

# SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM BULLETIN

## II ORDINARY SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS 4-25 OCTOBER 2009

*The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.  
"You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:13,14)*

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*This Bulletin is only a working instrument for the press.  
Translations are not official.*

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### English Edition

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#### SUMMARY

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#### PRESENTATION BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL

On Friday, 2nd October 2009 at 11.30 am in the John Paul II Hall in the Press Office of the Holy See, the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops H.E. Most Rev Nikola Eterović held a Briefing to give information on the meaning and development of the Synodal Assembly.

Here below is the text of the presentation of the Secretary General:

In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus revealed the dignity of his Disciples, saying, "You are salt for the earth... You are light for the world" (Mt 5: 13-14). These words, valid for Christians of all times are directed in a particular way to the faithful of Africa in this moment of their ecclesiastical and social history. The relevance of this call was also underlined by the Holy Father Benedict XVI who made it the theme of his first Apostolic Visit to the heart of Africa, in Cameroon and Angola, from the 17th to the 23rd March 2009.

This is both an observation and an exhortation. Christians, reborn in baptism through the grace of

the Holy Spirit, are dressed in Jesus Christ “light of the world” (cf Jn 8:12) that “gives light to everyone” (Jn 1:9). Therefore, they must live the spirit of the Beatitudes and in this way mirror Jesus Christ the Light, according to his words: “In the same way your light must shine in people’s sight, so that seeing your good works, they may give praise to your father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:16). Committing themselves to an authentic Christian life, the Disciples of the Lord try to follow him, they go after him in denying themselves and taking up his cross (cf Mk 8:34). Allowing themselves to be guided by the light of Christ, they will increasingly become the salt of the earth that, renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit, not only will not lose its flavor, but will be able to give a real taste of the Gospel to all of humanity in Africa and throughout the whole world.

Being the salt of the earth and the light of the world is the vocation of every Christian. Applied to the Africa reality, this truth allows us to understand the spirit in which we wish to celebrate the II Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: The Church in Africa in the service of reconciliation, justice and peace. “You are salt for the earth... You are light for the world” (Mt 5: 13-14). The priority refers therefore, to the urgent work of evangelization that has as its inseparable companion the promotion of humanity in the context of the African continent. The theme of the Assembly is quite explicit as it takes its title from the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *ECCLESIAL* in Africa, that brings together the results of the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops that took place from the 10th of April to the 8th of May 1994 on the theme: The Church in Africa and its evangelizing mission towards the year 2000. “You will be my witnesses” (Ac 1:8). This choice was meant to underline the continuity between the two assemblies. The first offered a general and overall picture of the situation of the Catholic Church in the continent. It also faced a variety of challenges, ecclesiastical, social and political, which, unfortunately are still largely present. Bearing in mind that this is still the situation, with the Second Special Assembly the Synodal Fathers, under the guidance of the Holy Father Benedict XVI, wish to deepen the mission of the Church in the service of reconciliation, justice and peace. These are themes that are fundamental for the present and future of the Catholic Church in Africa. In this urgent task she is prepared to work with other churches and Christian communities, with those who belong to non-Christian religions, as well as with all men of good will. As regards this, on the first day of activity a report of about 30 minutes is expected on the reception of *ECCLESIAL* in Africa which will be followed by free discussion on this theme. Preparation for the II Special Assembly for Africa began five years ago when, on June 15th 2004 God’s Servant John Paul II expressed a desire to call the II Assembly of Bishops for Africa. The most specific beginning was the publication of the Lineament, on June 27th 2006. During his visit to Yaoundé, in Cameroon, the Holy Father Benedict XVI delivered, on March 19th 2009, the *Instrumentum laboris* for the meeting of the Bishops to the Presidents of the 36 Episcopal Conferences and the heads of the two Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* as well as the Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy of Egypt.

The Church in Africa had great dynamism. From 1978 to 2007, the number of African Catholics rose from 55,000,000 to 146,000,000. Vocations to the priesthood and the religious life also saw a notable growth in numbers (see attachment).

This promising picture needs to be completed by recalling the 521 pastoral agents who were killed in Africa between 1994 and 2008 in the name of Jesus Christ (cf Mt 10:22). These were Africans by birth or adoption, i.e. missionaries in African lands. In the year 2008, for example, of 20 Catholic pastoral workers killed throughout the world, 5 were African: 3 priests, one religious and one lay volunteer, from respectively Kenya, Guinea, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Gospel they preached is the true salt of the earth, the guarantee of a deep-rooted evangelization, capable of facing every difficulty. The Good News accompanied by the clear testimony of their ecclesiastical service becomes the light that shines in the darkness of the world, many times concentrated too greatly on certain areas of the African continent.

To be evermore the salt of the earth and the light of the world is the grace that is obtained

through prayer. The celebration of the Synod of Bishops will be accompanied by intense moments of prayer.

The Holy Father Benedict XVI, President of the Synod of Bishops, will lead three Eucharistic celebrations in the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter's. Apart from the opening of proceedings on Sunday 4th and at the end of the Synod's work on Sunday October 25th, His Holiness will canonize 5 Blesseds on Sunday October 11th: Zygmunt Szczęśny Feliński, Francisco Coll y Guitart, Jozef Damiaan de Veuster, Rafael Arnáiz Barón and Marie de la Croix (Jeanne) Jugan. These saints concretely demonstrate how to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Prayer will accompany the reflections of the Synod Fathers every day in the morning and afternoon. The Hour of Terce will be followed by a short sermon, organized by the Synod Fathers. A special moment is foreseen for the evening of Saturday October 10th. The Holy father will lead the recital of the Holy Rosary with Africa and for Africa, on TV, via satellite, from the Paul VI Hall with the universities of 9 African capitals: Cairo (Egypt), Tananarive (Madagascar), Kinshasa (Dem. Rep. Congo), Nairobi (Kenya), Johannesburg (South Africa), Maputo (Mozambique), Khartoum (Sudan), Onitsha (Nigeria) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso).

244 Synod Fathers will participate at the II Special Assembly for Africa, of whom 228 are bishops. These will take part in various roles: 79 will be taking part ex officio, 129 are elected and 36 are nominated by the Pontiff. Among these there are 33 cardinals, 75 archbishops, 120 bishops and 8 religious, elected by the Union of Superiors General. As to their positions, there are 37 Presidents of Episcopal Conferences, 189 Ordinary Bishops, 4 coadjutors, 2 auxiliaries and 8 emeritus (arch)bishops.

With reference to Art. VII of the Ordo Synodi Episcoporum, the Holy Father Benedict XVI established that participating in the Synod of Bishops ex officio, along with the 25 department heads of the Roman Curia, there would also be all the African cardinals, presently 14, the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences, national, regional and the international reunions. In choosing the Synod Fathers the criterion followed was that of electing one bishop in five. In any case, an attempt was made to have at least one bishop from each of the 53 Africa countries. The majority of the Synod Fathers, 197 of them, are from Africa. Another 47 come from other continents: 34 from Europe, 10 from America, 2 from Asia and 1 from Oceania. Among these are the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences from the other 4 continents who will address the Assembly at the start of its work. This fact will underline that the II Special Assembly for Africa concerns the whole Church.

As regards the work of the Synod, 20 General Congregations are foreseen along with 9 Sessions of the Circoli Minori, divided into the three official languages of the Synod: French, English and Portuguese. The Synod Fathers can also use Italian.

4 press officers will use these languages to regularly update journalists on the work of the Synod. The first press conference will take place on Monday October 5th. Card. Peter Kodwo Appiah TURKSON, Archbishop of Cape Coast, Ghana and the General Relator, will take part.

The Holy Father Benedict XVI has nominated their Eminences the following Cardinals as President Delegates: Francis ARINZE, Prefect Emeritus for the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments: Théodore-Adrien SARR, Archbishop of Dakar, Senegal, and Wilfrid Fox Napier, O.F.M., Archbishop of Durban, South Africa. At the same time, His Holiness nominated two Special Secretaries: His Excellency Mons. António Damião FRANKLIN, Archbishop of Luanda, Angola, and His Excellency Mons. Edond DJITANGAR, Bishop of Sarh, Chad.

The fraternal delegates, representing 6 churches and ecclesiastical communities present in Africa, with whom the Catholic Church maintains a relationship of dialogue and collaboration, will also take part in the Assembly.

There will also be 29 experts, 19 men and 10 women, and 49 observers, 29 men and 20 women, willing to make their contribution to the successful unfolding of the Synod's work, enriching

reflection with their important testimony.

Along with the assistants, translators and technical personnel, and, in particular, the Officials of the General Secretariat, around 400 people will take part in the Synodal Assembly.

Three Special Guests will also participate during the Synod Assemblies, having accepted the Pope's invitation.

First, on Tuesday October 6th, the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church His Holiness Abuna Paulos will take part in the Third General Congregation. This will mean the participation at the Synod of the representative of the aforementioned Christian Church which has been present in Africa without interruption since the time of the Apostles.

On Friday October 9th, Mr. Rudolf Adada, former head of the Joint United Nations/African Union Peacekeeping Mission For Darfur is expected. He will be reporting on the efforts for peace in the Darfur region, which is of interest not only for the African countries but for the whole world.

On Monday October 12th the Synodal Fathers will be addressed by Mr Jacques Diouf, Director General of FAO on the efforts the FAO is making to ensure sufficient food for Africa.

"You are salt for the earth... You are light for the world" (Mt 5: 13-14). The Church, which has been a pilgrim in Africa for 2,000 years, is trying to put into practice this invitation from its Lord. It has been doing this in the regions of North-East Africa since the time of the Apostles (cf Ac 8: 26-39). In some areas, such as present-day Angola for example, the Good News was announced 500 years ago. In other areas the light of the Gospel was brought by the missionaries about 100 years ago. Thanks be to God the results have been bountiful. One sign of apostolic fruitfulness is the number of African missionary vocations. There is an ever-increasing number of priests, religious and lay people who perform pastoral service in other particular churches in Africa or on other continents. Along with the Good News, they endeavor to promote the Church's educational and social activities, offering a complete human and Christian education to the new generations. At the same time, they are trying to alleviate the open physical and spiritual wounds of their brothers in the face of the great challenges of underdevelopment and, therefore, hunger, illness and violence, including wars. By their actions, they continue the work of Jesus The Good Samaritan in favor of all Africans, regardless of their ethnicity, language or religion, thus providing a precious contribution to the process of justice and peace, born from a heart that is reconciled with God and his neighbor.

Invoking the intercession of many African saints and, in particular, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Africa, we pray that the celebration of the II Special Assembly will become a propitious occasion for the whole People of God to dedicate themselves to prayer and deep reflection on the present state of pastoral activity in Africa, in union with the Shepherds and under the guidance of the Bishop of Rome and Universal Shepherd of the Church. Blessed by the Holy Spirit, the Church in Africa hopes to set out, with renewed zeal, in the activities of evangelization and the promotion of humanity in the great continent. A Church that is at peace with itself can become a credible announcer of reconciliation even at the level of society, bringing an irreplaceable contribution to the promotion of justice and the achievement of peace.

