

# SYNTHESIS OF THE SYNODAL PROCESS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CUBA

(from October 17, 2021 to July 21, 2022)

## Introduction

### Introduction

- I. Fruits of the synodal process *"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and you have revealed them to the simple people. Yes, Father, so it has seemed better to you."* (Mt 11:25)
- a) Synodal style
  - b) Joy, hope and enthusiasm
  - c) The identification of a new lay leadership
  - d) The missionary challenge
  - e) The gradual revitalization of participation areas
  - f) Recognition of common priorities

1. The Church on pilgrimage in Cuba wants, together with her Lord Jesus Christ, to express a profound thanksgiving to the Father. This synodal itinerary, to which Pope Francis summoned us, has been welcomed as a Gift of the Spirit for this portion of the people of God; we give thanks for all those who have been involved in the journey: bishops, priests, religious men and women, permanent deacons, seminarians and especially for the lay faithful. We are grateful for the availability for service, the time and resources placed at the disposal of this ecclesial moment by the various diocesan leaders and their teams, as well as the prayerful company of the contemplative orders and so many brothers and sisters who have sustained us with the strength that flows from prayer. We are grateful for the enthusiastic reception of those Christian communities who, both in the churches and in the mission houses, were ready to listen to each other, to discern what the Spirit is asking of us and to dream of the Church we want to be.

### II. Invitations from the Spirit

- a) Synodal style
- b) Welcoming and missionary church
- c) Growing communion

### III. Conclusions

- a) Aspects requiring further discernment
- b) Other aspects to take into account

2. Our gratitude goes deep into the history of this Church and extends to milestones of the past, because we have recognized that the synodal style, without using this terminology, has accompanied us in other important events: the Cuban Ecclesial Reflection (REC), initiated in 1981, which progressively involved the Christian communities, and which had a moment of synthesis and relaunching in the Cuban National Ecclesial Encounter (ENEC) held in February 1986; the pilgrimage of the Cross of the V Centenary of the Evangelization of America, the different moments of preparation for the visits of the last three Popes to Cuba, the itineraries of prayer, reflection and Participative Pastoral Planning with which the National Pastoral Plans have been elaborated and the celebration of the IV Centenary of the discovery and presence of the image of the Virgin of Charity (2009 - 2012); show us that the People of God in Cuba, with lights and shadows, has experienced the benefit and the joy of "walking together".

3. We have noted with joy that all eleven dioceses of the country were involved in the synodal process, each one according to its own reality and possibilities. All of them created a diocesan team that has animated, oriented and followed the itinerary in the local Church. Representatives of these teams met in Havana, in December 2021, to discern and program nationally the proposal that the Pope made to us. From this meeting a great number of initiatives were promoted, with great creativity and originality, to sensitize all the members of the People of God on this path. Thus were born different brochures, explanatory cards, catechesis, questionnaires, videos, podcasts, contests, songs and other modalities to show that the spirit and the way of being "Synodal Church" was being revitalized.

4. Most of the consultations carried out during the "listening" phase took place within the Christian communities. The celebration of parish or community assemblies, as well as diocesan assemblies, is noteworthy. Some local Churches report that they have had significant experiences of dialogue beyond our "borders". In this sense, we highlight meetings with leaders or pastors of Orthodox Churches and other ecclesial communities, civil authorities and people from the health, culture and education sectors. There has also been dialogue on the being and work of the Church with families of peasants and of brothers and sisters who are in prison. We refer with gratitude to the catechesis where the children also participated in the process, according to their ages and capacities of understanding; the drawing contests for children that were organized in several places were beautiful. We also recognize that in some communities this process was not welcomed and in others, the initial dynamism was lost.

5. The synodal process is taking place among us in the midst of a particularly complex situation, since Cuba is going through the most serious crisis of its last decades. The effects of the pandemic had not yet been fully overcome and the shortage of food and medicine was already worsening, and there was growing inflation and discomfort in daily life. Our communities and pastoral agents participate in the burden and fatigue generated by the daily subsistence in Cuba; and the pain for the lack of spaces and concrete proposals to ensure a present and future of welfare and hope. This social situation, which is described briefly, influences and conditions in a negative way the experience of the process and its further strengthening.

6. Among other difficulties for the realization of this itinerary we find the following: the lack of adequate understanding of the synodal process to which we are invited, the constant and growing emigration of pastoral agents and members of the Christian community, especially young people, the lack of passion for the Kingdom among some who should be the main animators, the unstable permanence of priests and religious, in addition to the understandable difficulties in inculturation.

7. We reiterate that our involvement in the synodal process to which the Holy Father has summoned us has been a breath of the Spirit for the life of this Church. Undoubtedly, the communities that have allowed themselves to be challenged by the Lord have been discovering that we grow in fraternity, illusion and hope; that in spite of everything, even ourselves and our sins, God and Our Lady of Charity walk with us.

