretary and some members elected by the Synod Assembly taking due account of the various regions, as well as others appointed by the Roman Pontiff.

§3. The Final Document is submitted for the approval of the members, in accordance with particular law, with a view to obtaining moral unanimity insofar as this is possible.

## Art. 18

### *Delivery of the Final Document to the Roman Pontiff*

§1. Once the approval of the members has been obtained, the Final Document of the Assembly is presented to the Roman Pontiff, who decides on its publication.

If it is expressly approved by the Roman Pontiff, the Final Document participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter.

§2. If the Roman Pontiff has granted deliberative power to the Synod Assembly, according to the norm of canon 343 of the Code of Canon Law, the Final Document participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter once it has been ratified and promulgated by him.

In this case, the Final Document is published with the signature of the Roman Pontiff together with that of the members.

## IV. Implementation Phase of the Synod Assembly

## Art. 19

### *Reception and Implementation of the Conclusions of the Assembly*

§1. The diocesan or eparchial Bishops see to the reception and implementation of the conclusions of the Synod Assembly, once they have been accepted by the Roman Pontiff, with the help of the participatory bodies provided for by law.

§2. The Synods of Bishops of the Patriarchal Churches and Major Archbishops, the Councils of Hierarchs and the Assemblies of Hierarchs of the Churches *sui iuris* and the Episcopal Conferences coordinate the implementation of the aforementioned conclusions in their territory, and to this end they may set up common initiatives.

## Art. 20

### *Duties of the General Secretariat of the Synod*

§1. Together with the competent dicastery of the Roman Curia, as well as other dicasteries interested in various ways according to the theme and the circumstances, the General Secretariat of the Synod for its part promotes the implementation of the synodal recommendations approved by the Roman Pontiff.

§2. The General Secretariat may commission studies and other suitable initiatives for this purpose.

§3. In particular circumstances, the General Secretariat, by mandate of the Roman Pontiff, may issue documents regarding implementation, having heard the view of the competent dicastery.

## Art. 21

### *The Establishment of a Commission for Implementation*

§1. According to the theme and the circumstances, the General Secretariat of the Synod may have recourse to a Commission for implementation, consisting of experts.

§2. The General Secretary of the Synod appoints its members, having heard the Head of the competent dicastery of the Roman Curia, and chairs it.

§3. The Commission assists the General Secretariat in fulfilling the task outlined in art. 20 §1 by means of dedicated studies.

## V. General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops

## Art. 22

### *Constitution of the General Secretariat*

§1. The General Secretariat is a permanent institution at the service of the Synod of Bishops, directly subject to the Roman Pontiff.

§2. It consists of the General Secretary, the Undersecretary, who assists the General Secretary in

all his activities, the Ordinary Council, and also, if they have been established, the Councils mentioned in art. 25.

§3. The General Secretary and the Undersecretary are appointed by the Roman Pontiff and are members of the Synod Assembly.

§4. The General Secretariat avails itself of an appropriate number of officials and consultants for the performance of its duties.

## Art. 23

### *Duties of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops*

§1. The General Secretariat has competence for the preparation and implementation of the Synod Assemblies, and also for other questions that the Roman Pontiff may wish to put before it for the good of the universal Church.

§2. To this end, it cooperates with the Synods of Bishops of the Patriarchal Churches and Major Archdioceses, the Councils of Hierarchs and the Assemblies of Hierarchs of the Churches *sui iuris* and the Episcopal Conferences, as well as the dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

## Art. 24

### *The Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat*

§1. The Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat is competent for the preparation and implementation of the Ordinary General Assembly.

§2. It consists for the most part of diocesan Bishops, elected by the Ordinary General Assembly to represent the different geographical areas according to the norm of particular law, among whom is one of the Heads or Eparchial Bishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches; it also includes the Head of the dicastery of the Roman Curia that has competence for the theme of the Synod established by the Roman Pontiff as well as certain Bishops appointed by the Roman Pontiff.

§3. The members of the Ordinary Council take up office at the conclusion of the Ordinary General Assembly that elects them, they are members of the following Ordinary General Assembly and their mandate ceases at the conclusion of the latter.

