

Digital worlds and synodal listening

The digital “6th Continent” And the Synod

Adriana Masotti

The digital "sixth continent" is also represented in the 2021-2024 Synod. "The Digital Synod Initiative constitutes a significant effort to listen to young people and offers new insights for proclamation of the Gospel", read the working document crafted during the continental phase of the Synod, which also considers young people as a "preferential option" for the Churches. The digital world is central for people of all ages, as many might not connect with the Church otherwise. In fact, so-called *influencers*, or digital missionaries, were the driving force behind the Digital Synod. There was an expressed desire to extend a very real mandate to them.

At one online event sponsored by the Dicastery for Communication last October, for example, close to 200 young evangelizers from different countries, together with priests and men and women religious, came together to pray for the Synod. A second meeting also took place on Christmas Eve. There, it was said that the digital continent "is that space where many search for a reason to live, but do not yet know Jesus". For this reason, the language of the web is needed in order to bring Jesus' message.

Consultations also took place in the months prior via an online questionnaire containing questions on faith, the Church and the impact of the Gospel in one's life. Using today's vast social media platforms, 280 *influencers* from 22 countries connected with their online *followers*. As a result, 13,000 questionnaires were completed and 30,000 other spontaneous responses sent in Italy alone. In total, 110,000 questionnaires arrived from the so-called 'digital continent' worldwide.

These numbers speak to an existing interest in the Church. Worldwide, a third of respondents define themselves as non-believers, agnostics or non-participatory in the Church. Yet they often also speak of a desire, a nostalgia or a curiosity around faith. Many wounds were also voiced by those feeling judged or marginalized. The abuse scandal has also had a forceful impact on how the Church is seen today too.

A summary of all digital input was then prepared and delivered to the General Secretariat of the Synod. This positive experience further illustrated the need to both value digital missionaries in Church life and recognize the digital web's role in pastoral care especially for young people. The Church is called to encounter people where they dwell, including on the immense and ever-growing digital continent.