## I. Fruits of the synodal process

*"It is not you who have chosen me, it is I who have chosen you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and your fruit should remain."  
(John 15:16-17)*

8. This itinerary has allowed us to identify the following fruits that we welcome with gratitude and responsibility, in order to continue cultivating them in our communities:

- a) **The synodal style** has been the first benefit we have experienced in this process. It has allowed us to refocus on what is essential to the Church: Jesus. His way of proceeding should be ours: to accompany and console, to encourage, to transmit confidence, to listen without manipulating. We need a Church that continues to walk alongside the people, so that among all Cubans, we can transform realities of death into life and compassion.

This experience has also given us the opportunity to dialogue among ourselves, to listen to each other with humility in order to discover the voice of God and to express with courage and simplicity what we think.

- b) **Joy, hope and enthusiasm** have also been tangible fruits of this journey. We have rediscovered ourselves as a Church in the midst of a very complex social situation, after the period of the pandemic. We have realized that we are part of a big family and that we do not go through life alone, but that God and other brothers and sisters walk with us. The synodal process has shown us that there are people who dream and are committed to the renewal of our communities.
- c) **The identification of a new lay leadership.** Some men and women have joined our communities in recent years, have been captivated by this proposal and have assumed responsibilities in its development. The faithful who were involved in the discernment of the priorities of each diocese, contributed their best and are necessary agents for the road ahead. They experience the Church as a reality that is close to them, that concerns them, not as a matter of the priest and a few others. This process has made it possible to recognize attitudes of clericalism and abuses of power, to which we have often become accustomed and which generate discomfort in the communities.
- d) **The missionary challenge.** The local communities have become more aware of their evangelizing responsibility in the environment in which they live (neighborhood, town, etc.) and of the need to extend their work to other members and groups of society. The missionary spirit should not be exclusive to one part of the community, but of all the baptized, called to participate in social life by sowing evangelical values.

The synodal process has allowed us to strengthen our dialogue with non-ecclesial environments through people involved in the world of health, education, culture, among others. This has favored the approach to our communities of members of these spaces, to collaborate in common projects. We have also shared this path with other Christian denominations.

- e) **The progressive revitalization of spaces for participation.** This process has strengthened community, parish and diocesan councils and has awakened the need to create them where they disappeared or never existed. Synodal experiences have been fostered based on common prayer with the Word of God, mutual listening and the inclusion of the community in order to reach decisions. Teamwork among the laity, priests, religious and deacons, members of the People of God, has also been encouraged.
- f) **The recognition of common priorities.** The synodal journey has allowed us to identify the features of the Church that we are and to dare to dream of the Church we long for. Starting from reality and with our gaze on the horizon of the Kingdom, we know ourselves to be the pilgrim People of God in history, breaking through paralysis and rejecting the temptation to turn back. This journey has allowed us to deepen the challenges of the three axes of the Synod: communion, participation and mission; and has triggered initiatives to respond to them. The serene awareness of the weaknesses of our Church helps us to overcome the temptation of triumphalism and allows us to walk towards the future with our feet on the ground.

## II. Invitations from the Spirit

*"Whoever has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."  
(Rev 2:11)*

9. The experiences of prayer, community dialogue and reciprocal listening have allowed us to recognize the invitations or calls of the Spirit to the Church in Cuba, so that we can respond more evangelically to what we have discovered in the prayerful gaze of our ecclesial and social reality, as challenges and demands of the communities.

### a) Synodal style

The first of these inspirations of the Spirit of the Lord is to make the **synodal style** a habitual way of being Church, to grow in the experience of "walking together" and to foster areas of intra-ecclesial dialogue. In order to live this, the following suggestions are proposed from the reading of the diocesan syntheses:

- To offer spaces to listen to the Spirit, to learn to pray with the Word of God and, from that presence of the Lord in our midst, to share life, to listen to each other, to dialogue, to heal wounds and to reconcile.
- Strengthen diocesan and community instances of participation and communion.
- Reorganize the parish as a community of communities.
- Renew the necessary pastoral structures that no longer function.
- Coordinate the different diocesan pastoral ministries.

### b) Formation for a disciple identity

Updating and strengthening the **formation of** all the baptized has been another invitation, so that faith in the One and Triune God can really influence and determine the life, criteria, attitudes, thoughts and feelings of those of us who recognize ourselves as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this sense, the diocesan contributions make the following suggestions:

- Rethink the formation of catechumens, adapting this itinerary to the Cuban reality.
- Continue formation in the synodal spirit and praxis.
- Link catechesis with family pastoral care, so that parents discover their irreplaceable role in transmitting the faith to their children.