Some statistics about the Church's charitable activity in Africa

I) There are 53 national Caritas in Africa of whom 20 have an additional aim, generally relating to the promotion of solidarity and the complete development of man and society. Then there is the Middle-Eastern and North African Caritas. All the national organizations are coordinated by Caritas Africa which is based in Kampala, Uganda.

II) The network of the Commissions for Justice and Peace is quite well developed. At a continental level there is SECAM's Justice and Peace Secretariat. Furthermore, there are 8 regional and 34 national commissions, linked to their respective Episcopal Conferences. There are also 12 institutes and centers for the promotion of the Church's social doctrine.

III) Among the significant works of human promotion, we should recall the Sahel Foundation, created by Pope John Paul II on February 22nd 1984, after his Apostolic visit to Burkina Faso. [1] On February 12th 2001, the mourned Pope John Paul II constituted The Good Samaritan Foundation, based on the goal to support the most needy, especially those with AIDS. The Foundation is part of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care.

IV) The Catholic Church is present in the field of the pastoral of health. According to the latest statistics available from the year 2007, there are 16,178 health centers of which: 1,074 hospitals; 5,373 day clinics; 186 leprosaria; 753 homes for the old and the handicapped; 979 orphanages; 1,997 kindergartens; 1,590 marriage counseling centers; 2,947 centers for social rehabilitation; 1,279 different health centers.

V) While proclaiming the Gospel, the Catholic Church always has promoted the complete education of individuals through the Catholic Schools. Today on the African continent, there are 12,496 nurseries with 1,266,444 registered children; 33,263 elementary schools with 14,061,806 students; 9,838 high schools with 3,738,238 students. There are 54,362 students in the Superior Institutes; 11,011 students in the Universities following ecclesial courses and 76,432 studying other courses.

[1] During its 25 years of existence, the Foundation has distributed approximately 40,000,000 US dollars in 9 countries: Burkina Faso, Capo Verde, Chad, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal, financing projects for water and arable land, as well as formation and teaching.

Africa										
	Population	Catholics	Ecclesial Circles	Pastoral Centers	Bishops	Priests	Deacons	Brothers	Sisters	Missionaries
2007	943.743.000	164.925.000	516	89.006	657	34.658	403	7.921	61.886	3.590
2006	926.878.000	158.313.000	514	85.311	638	33.478	379	7.846	60.708	4.301
2005	898.630.000	153.470.000	509	84.472	630	32.370	374	7.948	58.781	4.092
2004	876.720.000	148.817.000	507	81.629	630	31.259	368	7.791	57.475	3.926
2003	850.558.000	143.659.000	505	79.994	632	30.419	336	7.370	56.409	2.633
2002	830.516.000	137.428.000	503	79.514	617	29.274	336	7.139	53.980	2.575
2001	809.105.000	135.660.000	497	79.003	616	27.988	372	7.249	52.695	1.488
2000	789.455.000	130.018.000	495	82.668	601	27.165	361	7.256	52.583	1.222
1999	768.999.000	124.270.000	489	87.661	592	26.547	324	7.299	51.617	1.071
1998	748.612.000	16.664.000	479	84.131	575	26.026	1.313	7.025	51.304	1.256

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## SYNODAL WORKING CALENDAR

4 October - Sunday

09.30

Solemn inauguration with Concelebration of the Holy Mass in St. Peter's Basilica

5 October - Monday

09.00 - 12.30

First General Congregation

Greeting by the President Delegate  
Report of the General Secretary  
PRESENTATION BEFORE THE DISCUSSION

Open for Interventions

16.30 - 19.00

Second General Congregation

Reports on the relations of the various continents with Africa

Report on Ecclesia in Africa

18.00 - 19.00

Open for Interventions

6 October- Tuesday

09.00 - 12.30

Third General Congregation

Election of the Commission for the Message (I)

General Discussion begins

16.30 - 19.00

Fourth General Congregation

Continuation of the General Discussion

18.00 - 19.00

Open for Interventions

7 October - Wednesday

09.00 - 12.30

Small Groups (First Session)

Election of the Moderators and the Relators

Interventions about the Presentation before the Discussion

16.00

Meeting of the Moderators and the Relators

16.30 - 19.00

Fifth General Congregation

Continuation of the General Discussion

18.00 - 19.00

Open for Interventions

8 October - Thursday

09.00 - 12.30

Sixth General Congregation

Election of the Commission for the Message (II)

Continuation of the General Discussion

16.30 - 19.00

Seventh General Congregation

Continuation of the General Discussion

18.00 - 19.00

Open for Interventions

9 October - Friday

09.00 - 12.30

Eighth General Congregation

Continuation of the General Discussion

16.30 - 19.00

Ninth General Congregation

Continuation of the General Discussion

18.00 - 19.00

Open for Interventions

10 October - Saturday

09.00 - 12.30

Tenth General Congregation

Continuation of the General Discussion

18.00

Recitation of the Rosary with the students of the Universities of Rome in the Paul VI Hall

11 October - Sunday

10.00

Holy Mass with Canonization of the Blessed Zygmunt Szezęsny Feliński, Francisco Coll y Guitart, Jozef Damiaan de Veuster, Rafael Arnáiz Barón and Marie de la Croix (Jeanne) Jugan in the Basilica of Saint Peter

12 October - Monday

09.00 -12.30

Eleventh General Congregation

Continuation of the General Discussion

Listening Session of the Auditors (I)

16.30 - 19.00

Twelfth General Congregation

Continuation of the General Discussion

Listening Session of the Auditors (II)

18.00 - 19.00

Open for Interventions

13 October - Tuesday

09.00 - 12.30

Thirteenth General Congregation

Continuation of the General Discussion

Listening Session of the Fraternal Delegates

16.30 - 19.00

Fourteenth General Congregation

PRESENTATION AFTER THE DISCUSSION

18.00 - 19.00

Open for Interventions

14 October - Wednesday

09.00 - 12.30  
Small Groups (Second Session)  
Interventions about the Presentation after the Discussion  
16.30 - 19.00  
Small Groups (Third Session)  
Interventions about the Presentation after the Discussion

15 October - Thursday

09.00 - 12.30  
Fifteenth General Congregation  
Presentation of the Reports by the Small Groups in the Synod Hall  
Open for Interventions  
16.30 - 19.00  
Small Groups (Fourth Session)  
Formulation of the Propositions

17 October - Friday

09.00 - 12.30  
Small Groups (Fifth Session)  
Formulation of the Propositions  
16.30 - 19.00  
Small Groups (Sixth Session)  
Formulation of the Propositions  
19.00  
Handing over the Propositions to the General Secretariate

17 October - Saturday

09.00 - 12.30  
Sixteenth General Congregation  
Election of the Council (I)  
Presentation of the Draft of the Message  
Discussion of the Message

18 October - Sunday

No Congregation  
Unification of the Propositions by the General Relator, the Special Secretaries and Relators of the Small Groups

20 October - Monday

09.00 - 12.30  
No Congregation  
Unification of the Propositions by the General Relator, the Special Secretaries and Relators of the Small Groups  
16.30 - 19.00  
No Congregation  
Unification of the Propositions by the General Relator, the Special Secretaries and Relators of the

## Small Groups

20 October - Tuesday

09.00 - 11.30

Seventieth General Congregation

Presentation of the UNIFIED LIST OF PROPOSITIONS

Election of the Council(II)

11.30 - 12.30

Small Groups (Seventh Session)

Preparation of Collective Amendments to the Propositions

16.30 - 19.00

Small Groups (Eighth Session)

Preparation of Collective Amendments to the Propositions

21 October - Wednesday

09.00 - 12.30

Small Groups (Ninth Session)

Preparation of Collective Amendments to the Propositions

13.00

Handing over the Collective Amendments to the General Secretariat

16.30 - 19.00

No Congregation

Examination of the Collective Amendments to the Propositions by the General Relator with the Special Secretaries and Relators of the Small Groups

22 October - Thursday

09.00 - 12.30

No Congregation

Examination of the Collective Amendments to the Propositions by the General Relator with the Special Secretaries and Relators of the Small Groups

16.30 - 19.00

No Congregation

Examination of the Collective Amendments to the Propositions by the General Relator with the Special Secretaries and Relators of the Small Groups

23 October - Friday

09.00 - 12.30

Eighteenth General Congregation

Presentation and voting on the Message

17.30 - 19.00

Nineteenth General Congregation

Presentation of the FINAL LIST OF PROPOSITIONS

24 October - Saturday

09.00 - 12.30

Twentieth General Congregation

Voting on the Propositions: Placet - Non Placet

13.00

Fraternal meal with the Holy Father

Salutations

25 October - Sunday

09.30

Solemn Concelebration of the Holy Mass in St. Peter's Basilica concluding the Synod

Vatican City, 8 September 2009

+ Nikola Eterović

Titular Archbishop of Sisak

Secretary General

## GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE SYNOD

During the work of Vatican Council II, the Fathers at the Council explored the idea (manifested in the Decrees *Christus Dominus* [N. 5] and *Ad Gentes* [N. 29]) of enlivening the true spirit of collegiality, that is to say the conviction that the Pope, in his work as Universal Shepherd of the Church, could exercise his union with the Bishops, Members of the same episcopal order as the Bishop of Rome, in a more obvious and efficient way.

To achieve this, Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Letter "Motu proprio" *Apostolica sollicitudo*, dated September 15th 1965 (AAS 57 [1865] 775-780), created the Synod of Bishops for the entire Church, the fruit of conciliar experiences, determining the structure and the institutional task: «The Apostolic concern leading Us to carefully survey the signs of the times and to make every effort to adapt the means and methods of the holy apostolate to the changing circumstances and need of our day, impels Us to establish even closer ties with the bishops in order to strengthen Our union with them "whom the Holy Spirit has placed [...] to rule the Church of God" (Acts 20:28)» (Introduction, *Apostolica sollicitudo*). «The Synod of Bishops, whereby bishops chosen from various parts of the world are to offer more effective assistance to the supreme Shepherd, is to be constituted in such a way that it is: a) a central ecclesiastical institution; b) representing the whole Catholic episcopate; c) of its nature perpetual; d) as for structure, carrying out its function for a time and when called upon» (Chapter I, *Apostolica sollicitudo*). «The general purposes of the Synod are: a) to promote a closer union and greater cooperation between the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops of the whole world; b) to see to it that accurate and direct information is supplied on matters and situations that bear upon the internal life of the Church and upon the kind of action that should be carrying on in today's world; c) to facilitate agreement, at least on essential matters of doctrine and on the course of action to be taken in the life of the Church» (Chapter II, *Apostolica sollicitudo*). «Its special and immediate purposes are: a) to provide mutually useful information; b) to discuss the specific business for which the Synod is called into session on any given occasion» (Chapter III, *Apostolica sollicitudo*). «The Synod of Bishops can meet in General Session, in Extraordinary Session, and in Special Session» (Chapter IV, *Apostolica sollicitudo*).

