



# CONFERINȚA EPISCOPIILOR DIN ROMÂNIA

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## Synthesis of the synodal journey, 17 October 2021 - 15 August 2022, presented by the Romanian Bishops' Conference

### Introduction

The Catholic Church in Romania is an ecclesial reality which, in the current territory of this country where several Christian confessions live together, is situated in the continuity of the apostolic tradition. This has been a challenge, but also an encouragement to live the ecumenical spirit, characterised by dialogue, constant moments of prayer and meeting and a lively interest in getting to know each other.

The historical conditions that our country has faced over the centuries have also influenced the development of religious life in these lands, and today the Catholic Church in Romania presents itself with two realities that more deeply underline the universality and richness of the faith: The Roman Catholic Church in Romania, with two Archdioceses and four Dioceses (Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bucharest, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Alba-Iulia, Roman Catholic Diocese of Iași, Roman Catholic Diocese of Timișoara, Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare, Roman Catholic Diocese of Oradea); and the Romanian Church United with Rome, Greek-Catholic, with one Archdiocese and five Eparchies (Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș, Eparchy of Oradea, Eparchy of Cluj-Gherla, Eparchy of Lugoj, Eparchy of Maramureș and Eparchy of *Saint Basil the Great* of Bucharest). These structures have a specific historical evolution which results in the current organisation, in accordance with the history and specific mission of each local Church (the pastoral care of the faithful and the exercise of unity in diversity, specific to the Catholic Church).

The present document, drawn up on the basis of the synodal syntheses carried out in all these ecclesiastical circumscriptions, is an expression of synodal listening and discernment of the realities present in both Catholic realities of the same one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church in our country.

### 1. A Church called to always live the synodal spirit.

The Church is synodal by its very nature, since those who share the faith proclaimed by the Saviour, the Apostles and their followers - the Bishops - are called to be together as a community of faith and to walk together towards a common goal: personal encounter with Jesus Christ, personal and communal conversion and witness of life, which can draw others of good will to the Lord.

These realities, worthy of all the baptized, must be lived together, i.e. in community, avoiding any isolationist tendencies and prejudices. In this sense:

The centrality of the Holy Eucharist and the Word of God is seen as a *sine qua non* of being *together in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit*, belonging to the Church and living Christian brotherhood. Walking together implies

but it is the responsibility of all and takes different forms, depending on the circumstances (person or ecclesial institution) which imply the call to accompany and be accompanied on the path of salvation. (THE ROMAN CHURCH UNITED WITH ROME, GREEK CATHOLIC. SYNTHESIS OF THE SYNODAL JOURNEY 2022).

It is therefore everyone's responsibility in the liturgical plan. It is not only the hierarchy of the Church that ensures that the synodal spirit, which is proper to the Church, is lived out, but each baptised believer is called to take responsibility in order to truly walk together towards the deepening of the treasury of faith. The living out of an authentic synodal spirit can be achieved not only in liturgical terms, but also by sustaining a spirit of communion and sharing between Christian associations, Christian religious movements, communities of consecrated life and parishes. Integrating the culture of Christian witness, as the authentic foundation of the new evangelisation, into the catechesis of adults and their theological formation, in order to encourage the practice of the virtues in the family and in society, is another way of living synodality. A path of Christian formation can be proposed in this sense: a biblical and moral catechesis, which takes into account witness, as do catecheses on mission and liturgy. A diversification of ministries in the Church is welcome in order to support parish communities, by training and establishing lectors, acolytes and catechists.

In this sense, the pastoral initiative of the Holy Father - Pope Francis - is most welcome, precisely in order to help us all understand that we are children of the same Church and brothers among us, since the Synod:

is an interior journey that involves a serious, committed personal and community commitment, showing that all of us, spiritual shepherds, consecrated persons and lay faithful, are aware that *together* we constitute the same Church, desired by Christ as a sign of his presence in the world. And in these times, when humanity knows the depth of suffering caused by the pandemic of coronavirus or by tensions such as the war in Ukraine, the Church is invited to know herself better, to express her reality and aspirations, to say how she thinks of herself *today*. (SYNOD 2021-2023. FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION. SYNODAL SYNTHESIS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BUCURESTI).

