

The voice of God's people in the working document

The *Instrumentum laboris* for the Synod

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Barring any changes, there will be 378 voting members at the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to be held in the Vatican beginning October 4th, although the total number of participants will reach 459. Among those present, in addition to worldwide Episcopal Conferences representatives (Africa 43, Americas 47, Asia 25, Europe 48, Oceania 5) and 20 delegates of the Eastern Catholic Churches, there are 50 pontifical appointees. There are also 12 fraternal delegates representing other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and 8 special invitees. In total there are 85 women, including 56 with voting rights. "We have ensured maximum representation," says Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod, "but the assembly remains a Synod of Bishops."

The Assembly, presided over by Pope Francis, will be guided in its work by the 60-page *Instrumentum laboris* presented last June 20th. The first section reports on what has emerged so far from listening to God's people, highlighting the diversity and criticality of the Church on every continent: wars, climate crises, economies of exploitation, persecutions, secularization, wounds produced by sexual abuse and conscience, marginalization of peoples and groups.

A second section contains the three priority issues at the heart of the Synod's work: communion, mission and participation. There are 15 worksheets, with five for each of the three respective priorities: A communion that radiates; Co-responsibility in mission; Participation, governance and authority. Each worksheet presents a brief reflection and a question for discernment in different work sessions. According to Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, general rapporteur of the Synod, the *Instrumentum laboris* "does not claim to be a theological treatise on synodality. The text does not give answers but only asks questions, and bishops [...] must fulfill their episcopal mission and try to provide answers." A task which is perhaps impossible, Hollerich acknowledges, if it were not for the invoked presence of the Holy Spirit leading the Assembly.