## Art. 25

### *The Other Councils of the General Secretariat*



§1. The Councils of the General Secretariat for the preparation of the Extraordinary General Assembly and of the Special Assembly consist of members appointed by the Roman Pontiff.

§2. The members of these Councils take part in the Synod Assembly according to particular law and their mandate ceases at the conclusion of the latter.

§3. The Councils of the General Secretariat for the implementation of the Extraordinary General Assembly and the Special Assembly consist largely of members elected by the Synod Assembly according to the norm of particular law, but with the addition of further members appointed by the Roman Pontiff.

§4. Such Councils remain in office for five years from the closure of the Synod Assembly, unless the Roman Pontiff disposes otherwise.

## Final Provisions

### Art. 26

In accordance with the spirit and the norms of the present Apostolic Constitution, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops will issue an Instruction on the conduct of the Synodal Assemblies and on the activity of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, and regulations for each Synod Assembly.

### Art. 27

In the spirit of canon 20 of the Code of Canon Law and canon 1502 §2 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, upon promulgation and publication of the present Apostolic Constitution, all contrary provisions are duly abrogated, especially the following:

1. those canons of the Code of Canon Law and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches that, in whole or in part, directly contradict any article of the present Apostolic Constitution;
2. the articles of the Motu Proprio *Apostolica Sollicitudo* of *Paul VI* of 15 September 1965;
3. The *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum* of 29 September 2006, including the *Adnexum de modo procedendi in Circulis minoribus*.

I establish that what has been set forth in this Apostolic Constitution is fully effective from the day of its publication in *L'Osservatore Romano*, anything to the contrary notwithstanding, even if worthy of special mention, and that it be published in the official Commentary *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.

I invite everyone to receive the provisions of this Apostolic Constitution readily and wholeheartedly, through the help of the Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles and Mother of the Church.

*Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 15 September 2018, the sixth year of my Pontificate.*

**Franciscus**

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[1] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops *Christus Dominus* (28 October 1965), 5.

[2] *Ibid.*; cf. Saint *John Paul II*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* (16 October 2003), 58.

[3] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 1.

[4] *Ibid.*, 25.

[5] *Ibid.*, 27.

[6] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes* (7 October 1965), 29; cf. *ID.*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), 23.

[7] *Lumen Gentium*, 18.

[8] Cf. *ibid.*, 21-22; *Christus Dominus*, 4.

[9] Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 23; *Christus Dominus*, 3.

[10] Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 22; *Christus Dominus*, 4; *Codex Iuris Canonici* (25 January 1983), can. 337, §§1-2; *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (18 October 1990), can. 50, §§1-2.

[11] Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 337, §3; *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, can. 50, §3.

[12] No. I.

[13] Cf. *ibid.*, II.

[14] *Ibid.*, Preamble.

[15] Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 342-348; *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, can. 46.

[16] Homily at the Mass for the Closing of the VI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (29 October 1983).

[17] Address to Members of the XIII Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops (13 June 2013).

[18] *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

[19] Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, 28.

[20] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 119.

[21] *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

[22] Address to the Participants in the Symposium for New Bishops promoted by the Congregation for Bishops and by the Congregation for Eastern Churches (19 September 2013). Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 31.

[23] Address at the Vigil of Prayer in preparation for the Synod on the Family (4 October 2014).

[24] Address on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015).

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, 58.

[27] Address on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops. Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 31.

[28] Address on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops.

[29] Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, 58.

[30] John Paul II, Address to the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops (30 April 1983).

[31] Closing Address of the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (24 October 2015).

[32] Paul VI, Address for the start of the sessions of the I Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (30 September 1967).

[33] Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 339, §2; *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, can. 52, §2.

[34] Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 346.

[35] Address on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops.

[36] Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 22.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 333, §2; cf. *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, can. 45, §2; *Pastores Gregis*, 58.

[39] Letter to the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops on the occasion of the elevation of the Undersecretary to the episcopal dignity (1 April 2014).

[40] *Evangelii Gaudium*, 32.

[41] Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* (25 May 1995), 95.