During the Prayer *Angelus Domini*, on September 22nd 1974, Paul VI himself gave the definition of the Synod of Bishops: "It is an ecclesial institute, which we, questioning the signs of the times, and even more so in trying to interpret in depth Divine plans and the constitution of the Catholic Church, have established after Vatican Council II, to promote unity and collaboration between the Bishops of the whole world in this Apostolic See, through the common study of the conditions of the Church and in agreement on the questions pertaining to her mission. It is not a

Council, it is not a Parliament, it is a Synod with a special nature".

The theological foundation of the Synod of Bishops was given by the Servant of God Pope John Paul II, who in the Speech to the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops on April 30th 1983, stated that the Synod of Bishops was the "expression and the very valuable instrument of episcopal collegiality". This is an assembly of the Members of the Catholic Episcopacy, whose job is to aid in advising the Pope on the governing of the Universal Church, as to her safe-keeping, and to increase faith and traditions, to maintain and confirm ecclesial disciplines and to study the problems concerning the Church's activities in the world. This occurs, as confirmed by His Holiness Benedict XVI in the *Meditatio horae tertiae ad ineundos labores XI Coetus Generalis Ordinarii Synodi Episcoporum* (AAS 97 [2005] 951), in an atmosphere of mutual love, reciprocated assistance, also seen as co-sharing, "fraternal correction", consolation, which, inasmuch as the "function of collegiality", are a "great act of true collegial affection". During the fraternal 'agape' at the end of the VII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 30th 1987, held at the *nel Domus Sanctae Marthae* in the Vatican, John Paul II said: "Experiencing the Synod in itself bears something sacred within; something of the mystery of the Church. We may live the reality of the Church, even her 'ethnic' reality, her widespread reality, the spreading of the Word of God, received in many Nations, many cultures, many continents. This all is experienced; we experience the various speakers, their interventions, we live through the experiences of the local churches, very different experiences, sometimes, very painful experiences, other difficult experiences. And thus, from all the Fathers' interventions, and, at times together with the Fathers, even from our lay brothers and sisters, a picture emerges, a vision: A vision of the Church. However, it is not only a vision in the descriptive sense of how the Church lives, the Church as a human reality, ethnic reality, but, at the same time, it is a vision of the Church as mystery. And this is where a point begins, where the experience of the Synod, in being a deeply religious experience, is difficult to pass on to others, to bring it out; it remains, in a certain sense, within the Synod, in ourselves, in those who participated; everybody, everybody and all together confirm it, this experience, and today speak about this experience in the Synod, about this experience of the Church. They speak about it with great joy. It is a new richness that has been given to us, to each of us and to all of us to live like this during the four weeks, experiencing the Church that is the People of God; yes, people of God moving forward, but, in being people of God, it is also the Body of Christ. It is a mystery".

In representing the entire Catholic Episcopacy, the Synod of Bishops shows, in a special way, the spirit of communion that unites the bishops with the Pope and the bishops between themselves. It is the privileged place where the assembly of bishops, subjected directly and immediately to the power of the Pope, manifesting the collegial affection and solicitude of the Episcopacy for the well-being of the entire Church, expresses, under the action of the Spirit, its sure counsel on the various ecclesial problems. By its institution, the Synod of Bishops must provide information, discuss the questions proposed and express votes. These are given to the Supreme Pontiff in the form of Propositiones, so that with the help of the ordinary council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, he may possibly elaborate a post-synodal document for the entire Church. However, the fact that "the Synod is normally a consulting institution does not diminish its importance. In fact, in the Church, the goals of any collegial organ, be it for consultation or deliberation, is always searching for the truth or the good of the Church. When we are dealing with the verification of the same faith, the *Consensus Ecclesiae* is not given by the calculation of the votes, rather, it is the fruit of the action of the Spirit, the soul of the only Church of Christ".

## I. INTRODUCTION TO THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

The Synod of Bishops is a permanent institution established by Pope Paul VI, 15 September 1965, in response to the desire of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to keep alive the positive spirit engendered by the conciliar experience.

Literally speaking the word “synod”, derived from two Greek words *syn* meaning “together” and *hodos* meaning “road” or “way”, means a “coming together”. A Synod is a religious meeting or assembly at which bishops, gathered around and with the Holy Father, have the opportunity to interact with each other and to share information and experiences, in the common pursuit of pastoral solutions which have a universal validity and application. The Synod, generally speaking, can be defined as an assembly of bishops representing the Catholic episcopate, having the task of helping the Pope in the governing of the universal Church by rendering their counsel. Pope John Paul II has referred to the Synod as “a particularly fruitful expression and instrument of the collegiality of bishops” (Speech to the Council of the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 30 April 1983: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 1 May 1983).

Even before the Second Vatican Council the idea was growing for a structure which might provide the bishops with the means to assist the Pope, in some manner to be determined, in his governing of the universal Church.

His Eminence, Silvio Cardinal Oddi, then an Archbishop and Apostolic Pro-Nuncio in the United Arab Republic (Egypt), on 5 November 1959, made a proposal to establish a central governing body of the Church or, to use his words, “a consultative body”. He stated: “From many parts of the world there come complaints that the Church does not have a permanent consultative body, apart from the Roman congregations. Therefore, a kind of ‘Council in miniature’ should be established and include persons from the Church worldwide who would meet periodically, even once a year, to discuss major concerns and to suggest possible new paths in the workings of the Church. This body would extend over the whole Church as the Episcopal Conferences bring together all or part of the hierarchy of a country or countries. Other bodies, like C.E.L.A.M. (the Latin American Episcopal Council), for example, extends its activity for the benefit of the whole continent”.

On 22 December 1959, His Eminence, Cardinal Bernardus Alfrink, Archbishop of Utrecht, wrote: “In clear terms the Council proclaims that the government of the universal Church is by right exercised by the college of bishops with the Pope as its head. From here it follows that, in one sense, the care of the universal Church is the responsibility of every bishop taken singularly, and also, in another sense, that all bishops participate in the governing of the Church worldwide. This can be done not only in calling an Ecumenical Council, but also in the creation of new institutions. Perhaps some permanent Council of specialized bishops, chosen from the Church, could be given the charge of a legislative function in union with the Supreme Pontiff and the cardinals of the Roman Curia. The Roman Congregations would then maintain only a consultative and executive power”.

However, it was Pope Paul VI who gave force to these ideas, while he was still Archbishop of Milan. In a talk commemorating the death of Pope John XXIII, he made reference to an “ongoing collaboration of the episcopate that is not yet in effect, which would remain personal and in union, but given the responsibility of governing the whole Church”. After his election as Pope he kept returning to the concept of collaboration within the Episcopal body - the bishops in union with the successor of Saint Peter - in a talk he gave to the Roman Curia (21 September 1963), at the opening of the second session of the Second Vatican Council (29 September 1963) and again at its closing (4 December 1963).

At the conclusion of a discourse beginning the last session of the Council (14 September 1965), Pope Paul VI himself made public his intention to establish the Synod of Bishops in the following words: “The advanced information that We Ourselves are happy to share with you is that We intend to give you some institution, called for by this Council, a ‘Synod of Bishops’, which will be made up of bishops nominated for the most part by the Episcopal Conferences with our approval and called by the Pope according to the needs of the Church, for his consultation and collaboration, when for the well-being of the Church it might seem to him opportune. It goes without saying that this collaboration of the episcopate ought to bring the greatest joy to the Holy See and to the whole Church. In a particular way it will serve a useful purpose in the daily work

of the Roman Curia, to which We owe so much recognition for its most valuable help, and for which, as bishops in their diocese, We also have permanent need in Our apostolic concerns. News and norms will be made known to this assembly as soon as possible. We did not wish to deprive Ourselves of the honor and pleasure of making you aware of this brief communication so as to personally bear witness once more to Our trust, esteem and fraternity. We place this beautiful and promising innovation under the protection of Mary, the Mother of God”.

On the next day, 15 September 1965 at the beginning of the 128th General Assembly, the then Bishop Pericle Felici, General Secretary of the Council, promulgated the “Motu proprio” *Apostolica sollicitudo* with which the Synod of Bishops was officially instituted.

The principal characteristic of the Synod of Bishops is service to the communion and collegiality of the world’s bishops with the Holy Father. It is not a particular organism with limited competence as that of the Roman Congregations and Councils. Instead, it has full competence to deal with any subject in accordance with the procedure established by the Holy Father in the letter of convocation. The Synod of Bishops with its permanent General Secretariat is not part of the Roman Curia and does not depend on it; it is subject directly and solely to the Holy Father, with whom it is united in the universal government of the Church.

Though the institution of the Synod of Bishops is permanent in character, its actual functioning and concrete collaboration are not. In other words, the Synod of Bishops meets and operates only when the Holy Father considers it necessary or opportune to consult the episcopate, which at a synodal gathering, expresses its “opinion on very important and serious subjects” (Paul VI, Address to Cardinals, 24 June 1967). The task of every synodal Assembly shares in the collegial character which the episcopate can offer to the Holy Father. Through the Holy Father’s acceptance of the advice or the decisions of a given Assembly, the episcopate exercises a collegial activity which approaches but does not equal that manifested at an Ecumenical Council. This is a direct result of various factors: the ensured representation of the whole episcopate, the convocation by the Holy Father and “the unity of the episcopate, which, in order to be one, requires that there be a Head of the College” (John Paul II, *Pastores Gregis*, 56), who is first in the episcopal order.

## II. NOTES ON THE SYNODAL PROCESS

So as to fulfill its mission, the Synod of Bishops works according to a methodology based on collegiality, a concept which characterizes every stage of the synod process from the first steps of preparation to the conclusions reached in each synodal assembly. Briefly stated, the method of work alternates between analysis and synthesis, in consulting interested parties and decisions being made by competent authorities, according to a dynamic of feed-back which permits the continual verification of results and the making of new proposals. Each part of this process takes place within the climate of collegial communion.

Already in the preparatory stage, the topic of the synodal assembly is the result of collegiality.

The first official step in the process is to consult the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, Episcopal Conferences, department heads of the Roman Curia and the Union of Superiors General for suggestions on possible topics for a synod. As a rule, in ordinary general assemblies this consultation is anticipated by an informal solicitation of the synod fathers in the closing days of the synodal assembly for their preference in the matter. However, in each case the bishops are asked to keep in mind the following criteria:

- a) that the topic have a universal character, that is, a reference and application to the whole Church;
- b) that the topic have a contemporary character and urgency, in a positive sense, that is, having the capability of exciting new energies and movement in the Church towards growth;
- c) that the topic have a pastoral focus and application as well as a firm doctrinal basis;
- d) that the topic have a feasibility; in other words, that it have the potential actually to be

accomplished.

The suggestions on a topic - which must include reasons for the choice - are classified, analyzed and studied during a meeting of the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. Afterwards, the Council submits the meeting's results, together with pertinent recommendations, to the Holy Father who makes the final decision on the topic for treatment in the synodal assembly.