## 2. A Church called to live through Christ, with Christ and in Christ.

The Church without Christ, who is its Head and Lord, cannot live. It is Christ himself who sustains it and nourishes it through the Word and the mysteries celebrated with God's people and for God's people. The most direct and fundamental manifestation of the Church as Church is the Liturgy. In the Liturgy, God's people gather, become aware of themselves, pray, learn and live the mysteries of the faith, are strengthened by the celebration of the Sacraments, and are spiritually formed to bring the news of salvation to their brothers and sisters outside the Church, to all those of good will. It is necessary to form and maintain a *lively liturgical consciousness*, uniting us all around the Lord's Table. Of great importance in this regard are the Liturgies celebrated for different age groups (children, adolescents/young people, adults).

Liturgical celebration and occasions of common prayer have an inspiring and sustaining effect on the common journey. The need for spirituality has not disappeared,



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but the overburdened person in everyday life becomes superficial. Prayer and participation in

liturgical ceremonies convey a sense of calm, inner peace, spiritual affirmation and belonging. (SYNODAL SYNTHESIS OF THE ROMAN-CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ORADEA).

Liturgical celebrations, therefore, in which the Holy Sacrifice of the Eucharist occupies a central place, must be animated by an awareness of the presence of the one being celebrated: Jesus Christ the Lord. The mysteries of the Church are by no means mere commemorations, still less dramatic moments, but true memorials of God's love and an occasion for spiritual union with the Son of God, who through these celebrations continues to be present in our midst. A continuous liturgical formation of God's people, and even of the servers of the altar, is necessary through the combination of two dimensions: a) prayer, through which we remain realistically before God and from which we draw the spiritual strength necessary for life; b) the deepening of liturgical content and meaning, which prepares us for the encounter with ourselves, with the Lord and with others.

Prayer, especially the Eucharist truly forms and nourishes our communities. Christ unites us. Often, however, this formation of community is not achieved simply by attending Mass. The Eucharist is the centre of our life. We must nourish ourselves with the Eucharist, but at the same time we must fulfil what Christ urges us through the Eucharist, to form communities (THE SYNODAL ROAD IN THE ROMAN-CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF TIMIȘOARA).

In the statements below we find a pastoral situation common to the whole Catholic Church in Romania, regarding more concrete initiatives regarding the liturgical formation of the faithful, so that they know what is celebrated:

Believers are educated to experience the Mass as a distinct, but not separate, moment of their Christian existence. To this end, some churches cover topics such as: "The Eucharist, the centre of the Church's life and mission", "Sunday and the liturgical year", "The sacraments in the Christian's journey of faith", "Liturgy between reform and liturgical formation". For the vast majority of Christians who took part in the synodal consultations, the Sunday liturgy represents a duty to God, an encounter with Him, a spiritual charge for the week ahead. The involvement in the liturgical responses of all the faithful present gives a sense of community prayer, otherwise the Liturgy is experienced more as participation in the celebration. The desire to understand the main moments and the mystagogy behind the liturgical gestures and symbolism was noted among the faithful. (THE ROMAN CHURCH UNITED WITH ROME, GREEK CATHOLIC. SYNTHESIS OF THE SYNODAL JOURNEY 2022).

On the part of the faithful, liturgical celebrations are expected to be well and beautifully prepared, with input from both the priest and the faithful: increased emphasis on depth, preservation of traditions, use of sacred art in glorifying God, musical activities, concerts of sacred music, encouragement of the composition of new church songs are beneficial. (SYNOD 2021-2023. FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION. SYNODAL SYNTHESIS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BUCUREȘTI).