### c) **Growing in communion**

The Spirit has once again invited us to grow in **communion** and to seek bold and innovative ways for the Christian communities in Cuba to continue offering the witness of unity, which generates attraction and enthusiasm for the members of the Church and for those who do not feel part of it. In this order the following suggestions are discovered:

- Emphasize the centrality of the Eucharist as a source of union with the Lord and with each other.
- Promote the active participation of the people in the liturgy, making it meaningful for life.
- To foster a spirituality of communion where all members of the People of God recognize and are grateful for the variety of gifts and charisms for the edification of the Body of Christ and the proclamation of the Good News of salvation.
- Establish more open communication between the hierarchy and the faithful.
- To further promote vocation ministry.
- Concretize the implementation of lay ministries.
- To take care of liturgical celebrations, especially the baptism of children, prayers in cemeteries and Masses for the deceased, with pastoral care and delicacy.
- To grow in the awareness of the responsibility of all the baptized to contribute to the financial needs of the Church.
- Continue to promote Caritas volunteer work, visiting the sick, prison ministry, and care and love for the elderly.

### d) **Welcoming and missionary church**

Finally, the realization that our people are mostly religious but only a minority of practicing Christians, that many visit our churches but do not succeed in inserting themselves into the life of the Christian community, that there are countless realities, areas and people where the Gospel is unknown or ignored, has made us aware of the urgent need to be a **welcoming and missionary Church**, or as Pope Francis has expressed it, "Church going forth". To carry out this inspiration of the Spirit, the diocesan syntheses offer the following suggestions:

- To go out to meet others, to abandon complaints and negativity, to accompany the sufferings and joys of our people.
- The need to pray more for Christian unity and to take advantage of the opportunities already available: the Octave for unity, joint actions in the exercise of charity and ecumenical meetings.
- To promote celebrations outside of the Eucharist, such as: patronal feasts, novenas, novenas for the dead, processions, festivals, festivals, festivals, fairs, penitential celebrations, prayer meetings, community meetings and pilgrimages to shrines.
- To empower mission houses as a privileged space to bring the joy of the Gospel to the peripheries.
- Maintain the attention of the virtual groups and digital pages that were created in times of pandemic as important vehicles of communion and evangelization.
- Incorporate young people in areas of responsibility and provide them with adequate training, so that they can have an impact on the world of youth.
- To take care of and make grow the experiences that our Church has had of dialogue and cooperation with the world of culture, intellectuals, teachers and health personnel. To open up to other areas.
- To take pastoral care of those who have distanced themselves from our communities, the believers of popular piety, the practitioners of religious syncretism, those who live on the existential peripheries of our society and those who are marginalized.
- Pay attention to the rural and peasant world in order to articulate a pastoral care that takes into account the needs of these contexts.

### III. Conclusions

*"Go and make disciples of all peoples (...) and know that I am with you always until the end of the world."  
(Mt 28:20)*

10. As we prepare to conclude this synthesis of the synodal process in our Church, we would like to return to the initial tone of these pages, which is gratitude. We feel that everything we have lived, what we have shared, pastors and faithful, what we have prayed and reflected together, what we have worked and offered, even with great sacrifices, is a reason for profound gratitude to the Lord and to his People. We have truly had a simple and profound experience of walking together.

#### a) Aspects requiring further discernment

With humility and honesty, we would like to point out at the concluding moment some **aspects that, because of their importance, need further discernment**. We present them in the form of questions, so that the answer may be given by the whole Church in Cuba and thus serve as a stimulus for further steps along the way. In the same way, these questions can help us in the elaboration and promulgation of the new National Pastoral Plan.

- All the dioceses recognize the value of the synodal process, which has involved a significant number of faithful and has generated hope and vitality in the communities. *Does the Church in Cuba choose to continue along the synodal path?*
- In many communities there are no instances of participation, these have disappeared or do not function periodically with the role for which they were instituted. *Do we prioritize the creation of parish and diocesan councils?*
- The Church in Cuba has been characterized by lay protagonism and community participation. *Are we betting on the promotion of lay ministries?*
- The communities note the importance of intensifying the formation of lay people and ordained ministers in synodality in order to assume this ecclesial style. *Do we recognize the need for formation in synodality?*
- Our faithful dream of welcoming communities, capable of welcoming everyone in a house with open doors. It is also necessary to accompany the search and the faith journeys of each person. *Do we commit ourselves to organize a pastoral ministry of welcome and accompaniment?*

## **b) Other aspects to take into account**

In the syntheses of various dioceses we note some important themes that appear timidly and deserve to be part of future considerations. These are:

- Family ministry.
- Vocational ministry.
- The style of ordained ministers in a synodical Church.
- The study and application of the Social Doctrine of the Church.
- The pastoral care of people of popular piety.
- Those professing Afro-Cuban religions and religious syncretism.
- The spaces of community discernment for pastoral planning and verification of what is planned.

11. At the end of this stage of the diocesan synodal journey, we recognize this process as a grace of the Lord that has been given to us in the midst of our frailties. Once again we have experienced the miracle of empty hands, which give in abundance in the midst of our poverty.

May the Virgin of Charity of El Cobre, whose maternal intercession has not failed us throughout our history, continue to assist us so that the Church of God in Cuba may be like her, all of God and all of his people.

Come with us as we walk, Holy Mary, come!