At the next meeting, the Council prepares an outline for developing and presenting the synod topic in the document called the Lineamenta. The drafting of this document represents the combined work of the Council members, theologians who have a certain expertise in the material to be treated in the synodal assembly, and the staff of the General Secretariat who coordinate the various efforts. After studying the text and making the necessary revisions, the Council drafts a final version which is submitted to the Holy Father for his approval. The document is then translated into the world's major languages and sent to the Church's episcopate for the purpose of generating at the local level study, discussion and prayer concerning the synod topic.

The Lineamenta from the Latin word meaning "outline" is by its nature very broad in scope and is meant to elicit a broad range of observations and reactions. Though the first and authoritative recipients of the Lineamenta are obviously the bishops and the bishops' conferences, they have full liberty to broaden their basis of consultation. After gathering and summarizing suggestions, reactions and responses to the various aspects of the Lineamenta topic, the bishops prepare a report or official response to the questions proposed in the document, which is then sent to the General Secretariat by a certain date.

After having received the above material, the Council of the General Secretariat - always with the help of specialists on the subject - proceeds to draft another document called the Instrumentum laboris, which will serve as the basis and reference-point during synodal discussion. This "working document", though rendered public, is only a provisional text which will be the object of discussion during the synod. The document is not a draft of the final conclusions but only a text which aims at helping to focus discussion on the synod topic. After subsequent submission and approval by the Holy Father the document is translated into the major languages and sent to the bishops and those members who will participate in the General Assembly. Since 1983 the Instrumentum laboris of a given synodal assembly has been made public so as to receive a wide circulation. The bishop-delegates and members read the document to familiarize themselves with the contents which will then be discussed at the synodal assembly.

As a result of preparation work in the local Churches, based on the above-mentioned documents, i.e., Lineamenta and Instrumentum laboris, the bishops are thereby able to present to the synodal assembly the experiences and aspirations of each community as well as the fruit of the preliminary discussions of the episcopal conferences.

Three phases characterize the Synod's working sessions:

- a. during the first phase, each member makes a presentation of the situation in his particular Church. This encourages an exchange of faith and cultural experiences on the synod topic and contributes an initial picture of the Church situation, which, nevertheless, needs greater development and refinement.
- b. In light of these presentations, the Rapporteur of the Synod formulates a series of points for discussion during the second phase, when all the synod members divide into small groups *circuli minores* - according to the various languages spoken. The reports of each one of these groups are read in the plenary session. At this time, the synod fathers are given the opportunity to pose questions to clarify the subjects expressed and are able to make comments.
- c. In the third phase, work proceeds in the small groups towards formulating suggestions and observations in a more precise and definite form, so that in the final days of the assembly a vote can be taken on concrete propositions. The synod fathers' initial work in the small groups is to compose various propositions on the basis of the discussion in the synod hall and the reports of the small groups. In the small groups, the synod fathers can vote on a proposition with a "placet"

(yes) or "non placet" (no). The propositions of the small groups are then taken by the General Rapporteur and Special Secretary and combined into an Integrated List of Propositions which is presented by the General Rapporteur in plenary session. Afterwards, the small groups again meet to discuss the propositions. At this time, the synod fathers can submit individual amendments for consideration by the group, which will be used in composing the collectively voted upon amendments to the propositions which are expected from each group. The General Rapporteur and the Special Secretary give consideration to these collective amendments and may or may not incorporate them in the final list of propositions, depending on their decision, which, in case of refusal, have to give the basis for their decision in a document called the *Expensio modorum*. The final list of propositions is then presented in plenary session, after which the booklet becomes the ballot where each synod father can vote for or against the proposition.

At the end of a synodal assembly, the General Secretary oversees the work of archiving the material and drafting the report on the work of the synod for submission to the Holy Father. No established norm exists concerning the final document from the synodal assembly. At the conclusion of the first three synodal Assemblies (1967 and 1971 Ordinary General Assemblies and the 1969 Extraordinary General Assembly) the conclusions were submitted to the attention of the Pope with recommendations in response to problems expressed. Instead, after the 1974 Third Ordinary General Assembly the Holy Father himself, taking into account the synodal propositions and final reports, drafted the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*. A similar process was followed in the remaining Ordinary General Synodal Assemblies (1977, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1990, 1994, 2001, 2005), from which the following Apostolic Exhortations are associated respectively, *Catechesi tradendæ*, *Familiaris consortio*, *Reconciliatio et pœnitentia*, *Christifideles laici*, *Pastores dabo vobis*, *Vita consecrata*, *Pastores gregis* and *Sacramentum caritatis*.

At the conclusion of the Special Assembly for Africa (1994), the Holy Father promulgated the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* which bore many positive results in pastoral initiatives on this continent. Subsequent to publishing a document on the impact and implementation of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the level of the local Church, attention was given to the feasibility of a II Special Assembly. On 13 November 2004, Pope John Paul II announced the convocation of a II Special Assembly for Africa, which was later reconfirmed by the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in the Weekly General Audience of 22 June 2005.

In May, 1997, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation for the Special Assembly for Lebanon (1995) was published during a papal trip to Lebanon as part of the celebration phase of the Special Assembly. On 23 January 1999 the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation for the Special Assembly for America was promulgated by the Holy Father in Mexico at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. On 6 November 1999 the Post-Synodal Exhortation for Asia was signed by the Holy Father in Delhi, India.

Since the 1987 Synod, the various Councils of the General Secretariat and the General Secretary have been collegially involved in the process leading to the publication of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, the papal document coming from the synod. It is interesting to note the history and development of these Councils.

Between the second and third synodal Assemblies, an advisory Council for the General Secretariat was formed, made up of 12 elected bishops and 3 papal appointees. Such a Council first met from 12-15 May 1970 and was intended to facilitate communication with episcopal conferences and the formulation of the agenda for the subsequent assembly. After this meeting, a general consultation of the bishops worldwide was begun for suggested topics for future Assemblies (such consultation now begins in the final days of an Ordinary General Assembly).

Since that time the Ordinary Councils of the General Secretariat, elected from each synod in light of preparation for the following one, have become a permanent feature of the General Secretariat:

- Second Ordinary Council (6.11.1971 - 27.09.1974)
- Third Ordinary Council (26.10.1974 - 30.09.1977)

- Fourth Ordinary Council (29.10.1977 - 26.09.1980)
- Fifth Ordinary Council (25.10.1980 - 29.09.1983)
- Sixth Ordinary Council (29.10.1983 - 1.10.1987)
- Seventh Ordinary Council (30.10.1987 - 30.09.1990)
- Eighth Ordinary Council (28.10.1990 - 2.10.1994)
- Ninth Ordinary Council (29.10.1994 - 30.09.2001)
- Tenth Ordinary Council (26.10.2001 - 2.10.2005)
- Eleventh Ordinary Council (15.10.2005 - 5.10.2008)

With the advent of continental or regional synodal assemblies, the Holy Father chose to form during the special assemblies post-synodal councils through election and papal appointment. As a result, in addition to the Ordinary Council, the General Secretariat has in existence the following Post-Synodal Councils from their date of institution. With the revision of the *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum* (2006), these councils are now called “Special Councils”:

- Special Council for the Netherlands (31.01.1980)
- Special Council for Africa (8.05.1994)
- Special Council for Lebanon (14.12.1995)
- Special Council for America (12.12.1997)
- Special Council for Asia (14.05.May 1998)
- Special Council for Oceania (11.12.1998)
- Special Council for Europe (22.10.1999)

Similarly, in the preparation of a Special Assembly, the Holy Father appointed a group of bishops, primarily from the continent and region under consideration, to form pre-synodal Councils. These Councils endured from the date of appointment until the first day of the synodal assembly. Therefore, the following is a listing of past pre-synodal councils along with their dates of existence:

- Pre-Synodal Council for Africa (6.01.1989 - 10.04.1994)
- Pre-Synodal Council for Lebanon (24.01.1992 - 26.11.1995)
- Pre-Synodal Council for America (12.06.1995 - 16.11.1997)
- Pre-Synodal Council for Asia (10.09.1995 - 19.04.1998)
- Pre-Synodal Council for Oceania (7.06.1996 - 22.11.1998)
- Pre-Synodal Council for Europe (9.02.1997 - 1.10.1999)

As can be observed, the collegial methodology is operative from the very beginning (through the choice of topic), during the preparation (through the development of the topic in the *Lineamenta*) and the actual celebration of the Synod Assembly, to the publication of the document, which is the fruit and crowning-point of the synod itself. In this way, it can be said that the synod works as a collegial body through which, in the first stage, the faith and life experiences of the Christian communities are taken into account; later, in plenary sessions, these elements are recapitulated and enlightened by faith and then, in a spirit of communion, propositions are formulated which, from the Holy Father, who is the principle of unity in the Church, return to the particular Churches as the oxygenated blood returns to arteries to vivify the human body.

So that this collegiality can fully realize its potential, it is necessary that a selfless spirit of collaboration exist among all those called upon to participate in the preparation of a synodal Assembly, particularly the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* and the Episcopal Conferences which gather the Pastors of the local Churches where the faith of the People of God is lived and experienced in all its vigor and richness. The principle way in which the collegial participation of the episcopal bodies receives concrete form is in their responses to the *Lineamenta*. The greater the number of episcopal bodies which respond, the more rich and varied will be the elements which, faithfully reflecting the life of the local Churches, constitute true reference points for both the drafting of the *Instrumentum laboris*, and the discussion in the synod hall during a synodal Assembly.

### III. SUMMARY OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLIES

#### 1. I Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 29 September - 29 October 1967

Synod Fathers: 197

Topic: “The Preservation and Strengthening of the Catholic Faith, its Integrity, its Force, its Development, its Doctrinal and Historical Coherence”

Pope Paul VI stated the goals for this First General Assembly: “... the preservation and the strengthening of the Catholic faith, its integrity, its force, its development, its doctrinal and historical coherence”. One result of the meeting was a recommendation by the bishops, in light of the rise of atheism, a crisis of faith and erroneous theological opinions, to set up an international commission of theologians to assist the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as well as to broaden a discussion on approaches to theological research. In 1969 Pope Paul VI established the International Theological Commission.

The Synod also called for a revision of the Code of Canon Law of 1917 in an attempt to make it more pastoral and more contemporary in tone and emphasis. The work was subsequently begun by Pope Paul VI and brought to completion under Pope John Paul II with the promulgation, in 1983, of the revised Code of Canon Law.

The greater role of Episcopal Conferences in the renewal of seminaries and in priestly formation was discussed and proposals submitted to the Pope. Certain procedures relating to mixed marriages, recommended by the Assembly, were approved by the Pope in 1970, and various aspects of liturgical reform were treated, many of which were implemented when the New Order of the Mass was approved and put into effect in 1969.

#### 2. I Extraordinary General Assembly

In Session: 11 October - 28 October 1969

Synod Fathers: 146

Topic: “The Cooperation between the Holy See and the Episcopal Conferences”

This specially convoked General Assembly had as its agenda to seek and examine ways and means of putting into practice the collegiality of bishops with the Pope, a subject which gained much attention in the declarations on the Church formulated at the Second Vatican Council. This meeting opened the door to wider participation by the bishops with the Pope and each other in the pastoral care of the universal Church.