Liturgical formation remains an open field of apostolate in which we are all called to work together: clergy, consecrated persons and lay people. We must avoid certain pastoral tendencies which are detrimental to the spiritual effectiveness of sacred actions:

Excessive attachment to tradition, rigidity, clericalism, hypocrisy, exaggeratedly sober attitudes, negativism, strictness, hinder the experience of God's love in the liturgy. It is repulsive if church life is reduced to obligatory liturgies, but it is also repulsive if one neglects the duties of one's state in life under the pretext of prayer and participation in the holy liturgies. (SYNOD OF BISHOPS - DIOCESAN STAGE. ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ALBA IULIA).

### **3. A Church open to the future: the pastoral care of children, youth and adults.**

We live in a society marked by profound changes, influenced by what is happening in the post-modern era. Contemporary man tends to deny reference to the sacred and chooses to fill the place of God in his heart with the offerings of consumerism and moral relativism. This also leads to a desire, especially among young people, to move away from the 'old' moral references and to seek what brings momentary satisfaction without moral, human and religious consistency. We see that the involved and constant presence of children and young people in the life of the Church is increasingly weak, with many parishes identifying a real abandonment of religious practice among them, especially young people, which makes one wonder about the future of our faith communities. This calls for an adaptation of the language of faith to the age groups involved in the life of the Church. This adaptation should have the courage to constantly address sensitive topics and integrate them into the structure of catechesis, such as the correct understanding of sexuality, gender ideology, abortion, corruption, euthanasia. In this regard, it is relevant to train lay people for and through the media as a factor of Christian education. More specifically,

In many situations, teenagers and young people feel that they are left on the margins of the community. They want to be accompanied, encouraged and involved in their own parishes. Many of them express the need for intensive formation in order to live their faith and face the challenges of life.

There are different ways in which one can grow as a fellow traveller so that members of the Christian community are "facilitators of grace and not controllers of the law". Some ways would be the following: listening to and putting into practice the Word of God, active participation in liturgical actions, devotion to one's own community, involvement in a church association, volunteering, collaboration between pastors and laity, attention to the younger generation, use of modern means of communication to strengthen the community, etc. (SYNODAL SYNTHESIS OF THE Iasi DEITY).

Young people, future adults, have high expectations of the Church. They want, deep in their hearts, to feel welcomed with what is specific to them, to be guided in the life of faith in a competent way, to find people who are well formed spiritually and humanly with whom they can talk openly about the concerns and challenges of their age. They are not deliberately reticent about the Church, but the attitude of some pastoral workers or believers can turn them away from the Church relatively quickly.

easily of what they really want: knowledge and understanding of their own faith and connection to God.

Young people have generous hearts! They are generous by nature of their beautiful age, and this genuine beauty of theirs must not be allowed to be swallowed up by the offerings of the desacralizing world in which we live. Among their expectations:

We need to make time for listening. We need to open our hearts and make room in ourselves for the other. Let us not react immediately to what is said. Sincere listening is necessary for long-term membership in a community or living in a Christian family. (SYNODAL JOURNEY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF TIMISOARA).

The young people themselves admit that they have met exemplary people in the parish environment, that they perceive an openness towards young people from the Church. They also appreciate the small steps, they consider the life of adults as witnesses of the faith necessary. Opinions, on the other hand, reflect the other side of reality that needs an even stronger, more inclusive community. Young adults, brought up in religious classes, find it hard to find a welcoming community, not forming their own group. It was also described as a difficulty that there are parishes where prolonged rivalry between groups and individuals makes it difficult to live in unity (REPORT OF THE ROMAN-CATHOLIC DIVISION OF SATU MARE ON THE SYNODAL COURSE).