The main emphasis of these sessions involved two basic points: 1. the collegiality of the bishops with the Pope; 2. the relation of Episcopal Conferences to the Pope and to individual bishops. Various recommendations were subsequently submitted to the Pope, three of which received immediate attention: 1. that the Synod meet at regular intervals, every two years (subsequently changed to every 3 years); 2. that the General Secretariat operate between Synodal sessions and organize these meetings; 3. that the bishops be permitted to suggest topics for the future assemblies.

Between the second and third Synodal assemblies, an advisory Council for the General Secretariat was formed made up of 12 elected bishops and 3 papal appointees. Such a Council first met from 12-15 May 1970 and was intended to facilitate communication with episcopal conferences and the formulation of the agenda for the subsequent assembly. After this meeting a general consultation of the bishops worldwide was begun for suggested topics for future assemblies. Such consultation now begins in the final days of a synodal Assembly. Since that

time the Council of the General Secretariat, elected from each Synod in light of preparation for the following Synod, has become a permanent feature of the General Secretariat.

### 3. II Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 30 September - 6 November 1971 (longest to date)

Synod Fathers: 210

Topic: "The Ministerial Priesthood and Justice in the World"

In the course of their discussion the Synod Fathers praised priests worldwide for their dedication in their ministry to Word and Sacrament as well as their pastoral work in the apostolate. At the same time, attention was given to various difficulties experienced by priests in the ministry. In addition, the Synod Fathers treated the subject of justice, stating the need to relate the Gospel to existing worldwide and local circumstances. In response they outlined an 8-point program for international action, and made recommendations that the Church on the local level foster education and ecumenical collaboration in the field of justice.

### 4. III Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 27 September - 26 October 1974

Synod Fathers: 209

Topic: "Evangelization in the Modern World"

At this assembly the Synod Fathers re-emphasized the essential missionary character of the Church and the duty of each member to bear witness to Christ in the world. In this context the popular issue of "liberation" was linked to the work of evangelization in seeking to free peoples and individuals from sin. The Synod Fathers' recommendations and proposals submitted to the Pope, were used in the formulation of the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii nuntiandi" of 8 December 1975.

### 5. IV Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 30 September - 29 October 1977

Synod Fathers: 204

Topic: "Catechesis in our Time"

The discussion of the Synod Fathers, which gave special attention to the catechesis of children and young people, resulted in a series of 34 proposals or "Propositions" and over 900 suggestions regarding the subject. Six general areas were treated in these recommendations: the importance of catechetical renewal, the nature of true catechesis, the persons involved in catechesis, the ongoing need of catechesis for all Christians, the means or channels of catechesis and the special aspects affecting catechesis.

On this occasion the Synod Fathers issued for the first time a Synodal statement entitled A Message to the People of God, in which the Synod Fathers pointed out that Christ is the center of salvation and, therefore, of catechesis. At the same time, they emphasized that all Christians have the responsibility of bringing Christ to the world.

Shortly after the conclusion of this Synod, Pope John Paul II issued the Apostolic Exhortation "Catechesi tradendae" of 17 October 1979, which utilized a great many of the Synod Fathers' insights and proposals.

### 6. Special Assembly for the Netherlands

In Session: 14 - 31 January 1980

Synod Fathers: 19

Topic: "The Pastoral Situation in the Netherlands"

The then-designated "Particular Synod for the Netherlands" or "Dutch Synod" as it was popularly known, is, according to the revised Code of Canon Law (cf. canon 345), subsequently promulgated in 1983, the first Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. This synodal gathering, held in Rome, treated the Vatican II concept of mystery of Church communion and its practical implications, both local and universal, centering on the figure of the bishop as "Teacher of the Faith" and "Pastor of Souls", both in his diocese and in the Episcopal Conference. At its conclusion the assembly adopted resolutions pertaining to the ministerial priesthood, religious life, the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church, the sacraments, the Eucharist and Confession, liturgy, catechesis and ecumenism, all based on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. A specially-formed Council instituted at the end of this synodal assembly periodically meets with the General Secretariat to continue to assess the pastoral situation and to promote the implementation of the Synod resolutions. Though technically still in existence, this Council has not had a meeting since 10-11 November 1995.

#### 7. V Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 26 September - 25 October 1980

Synod Fathers: 216

Topic: "The Christian Family"

A reaffirmation of the Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage and the contents of the encyclical *Humanae vitae* was central to the work of this Synod. In the course of their work the Synod Fathers produced a written message entitled, *A Message to Christian Families in the Modern World*, and proposed a Charter for the Rights of the Family which Pope John Paul II subsequently acted upon, on 22 October 1983. From the discussion and proposals of the assembly the Pope issued the Apostolic Exhortation "*Familiaris consortio*" of 22 November 1981.

#### 8. VI Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 29 September - 29 October 1983

Synod Fathers: 221

Topic: "Penance and Reconciliation in the Mission of the Church"

The synodal assembly and theme coincided with the "extraordinary" Holy Year proclaimed by the Holy Father to commemorate the 1950th year of the Redemption of the World through the Death of Christ. At this time the Synod Fathers discussed related matters, emphasizing the need of applying the fruits of Christ's redemption to a person's life and, as a result, to society. In a statement issued by the assembly the Synod Fathers called the world to "reconciliation" and proclaimed "the Church as a Sacrament of reconciliation and a sign of the mercy of God toward the sinner". The Synod Fathers' work during the Synod served as the basis for the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Reconciliatio et paenitentia*" of 2 December 1984, which for the first time was designated as a "Post-Synodal" document.

#### 9. II Extraordinary General Assembly

In Session: 24 November - 8 December 1985

Synod Fathers: 165

Topic: "The Twentieth Anniversary of the Conclusion of the Second Vatican Council"

Specially convened by Pope John Paul II (cf. canon 345), the purpose of this synodal assembly was to commemorate the occurrence of the Second Vatican Council and to assess the state of Church renewal. According to statute the Synod brought together all the presidents of the over 100 Episcopal Conferences worldwide and various other persons. The discussions centered on the documents of the Second Vatican Council and their implementation in the Church around the world. At this session the Synod Fathers produced a Final Report (*Relatio finalis*), issued at the closing session, along with a Nuntius or Message to the People of God. Responding to the proposal from the Synod Fathers at this assembly, the Holy Father authorized the compilation and publication of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, released in 1992. At the same time, it "... called for a fuller and more profound study of the theological and, consequently, the juridical status of episcopal Conferences, and above all of the issue of their doctrinal authority, in light of no. 38 of the conciliar Decree *Christus Dominus* and canons 447 and 753 of the Code of Canon Law (Final Report, II, C, 8, b)," which was addressed in John Paul II's Apostolic Letter "*Motu proprio*" on the Theological and Juridical Nature of Episcopal Conferences (21 May 1998), 7.

#### 10. VII Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 1 - 30 October 1987

Synod Fathers: 232

Topic: "The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World"

Through a consideration of the concepts of vocation ("being") and mission ("doing") in the Vatican II context of Church communion, the Synod Fathers sought to emphasize the distinctive nature of the lay faithful in the Church's life, in their sharing or communion in holiness and the Church's work of evangelization in the world, in virtue of their secular character. Because of the topic, this Synod witnessed a significant presence of lay persons as Auditors, who were called upon to address the general assembly and share insights in the Small Groups. For the first time, a lay woman and man were appointed as Adjunct Special Secretaries. The information resulting from this Synod, particularly the 54 propositions of the General Assembly, were used in the formulation of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Christifideles laici*" of 30 December 1988.

#### 11. VIII Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 30 September - 28 October 1990

Synod Fathers: 238

Topic: "The Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day"

Taking into consideration the work of the Second Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (1971) which gave a theological treatment to the priesthood and its implications in the priestly ministry, this Synod was more pastoral in tone, centering upon priestly formation and the "person" of the priest himself, both religious and diocesan, before and after ordination. Notable in the sessions was the general accord of the Synod Fathers in their discussion and treatment of the subject. At the Synod's conclusion the Synod Fathers offered 41 propositions to the Holy Father which were used, along with other information resulting from the Synod process, in the preparation of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Pastores dabo vobis*" of 25 March 1992. On 25 October, during the 28th Congregation, His Excellency Most Rev. Emilio Eid, Auxiliary

Bishop of Sarepta of the Maronites and Vice-President of the Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches gave a presentation on the revised Code and distributed a copy to the Synod Fathers and other participants.

## 12. I Special Assembly for Europe

In Session: 28 November - 14 December 1991

Synod Fathers: 137

Topic: "So That We Might Be Witnesses of Christ Who Has Set Us Free"

On 22 April 1990 during an Apostolic Visit to Velehrad, Czechoslovakia, the site of the tomb of St. Methodius, co-patron of Europe with Saints Cyril and Benedict, the Holy Father announced his desire to convoke a Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops so as to discern the kairos of the situation created by the great changes taking place in Europe and to consider the role of the Church in the efforts on the continent towards renewal and reconstruction. The special nature of the Synod and its brief preparation period required various modifications to Synod procedure, e.g., instead of the *Lineamenta* and *Instrumentum laboris* documents, a brief guide to reflection (*Itinerarium*) and a synopsis (*Summarium*) were prepared; special criteria were devised for episcopal delegates so as also to give substantial representation bishops from Central and Eastern Europe, etc. One of the noteworthy events in the preparation was a pre-Synodal symposium sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Culture which gathered intellectuals from both eastern and western Europe in a common reflection on the Synod topic. Likewise, representatives from the Orthodox Church and major Christian communities in Europe were invited in a spirit of ecumenism to participate for the first time in a synodal Assembly as "fraternal delegates". The work of the special assembly culminated in the publication of a *Declaratio* (Statement), in which the Synod Fathers outlined a program for the new evangelization of Europe and made an appeal for universal solidarity among all European citizens. Subsequently, a group of members from the special assembly was appointed to devise ways of implementing the conclusions of the Declaration through a strengthening of the *Concilium Conferentiarum Episcopaliu Europae* (CCEE) in light of the present circumstances.

## 13. I Special Assembly for Africa

In Session: 10 April - 8 May 1994

Synod Fathers: 242

Topic: "The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: 'You Shall Be My Witnesses' (Acts 1, 8)"

On 6 January 1989 the Holy Father announced his intention to convene this Special Assembly and appointed a Pre-Preparatory Commission, made up primarily of members of the African episcopate. The following June, this group was expanded to constitute the Council of the General Secretariat, and entrusted with helping prepare for the synodal Assembly. In conjunction with the meeting of representatives of the African episcopate in Lomé, Togo, July, 1990, the *Lineamenta* document "outlining" the Synod topic was published, beginning a period of prayerful reflection on the local level. The responses from the local Churches were used in formulating the Special Assembly's "working paper" or *Instrumentum laboris*, released during the Holy Father's Ninth Pastoral Visit to Africa, Kampala (Uganda), February, 1993.

With this document as a point of reference, the Synod Fathers discussed in the month long session the general topic of evangelization from the following perspectives: 1. Proclamation of the Message; 2. Inculturation; 3. Dialogue; 4. Justice and Peace; 5. Means of Social Communication. In addition to the lively and in-depth discussion of the topic during the various

phases of Synodal activity, a highlight of the Special Assembly were the opening and closing ceremonies which incorporated many elements from liturgical traditions in Africa.

The resulting documentation includes a lengthy Message to the People of God, released at the conclusion of the Special Assembly, and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Ecclesia in Africa” of 14 September 1995, signed and presented to the Church in conjunction with the Synodal visit to Africa by the Holy Father, 14-20 September 1995, for the Special Assembly’s celebration phase.

#### 14. IX Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 2 - 29 October 1994

Synod Fathers: 245

Topic: “The Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World”

On 30 December 1991, the Holy Father announced the convocation of a synodal Assembly to consider the topic of consecrated life. Some saw it as a logical completion of the treatment of the states of life in the Church begun in the previous two Ordinary Assemblies on the laity and the priesthood respectively. The period of prayer and reflection prior to the synodal Assembly was particularly fruitful, eliciting a widespread exchange not simply within the institutes of consecrated life and the societies of apostolic life, but also within national and international bodies, not to mention various individual and group initiatives with the Church’s hierarchy and various departments of the Roman Curia. The Synod Fathers touched on a vast number of subjects associated with the topic and listened attentively to the many interventions made by the great number of auditors. Particularly noteworthy during this Synodal gathering was the number of Synod Fathers members from religious congregations, the appointment of a woman and man religious as Adjunct Special Secretaries, as well as the significantly increased number of women and men from the consecrated life as Experts and Auditors. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Vita consecrata” was published on 25 March 1996.

#### 15. Special Assembly for Lebanon

In Session: 26 November - 14 December 1995

Synod Fathers: 69

Topic: “Christ is Our Hope: Renewed by His Spirit, in Solidarity We Bear Witness to His Love”

Because of the particular needs of the Church in Lebanon created by the prolonged situation of war, the Holy Father announced on 6 June 1991 his intention to convoke a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Lebanon. After subsequent initial meetings with the Patriarchs of the Oriental Churches in Lebanon, a ten-member Council, representing the 6 sui juris Catholic Churches in Lebanon, was appointed in January, 1992 to render assistance in the required preparatory work. At the same time, a Lebanese bishop was also designated as an on-site coordinator.

The Lineamenta of the Special Assembly was made public on 13 March 1993, beginning the phase of prayer and reflection on the Synod topic by the local dioceses and various Church bodies in Lebanon, a period which lasted until 1 November 94. The responses to the Lineamenta were incorporated in the Instrumentum laboris, the Special Assembly’s working document, which served as the point of reference during the synodal Assembly. On 12 December, an annotated version of the Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches, published under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, was distributed to the synod fathers.

On 10 May 1997 the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Une Espérance nouvelle pour le

Liban” (“A New Hope for Lebanon”), was published during a papal visit to Lebanon for the celebration phase of the Special Assembly. An Arab translation of the document, prepared by the Assembly of Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon (A.P.E.C.L.), was subsequently published in 1998. The Post-Synodal Council, resulting from this special assembly, continues to hold meetings to evaluate the impact and implementation of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation in Lebanon. In this regard, a report was prepared and mailed in 2003 to the hierarchy of Lebanon, the heads of the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the Patriarchs, Major Archbishops and Metropolitans of the Eastern Churches sui iuris, the presidents of the episcopal conferences worldwide and other interested parties. Since then, the Special Council has met periodically to assess the situation in Lebanon.

## 16. Special Assembly for America

In Session: 16 November - 12 December 1997

Synod Fathers: 233

Topic: “Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: the Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America”

In the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, the Holy Father made known his desire to continue the Synodal movement on the continental level, beginning with the Special Assemblies for Europe (1991) and Africa (1994), and to convene special Synodal assemblies, including the Special Assembly for America, as part of the program leading to the celebration of the Jubilee Year 2000. On 12 June 1995, a Pre-Synodal Council was appointed to collaborate in the preparations of the special assembly. With its assistance, the *Lineamenta* was published on 3 September 1996 and the *Instrumentum laboris* on 10 September 1997.

During the assembly, the Synod Fathers took into consideration the various features of Church life and society on the American continent and sought the best ways and means of allowing the people of America to encounter Jesus Christ. In this regard, they discussed the relation between the Gospel and culture and the main concepts of conversion, communion and solidarity in meeting the great challenges of contemporary society on the continent. At the conclusion of the special assembly the Synod Fathers published the customary Nuntius or “Message to the People of God”.

A Post-Synodal Council, elected during the assembly, met on various occasions to evaluate the results of the Synod and to offer assistance to the Holy Father in drafting the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “*Ecclesia in America*” of 22 January 1999, which was promulgated by the Holy Father, 23 January 1999, during the celebration phase of the special assembly in Mexico City, Mexico. On the following day, many Synodal participants from all parts of the continent were present for the Eucharistic Liturgy celebrated in the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Subsequently, the Post-Synodal Council has met at various times to evaluate the implementation of the document and to offer encouragement to the bishops in their initiatives on the continent in response to the post-Synodal document. In 2002, a Report in this matter was prepared and sent to each member of the hierarchy in America, the heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the Patriarchs, Major Archbishops and Metropolitans of the Eastern Churches sui iuris, the presidents of the episcopal conferences worldwide and other interested parties. The Special Council meets periodically to continue to discuss the priority issues on the continent set forth in the Report.

## 17. Special Assembly for Asia

In Session: 19 April - 14 May 1998

Synod Fathers: 191

Topic: “Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: ‘...That They May

Have Life, and Have it Abundantly' (Jn 10,10)''

In the Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, the Holy Father announced his intention to call special synodal assemblies on the continental level as part of the preparatory program leading to the Jubilee Year 2000. On 10 September 1995, the Holy Father established the Pre-Synodal Council for the Special Assembly for Asia made up primarily of cardinals, archbishops and bishops from Asia. Part of their task was to assist the General Secretariat in the drafting of the *Lineamenta* released on 3 September 1996 and the *Instrumentum laboris* published on 13 February 1998.

During the Special Assembly, the Synod Fathers, keeping in mind that the Church is a small but vibrant flock on a Asian continent where the Great Religions of the World are present, focused their attention on the uniqueness of the person of Jesus as Savior and His gift of abundant life in the context of the Church's program of a new evangelization. Of particular concern was how the Church, in a concrete pastoral plan, can continue the Lord's mission of love and service in Asia. At the conclusion, the Synod Fathers published a *Nuntius* or Message to the People of God which treated various points of the Synodal topic.

A Post-Synodal Council resulted from the synodal assembly. Subsequently having met at various intervals in the wake of the assembly, this Council offered assistance in analyzing the special assembly's recommendations and contributed to the drafting of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Ecclesia in Asia*", which was signed by the Holy Father on 6 November 1999 in the Sacred Heart Cathedral, during the Synod's celebration phase, 5-8 November 1999, in New Delhi, India. Since that time, the Post-Synodal Council had met periodically to evaluate the distribution and implementation of the document in the Church in Asia. In 2002, a report was prepared and mailed to each member of the hierarchy on the Asian continent, the heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the Patriarchs, Major Archbishops and Metropolitans of the Eastern Churches *sui iuris*, the presidents of the episcopal conferences worldwide and other interested parties.

The Special Council continues to meet periodically to continue to discuss the priority issues on the continent set forth in the report.

#### 18. Special Assembly for Oceania

In Session: 22 November - 12 December 1998

Synod Fathers: 117

Topic: "Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania: Walking His Way, Telling His Truth, Living His Life"

The Special Assembly for Oceania was the third continental or regional synodal assembly to be held in the series announced by the Holy Father in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* as part of the preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000. On 7 June 1996 the Holy Father appointed the Pre-Synodal Council made up primarily of bishops from Oceania. In a series of meetings held in Rome and Wellington, New Zealand, this Council offered assistance in drafting the *Lineamenta*, establishing criteria for participation, and finalizing the *Instrumentum Laboris*. A unique feature of this synodal Assembly was the fact that all bishops of the region were to participate as *ex officio* members. To ease travel difficulties and limit the absence of the bishops from their local Churches, arrangements were made to hold the customary *ad limina* visits in conjunction with the special assembly. Despite the great difference in pastoral situations in the region, many common concerns emerged in the course of Synod work, e.g., inculturation of the Gospel, renewed attention to catechetics and formation, the revitalization of the faith of believers, pastoral care of youth, migrants and native peoples, etc., all of which converged in a concentration on the person of Christ, the way, the truth and the life.

On 11 December, the members of the Special Assembly elected a Post-Synodal Council, to which the Holy Father appointed three members. This Council held a number of meetings to discuss the outcome of the special assembly and to offer assistance to the Holy Father in drafting the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Ecclesia in Oceania”, promulgated 22 November 2001 at an important, historic ceremony in the Vatican during which the document was simultaneously transmitted on the internet to all the dioceses of the region. Ecclesia in Oceania thus became the first papal document to be transmitted by internet in the computer age.

In 2003, the Post-Synodal Council met to begin the process of evaluating the impact and implementation of Ecclesia in Oceania in the region, resulting in a report which was sent to the Bishops in Oceania and shared with the Universal Church in 2006. At its February meeting in 2008, the Council members made the decision to hold its next meeting in Australia, in conjunction with the Plenary Assembly of the Federation of the Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania in May, 2010.

## 19. II Special Assembly for Europe

In Session: 1 - 23 October 1999

Synod Fathers: 117

Topic: “Jesus Christ, Alive in His Church, Source of Hope for Europe”

The Second Special Assembly for Europe was the last in the series of continental Synodal assemblies which were convoked by the Holy Father in his Apostolic Letter Tertio millennio adveniente as part of the preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000. Notwithstanding the fact that the First Special Assembly for Europe took place in 1991, less than a decade ago, new social and cultural situations, existent on the continent in the wake of political changes in the East, have created pastoral challenges which make particularly opportune the convocation of a Second Special Assembly for Europe.

On 9 February 1997 the Holy Father appointed the Pre-Synodal Council to assist in the preparation of this synodal assembly, which, with the help of theologians from Europe and the staff of the General Secretariat, published the Lineamenta (Spring, 1998) and the Instrumentum Laboris (21 June 1999) of the Special Assembly.

In the course of the Second Special Assembly, the Synod Fathers gave attention to the various realities in the Church in Europe and the particular historic moment in the project towards unifying the continent. The topic of Jesus Christ, alive in his Church, dominated the synodal discussion on the cultural roots of the continent, while, at the same time, serving as the source of hope in the building of a new Europe on the foundation of faith.

The Post-Synodal Council, elected during the Assembly, held various meetings to analyze the outcome of the synod and to contribute to the drafting of the Holy Father’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Ecclesia in Europa” which was promulgated in the Vatican, 28 June 2003, during Evening Prayer beginning the Solemnity of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

Subsequently the Post-Synodal Council, to evaluate the impact and implementation of Ecclesia in Europa in the continent, drafted a questionnaire which was sent to the episcopal conferences and continental organizations in Europe. The responses to this questionnaire were used to evaluate some aspects of the Church’s mission in Europe.

## 20. X Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 30 September - 27 October 2001

Synod Fathers: 247

Topic: “The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World”

In preparation for the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly, the Ninth Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat, in a series of periodic meetings assisted in the consultation process to determine the Synodal topic and collaborated in the composition of the Lineamenta which was sent on 16 June 1998 to the bishops throughout the world and those customarily contacted for official responses. The responses were subsequently analyzed and included in the Council's work of drafting the Instrumentum laboris which was released on 1 June 2001.

During the synodal assembly the Synod Fathers focused on the person and role of the bishop in his diocese at the beginning of the Third Millennium.

On 26 October 2001, the synodal assembly elected members to the Tenth Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat to which the Holy Father appointed three members. In subsequent meetings, this Council analyzed the material which came from the synod process, especially the synod's Propositiones, so as to offer assistance to the Holy Father in his drafting the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Pastores Gregis", promulgated 16 October 2003, in conjunction with the 25th Anniversary of the Holy Father's election.

## 21. XI Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 2 - 23 October 2005

Synod Fathers: 258

Topic: The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church

On 29 November 2003, taking into consideration the opinion of the members of the Tenth Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, based on the consultation of the episcopal conferences worldwide and the other parties concerned, Pope John Paul II decided to convoke the Eleventh Ordinary General Assembly to treat the topic of the Eucharist. That the Pope's choice came briefly after the publication of his encyclical on the same subject deserves attention. This synodal assembly was convoked to provide the Pope with the pastoral reflections of the world's bishops on a subject vital to the life and mission of the Church.

The Lineamenta, composed by the Tenth Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat with the assistance of theologians, was sent to the episcopal conferences, the Eastern Churches sui iuris, the heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the Union of Superiors General and other concerned parties on 31 March 2004. At a subsequent meeting the Council analyzed the responses to the questions in the Lineamenta and, again with the help of experts, drafted the Instrumentum Laboris, which was made public on 7 July 2005.

After his election, Pope Benedict XVI reconfirmed the dates of the synodal assembly and, at the same time, approved the following innovations in synodal procedure: a reduction of the length of the synodal assembly to three weeks; an hour of open discussion, during the intervention phase, at the conclusion of the evening plenary sessions; an electronic vote by the members - in addition to the customary written ballot - on the Propositiones or synodal recommendations; and the release to the public pro hoc vice of an Italian translation of the Propositiones.

A special session was held to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, during which various synod fathers spoke on the theological, juridical and historical aspects of the synod. Subsequently, these presentations, along with reference material on synodal assemblies, were published in a book entitled *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi: 40 Anni di Storia* ("The Synod of Bishops: 40 Years of History") by the Lateran University Press.

The official documentation resulting from this synodal assembly includes a Message to the People of God (Nuntius), composed during the assembly and approved by the Synod Fathers, and the Holy Father's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Sacramentum Caritatis" of 22 February 2007.

## 22. XII Ordinary General Assembly

In Session: 5 - 26 October 2008

Synod Fathers: 253

Topic: The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church

On 6 October 2006, Pope Benedict XVI announced his decision to convoke the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly to treat the topic of “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church”. This Synod was intended to be in continuity with the 2005 Synod on the Eucharist and to set forth the intrinsic connection between the Eucharist and the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church.

In its preparation phase, the Council members, with the assistance of experts, drafted the customary Lineamenta, released on 27 April 2007, which gave preliminary guidelines on the topic and contained a series of questions for discussion and prayer at the local level. At later meetings the Council analyzed the responses to the questions in the Lineamenta, submitted to the General Secretariat, along with observations submitted by various groups and individuals, and drafted the Instrumentum laboris, which was made public on 12 June 2008.

This synod assembly was the first to take place after the revision of the Ordo Synodi Episcoporum, approved by the Holy Father on 29 September 2006, acceding to the counsel of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops on the opportuneness of updating the statutes to conform to the present Code of Canon Law and The Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches.

A distinctive feature of this synodal assembly was its occurrence during the Pauline Year, beginning 29 June 2008. In commemoration, the opening liturgy of the synod was celebrated in the Papal Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. At the same time, given the topic under discussion, a Rabbi was invited for the first time to address the synod fathers and participants. This synodal assembly equally witnessed for the first time the presence of His Holiness, Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, who addressed the synod participants during a Vespers Service in the Sistine Chapel.

As at the Eleventh Ordinary General Assembly, the 55 Propositiones, resulting from the collegial work of the Synod Fathers, were released to the public pro hoc vice in an Italian translation. At the synod’s conclusion, the members also issued a Message to the People of God (Nuntius). At present, the Church is eagerly awaiting the publication of the Holy Father’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, which will present the richness of reflection and discussion, not simply at the synodal assembly but throughout the synod process.

## 23. II Special Assembly for Africa

In Session: 4 - 25 October 2009

Topic: The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: “You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world” (Mt 5: 13, 14)

The Special Council for Africa, since its formation at the I Special Assembly (1994), has provided assistance to the General Secretariat in various ways. Subsequent to its work of drafting an a report on the impact and implementation of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Ecclesia in Africa” in the local Churches in Africa, the Council investigated the feasibility of a II Special Assembly. On 13 November 2004, during the Symposium of the Bishops of Africa and Europe, held in Rome, Pope John Paul II, “welcoming the desire of the Special Council for Africa” and responding to “the hopes of the African pastors,” announced the convocation of the Second Special Assembly for Africa. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in his weekly General Audience on 22 June 2005, reconfirmed this decision.

Subsequent to the initial announcement of a II Special Assembly and in collaboration with the Special Council for Africa, the Holy Father formulated the synod topic: “The Church in Africa in

Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. ‘You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world’ (Mt 5: 13, 14)”. With the assistance of experts, the Council then proceeded to draft the Lineamenta, presenting the topic and containing a series of questions for discussion and prayer on the local level. After being made public on 27 June 2006, the document was sent to the Church in Africa, where it was widely distributed and enthusiastically received. Responses to the Questions were sent to the General Secretariat for use in drafting the Instrumentum laboris, the document containing the agenda for the synodal assembly, which was made public on 13 June 2009.

The Special Council for Africa, given the nature of a continental assembly and to ensure maximum engagement of the members, devised special criteria for participation, which, after having received papal approval, were used by the Episcopal Conferences in Africa in electing members to the special assembly, in addition to those who participating by reason of their office and by papal appointment.

### PRAYER FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE SYNOD

In preparing for the Synodal Assise, the Holy Father Benedict XVI invited the African faithful to join in the prayer to the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Africa, which concludes the Lineamenta and the Instrumentum laboris, to help bettering the preparation and a joyful outcome of the synodal workings.

This is the first time the Holy Father asks for participation in a prayer towards this goal. It was recited by all the particular Churches, in the parishes, in the institutes for consecrated life and in all communities on the African continent.

The faithful's choral prayer will most surely be most fruitful in communion and spiritual support of the apostolic tasks of the Synodal Fathers, thus becoming a source of plentiful blessings from the One and Trine God for the work of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, Protectress of Africa,  
You have given to the world the true Light, Jesus Christ.  
Through your obedience to the Father and the grace of the Holy Spirit  
You have given us the source of our reconciliation and our justice,  
Jesus Christ, our peace and our joy.

Mother of Tenderness and Wisdom,  
Show us Jesus, your Son and the Son of God  
Guide our path of conversion  
So that Jesus might shine his glory on us  
In every aspect of our personal, familial and social lives.

Mother, full of Mercy and Justice,  
Through your docility to the Spirit, the Counselor,  
Obtain for us the grace to be witnesses of the Risen Lord,  
So that we will increasingly become  
The salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Mother of Perpetual Help,  
We entrust to your maternal intercession  
the preparation and fruits of the Second Special Assembly for Africa.  
Queen of Peace, pray for us!  
Our Lady of Africa, pray for us!

## THE SYNOD CHAPEL

The design and furnishings of the synod chapel are meant to communicate and celebrate the theological concepts of communion and collegiality underlying the Synod of Bishops which meets in assembly, *cum Petro et sub Petro*. Therefore, the episcopal college figures greatly in the artistic design and appointments of the chapel, drawing particular inspiration from two major Biblical passages, Acts 2:1-4 and John 20:19-29, which both treat the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the apostles gathered together.

Though the Church was mystically begotten at the crucifixion of Christ, coming forth, as St. Augustine mentions, like the new Eve from the side of the New Adam, the Church has consistently taught that the Church's initial venture into the world was accomplished on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended in tongues of fire upon the apostles, gathered with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in the Upper Room or Cenacle. Since this is a particularly powerful event in the life of the episcopal college as a group, and thereby the Church, the design of the chapel wishes to re-create visually the experience of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-4).

The oval stained glass window in the ceiling portrays the Holy Spirit as a dove on a triangular golden field to recall the Blessed Trinity, the source of communion in the episcopate and in the Church as a whole. The movement of the glass in various tones of red, yellow and orange highlights the outpouring of the Spirit in tongues of fire which made the apostles eloquent witnesses to Christ. Fire's property of light and heat also corresponds to enlightenment (wisdom) and strength (zeal), elements which characterised the mission of Peter and the apostles. The Holy Spirit continues as the dynamic force in the pastoral mission of the Pope and the episcopal college, particularly in the celebration of the synod.

According to Biblical evidence, the Cenacle or Upper Room, the site of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as seen above, was also the room in which Jesus celebrated the Passover meal at which he instituted the Sacraments of the Priesthood and the Eucharist. The setting of the Cenacle, therefore, becomes symbolic not only of the shared episcopal dignity but the principle of its unity. These concepts of communion and collegiality are communicated in the furnishings positioned directly beneath the Holy Spirit window: a central kneeler recalls the Holy Father, Successor of St. Peter, surrounded by benches and kneelers to symbolize the eleven remaining apostles. The configuration of the chairs in an oval as opposed to a standard consecutive "line-up" of benches or chairs, beginning at the entrance and sweeping towards the front of the chapel, assists in highlighting the unitive action of the college gathered "in and around Peter." At the same time, all - including the spectator - are drawn to the altar and tabernacle towards an encounter with the mystical Christ, present in the Eucharist, who, in the Easter apparition to the episcopal college, recorded by St. John, stands in the midst of the college, and "breathes forth" or imparts his Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 20: 19-29), giving them authority and power as bishops. The two bronze statues of Sts. Peter and Paul, in the niches at the rear of the chapel, are symbolic of the universality of the Church and the vocation of the episcopate.

The above theme is reinforced in the artwork on the glass door at the chapel's entrance: a central mitre bearing the apostolic keys to signify Peter, surrounded by eleven mitres, as if to announce the chapel's theme. The mitres are drawn together in a circle to indicate their unity as a college through the gift of Trinitarian communion.

To continue the theme of the collegiality and communion of the apostolic college, the altar is suggestive of the prow of a boat, turning up waves. The New Testament contains many passages in which a boat provides the setting for significant experiences for the apostles as a group or college.

- After Jesus calms the winds and the sea, the apostles, gathered in a boat, first receive the revelation that Jesus is more than a mere man. They marvel, "Who then is this, that he commands even wind and water, and sea obey him?" (cf. Matt 8:23-27; Lk 8:22-25; Mk 4:37-41).

- Jesus has the apostles get into a boat so that he can be alone with them to teach them (cf. Mk

6:32).

- Following the multiplication of the loaves and fish, Jesus sends the apostles out in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Even though the Lord spends the night in prayer on the hilltop, the apostles are never out of his sight. As a storm arises, Jesus approaches them walking on the water with the words, "It is I; do not be afraid." After they take him into the boat, it immediately reaches land and the apostles remain perplexed, because - as Mark recounts - they did not understand the significance of the multiplication of the loaves and fish (cf. Jn 6:16-21; Matt 14: 22-27; Mk 6:45).

The boat has special meaning not just for the apostolic college but for the person of Peter.

- In the series of Easter apparitions, it is from Peter's boat that the apostles (Peter, James, John, Thomas, Bartholomew, and two others), after catching a huge draught of fish, recognize the Risen Christ along the seashore (cf. Jn 21:1-8).

- Jesus preaches from a boat, presumably Peter's, to the crowd of people on the shore (cf. Matt 13:2; Mk 3:9; 4:1).

- Peter's faith is confirmed by Christ, in front of the other apostles, after Christ bids him to walk towards Him on the water. In the wake of this incident, the apostles worship the Lord and exclaim, "Truly you are the Son of God" (cf. Matt 14:28-33).

- In another post-Resurrection episode, it is from Peter's boat that the apostles lower their nets, at Jesus' request, and catch the miraculous draught of fish. Peter then is the one who drags the net ashore full of fish (cf. Jn 21: 4-11), symbolic of the Church.

In addition to the above associations, a boat also has Eucharistic significance in relation to the apostolic college and thus reinforces the use of this symbol as the base of the altar of reservation of the Blessed Sacrament.

- After the multiplication of the loaves and fish, Jesus sets out with his apostles in a boat, during which he relates his discourse "on the leaven of the Pharisees" (Matt 16: 5-12; Mk 8:14).

- A particularly significant biblical reference to the Eucharist comes from Mark's gospel.

Following the multiplication of the loaves and fish, a prefigurement of the Eucharist, the scriptures say that the apostles did not bring any bread with them, just "one loaf" (cf. Mk 8:14). The implication is that Jesus is the "one loaf" or Bread from heaven. In this instance, Jesus seeks to draw out of them the meaning of the miracle of the loaves and fish as well as his words and teaching on the Eucharist at this miraculous event.

The boat is also used as the symbol of the entire Church, oftentimes referred to as the "Bark of Peter." In this sense, the crucifix conveniently completes the mast to Peter's humble fishing boat. The movement of the sculpture, including the shroud-like pieces of cloth in the rear - a hearkening to the shroud and resurrection - is a further association with the work of the Holy Spirit, who provides the "wind" for the sails of Peter's Bark, always moving the Church ahead in time towards the Lord, in fulfilment of the promise.

The simple bronze tabernacle bears the customary shafts of wheat and grapes for the Eucharist. Fish, indicative of Peter the fisherman and the mission of the apostles as "fishers of men" (Matt 4:19; Mk 1:17) are also on the tabernacle, candlesticks and sanctuary lamp. The fish is also the ancient symbol of Christ, drawn by using the Greek word, ΙΧΘΥΣ, meaning fish, as an acronym for the phrase: "Jesus Christ, Son of God Saviour".

The Stations of the Cross, crafted in mother-of-pearl in Palestine, recall the following of Christ, the vocation which the bishops share with every Christian in the Church.

The Marian statue, entitled Our Lady of Hope, is reminiscent of Our Lady's presence with the Apostles gathered in prayer in the Cenacle. She extends her hand to marvel at the wonder of God's grace, to welcome the flame of the love of the Holy Spirit and to allow it to bear fruit. As true handmaiden and servant of the Lord and His Gospel and image of the Church who mystically brings forth children, Mary is the Mother of the Apostles and their successors. In effect, the apostles, gathered around Mary in the Upper Room, look at her as if into a mirror, a mirror in which they see themselves as Church, the "Bride of Christ".

## NOTICES

- PRESS CONFERENCE
- BRIEFING
- POOL
- BULLETIN SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM
- LIVE TV COVERAGE
- TELEPHONE NEWS-BULLETIN
- OPENING HOURS OF THE PRESS OFFICE OF THE HOLY SEE

### PRESS CONFERENCE

The first Press Conference on the Synod works (with simultaneous translations in Italian, English, French, Spanish and Portuguese) will be held in the John Paul II Hall of the Holy See Press office on Monday 5 October 2009 (following the Relatio ante disceptationem) at about 12.45 pm. Speakers:

- H. Em. Card. Peter Kodwo Appiah TURKSON, Archbishop of Cape Coast (GHANA), Relator General
- H. Exc. Mons. Odon Marie Arsène RAZANAKOLONA, Archbishop of Tananarive (MADAGASCAR)
- Rev. Federico LOMBARDI, S.I., Director of the Holy See Press Office, Ex-officio Secretary of Commission for Information (VATICAN CITY)

For the access permit, audio-visual operators (cameramen and technicians) and photoreporters are requested to apply to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.

The names of the participants will be communicated as soon as possible.

The next Press Conferences will be held on:

- Wednesday 14 October 2009 (following the Relatio post disceptationem)
- Friday 23 October 2009 (following the Nuntius)
- Saturday 24 October 2009 (following the Elenchus finalis propositionum)

### “BRIEFING”

In order to provide more accurate information on the work of the Synod, 4 language groups have been organized for the accredited journalists.

The location of the briefings and the name of the Press Attaché for each of the language groups are as follows:

#### Italian language group

Press Attaché: Rev. Msg. Giorgio COSTANTINO

Location: Journalists' Room, Holy See Press Office

#### English language group

Press Attaché: Mr Festus Abdul TARAWALIE

Location: John Paul II Conference Hall, Holy See Press Office

#### French language group

Press Attaché: Rev. Msg. Mons. Joseph Bato'ora BALLONG WEN MEWUDA

Location: Telecommunications Room, Holy See Press Office

Portuguese language group

Press attaché: Ms. Maria Dulce ARAÚJO ÉVORA

Location: “Blu” Room First Level, Holy See Press Office

On the following days the Press Attachés will hold briefings at about 1.10 pm:

- Tuesday 6 October 2009
- Wednesday 7 October 2009
- Thursday 8 October 2009
- Friday 9 October 2009
- Saturday 10 October 2009
- Monday 12 October 2009
- Tuesday 13 October 2009
- Thursday 15 October 2009
- Saturday 17 October 2009
- Tuesday 20 October 2009

On some occasions the Press Attaches will be accompanied by a Synodal Father or by an Expert.

The names of the participants and any changes in the above dates and times will be communicated as early as possible.

## POOLS

On the following days, pools of accredited journalists will have access to the Synod Hall in general for the opening prayer of the morning General Congregations.

- Tuesday 6 October 2009
- Thursday 8 October 2009
- Friday 9 October 2009
- Saturday 10 October 2009
- Monday 12 October 2009
- Tuesday 13 October 2009
- Thursday 15 October 2009
- Saturday 17 October 2009
- Tuesday 20 October 2009
- Friday 23 October 2009
- Saturday 24 October 2009

Registration lists for the pools will be made available to reporters at the Information Accreditation desk of the Holy See Press Office (to the right of the entrance hall).

For the pools, the photoreporters and TV operators are requested to apply to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.

The Participants of the pools are requested to meet at 8.30 am in the Press Sector which is located outside, in front of the entrance to the Paul VI Hall. From there they will be accompanied at all times by an official of the Holy See Press Office (for reporters) and by an official of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications (for photoreporters and TV camera teams). Suitable dress is required.

## BULLETIN SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM

The Bulletin of the Commission for information of the II Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops entitled Synodus Episcoporum, published by the Holy See Press Office, will be issued in 6 language editions (plurilingual, Italian, English, French, Spanish and Portuguese), with 2 issues each day (morning and afternoon) or as required.

The morning issue will be published at the conclusion of the morning General Congregation, and the afternoon issue the following morning.

Distribution to accredited journalists will take place in the Journalists' Room of the Holy See Press Office.

The plurilingual edition will contain summaries of the interventions by Synod Fathers, as prepared by themselves in their own languages. The other 5 editions will report the respective versions in Italian, English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

The third issue of the Bulletin will contain the Holy Father's Homily for the solemn opening Holy Mass on the morning of Sunday 4 October 2008 (it will be available to accredited journalists when the Holy See Press Office opens, under embargo).

The fourth issue of the Bulletin will contain the reports which will be presented in the First General Congregation, the morning of Monday 5 October 2008 (which will be broadcast live on TV in the Holy See Press Office).

## LIVE TV COVERAGE

The following events will be transmitted live on the TV monitors in the Telecommunications Room, in the Journalists' Room and in the John Paul II Conference Hall of the Holy See Press Office:

- Sunday 4 October 2009 (9.30 am): Solemn opening ceremony with Concelebration of the Holy Mass (Saint Peter's Basilica)
- Monday 5 October 2009 (9.00 am): Part of the First General Congregation during which the Report of the Secretary General and the Relatio ante disceptationem are presented
- Saturday 10 October 2009 (6.00 pm): Recitation of the Rosary with the students of the Universities in Rome (Paul VI Hall)
- Sunday 11 October (10.00 am): Solemn Eucharistic Concelebration with Canonization (Saint Peter's Basilica)
- Wednesday 13 October 2009 (9.00 am): Part of the General Congregation during which the Relatio post disceptationem is presented
- Sunday 25 October 2009 (9.30 am): Solemn Concelebration of the Holy Mass at the conclusion of the Synod (Saint Peter's Basilica)

Any updates will be published as soon as possible.

## TELEPHONE NEWS-BULLETIN

During the period of the Synod, a telephone news-bulletin will be available:

- +39-06-698.19 for the ordinary daily Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office;
- +39-06-698.84051 for the Bulletin of the Synod of Bishops - morning session;
- +39-06-698.84877 for the Bulletin of the Synod of Bishops - afternoon session.

## OPENING HOURS OF THE HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE

During the II Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, the Holy See Press Office will observe the following opening hours, from 2 to 25 October 2009:

- Friday 2 October: 9.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.
- Saturday 3 October: 9.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.
- Sunday 4 October: 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.
- From Monday 5 October to Friday 9 October: 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.
- Saturday 10 October: 9.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m.
- Sunday 11 October: 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.
- Monday 12 October: 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.
- Tuesday 13 October: 9.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m.
- From Wednesday 14 October to Saturday 17 October: 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.
- Sunday 18 October: 11.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.
- From Monday 19 October to Saturday 24 October: 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.
- Sunday 25 October: 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.

The staff of the Information and Accreditation Desk (to the right of the entrance hall) will be available:

- Monday-Friday: 9.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.
- Saturday: 9.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.

Notice of any changes will be communicated as soon as possible and will be posted on the bulletin board in the Journalists' Area of the Holy See Press Office, published in the Bulletin of the Commission for Information of the II Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops and in the Service Information area of the Internet site of the Holy See.