#### **4. A Church open to other brothers and sisters in faith: ecumenical dialogue**

The reality of the Catholic Church in Romania has the specificity of its minority character, conferred by the fact that the majority of the country's population belongs to the Romanian Orthodox Church. This does not mean a closed confessional affiliation, but a constant desire to live a single and living faith, which has been confirmed in different historical circumstances. Perhaps one of the most important concrete ecumenical moments was the unforgettable apostolic visit of St. John Paul II to our country on 7-9 May 1999. On his departure from Romania, the Pontiff expressed his thoughts with these words of great value and honour for *Christian Romania*:

Your country has a unique ecumenical vocation, as if inscribed in its roots. By its geographical position and its long history, culture and tradition, Romania is a home where East and West meet in natural dialogue.

Here too the Church breathes particularly obviously through its two lungs. And these days we have been able to experience this. Together with one another, like Peter, Andrew and the other apostles gathered in prayer with the Mother of God in the first cenacle, we experienced new spiritual Pentecosts. The wind of the Holy Spirit blew powerfully over this land, and made us strong in communion and more bold in proclaiming the gospel. The new language that was given to us, the language of fraternal communion, we used it and felt its sweetness and beauty, its strength and effectiveness. (...) The spiritual event we experienced, blessed by Saint Dimitrie and the holy martyrs of recent decades, is an experience to be preserved and passed on in the hope that the new millennium that is opening before us will be a time of greater communion between the Christian Churches and of the discovery of brotherhood between peoples. (ADDRESS BY POPE JOHN PAUL II AT THE FAREWELL CEREMONY. AIRPORT OF BENUÉASA, 9 MAY 1999).

We have, therefore, a conscious and living experience of ecumenical dialogue, desired by the Second Vatican Council as an authoritative and pertinent way of discovering what is specific to other Christian traditions, without mental barriers or sterile prejudices. In this sense:

Dialogue, celebration and ecumenical communion are of great importance to many. It is important to maintain and promote a constructive dialogue based on mutual respect between all believers at all levels. By seeking, planning and celebrating ecumenical occasions together, the unity of believers becomes a tangible reality, and many have already experienced the many good fruits of this effort. The strength and joy of our common faith helps us to walk together on the path that promotes what unites us and teaches us to respect our differences. (...) Let the results of ecumenical efforts be made known as widely as possible. It is necessary to reflect on the potential for ecumenical cooperation at the level of the local Church and, where appropriate, to strengthen it. Ecumenical relations, which can be considered very good in our diocese, need to be further deepened. There is a need for common action and a common voice, especially in the defence of life from birth to death. Common action by local Christian leaders is a sign for the whole community. Let us try to appreciate more what is ours and recognise the richness of other churches. In ecumenical youth relations, fellowship, organizing common social and charitable actions have priority. Young people are not afraid to learn new things, they can be a good example for their parents and later they can raise their children in this spirit (SYNODAL SYNTHESIS OF THE ROMAN- CATHOLIC DIET OF ORADEA).

Ecumenical dialogue is prejudiced by certain historical conditions, such as the drama of the Great Schism, which is still seen as a factor of rupture and dissociation, with believers of other confessions sometimes encouraged by their pastors to avoid contact with "heretics". The good news of the Second Vatican Council, welcomed by Catholics, unfortunately remains unheard by many non-Catholics - dialogue with Orthodox and non-Orthodox Protestants in particular suffers in this regard. Then there are still wounds from the painful period of communism, when living the faith and practising it visibly was discouraged by the authorities. It is desirable that there should be an optimal empowerment to encourage ecumenical dialogue at social and spiritual level. The relevant hierarchical forums are called upon to develop cultural-religious projects, implemented through partnerships aimed at children, young people and adults. Through dialogue and mutual knowledge, there is a need to identify the traumas produced throughout history and to make a joint effort to heal memories in the spirit of faith in Christ and ecumenical dialogue:

Good communication takes place where there is openness to dialogue, where common values and interests are developed, and where people in dialogue approach each other with mutual trust, goodwill and respect. At the same time, there are situations where past affronts or conflicts of interest hamper the spirit of dialogue. Opinions were expressed: "Let's not be afraid to speak out in communities outside the church" and "let's not forget that for 40 years under communism we couldn't talk about this. Now, after 30 years, we are still learning to dialogue. There are people who have been hurt in the Church. Who deals with them?" Ecumenical celebrations and solidarity (in the areas



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of charity, marriage, representation, education) are present at parish level

and localities. Conclusion: With the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, despite worldviews or other differences, it is necessary to continue dialogue, where possible, with representatives of different denominations, institutions and civil society (REPORT OF THE ROMAN-CATOLIC DIVISION OF SATU MARE ON THE SYNODAL COURSE).

It's good to remember that today's challenges are the same for everyone, that's why:

Christian churches and believers are called to act together to provide assistance to refugees and migrants, to fight against modern slavery and human trafficking, to support peace-building operations, to uphold religious freedom, to act against discrimination, to defend the sanctity of life and to care for creation. The dramas, sufferings and needs of this world almost compel us to walk together on the path of Christian unity. (SYNODAL SUMMARY OF THE DIOCESE OF IAȘI).

## **5. A Church open to society and to all people of goodwill through dialogue.**

Often God's people are faced with the misperception that the Church is not "visible", that it should do more in the social-charitable field, to be more present in the media, to be a real "business card" for Catholics in Romania and beyond. In our times, "visibility" gives vitality, attracts, can influence opinions, mentalities. The Church is "visible" primarily because it is and functions as a Church, and this can also be promoted through various radio and television stations, through a wide variety of websites, such as diocesan and eparchial websites, parish websites, websites of educational institutions, institutes of consecrated life, etc. In fact:

It is a general observation that dialogue is effective when and where participants are open to each other and respect each other. Good quality dialogue facilitates the acceptance of differences of opinion and the resolution of conflicts in the family, at work, in society or in the Church. Although breaking down opposing views is not difficult for most people in our society today, there is a prevailing social divergence that prevents or even prevents rapprochement. (SYNODAL SUMMARY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ORADEA).

Society expects from the Church competent answers to issues concerning the protection of life, the understanding of the sacredness of man, certain questions related to the correct understanding of faith. Not infrequently, the Church is faced with certain unjustified misgivings about its legitimate desire to engage in the correct understanding of pressing issues for society and to shed light on challenging issues of our day. These misgivings come either from media operators or even from some members of the Church who do not feel ready to speak out to present the Church's official line of thought, which is inspired by the word of Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church and the continuity of the teaching of the Ordinary and Extraordinary Magisterium, and which has in view precisely the genuine good of man. A more active promotion of dialogue between those who share the same religious convictions and with other people is desirable; and in this promotion, the media has an overwhelming role to play:

The media, modern means of communication, technical and scientific achievements play an important role in spreading the Gospel, but often we have not exploited them enough. Believers should take up with greater conviction the representation of the Church in public life. Dedicated Christians working in the same field could do more together. We all need to be more aware that evangelical life carries within it the seeds of social change. Dialogue should be strengthened not only within the Church, but also between the Church and society. (Synod of Bishops - Diocesan Stage. ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ALBA IULIA).

## **6. A Church open to listening to and engaging its own members.**

And all of us, as people of faith, need to be constantly reminded of the proper and necessary care we must give to our brothers and sisters, but with honesty and dignity:

Within the community, often the loudest voices are those who reserve the subject of religiosity altogether, and thus make the quiet ones uncomfortable in the community, stumble into hypocrisy and turn their backs. The formation of cliques and groups, partisanship can corrupt the unity of the Church. There should be less bureaucracy, more transparency, especially in the management of material goods (EPISCOPUS' SYNOD - DIECEAN STAGE. ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ALBA IULIA).

A great challenge for the Catholic Church in the world, as well as in our country, is the need to understand correctly the idea of responsible participation in the life of the Church, without the tendency to monopolize certain sectors of ecclesial life. To be in the Church means to assume the model of the Good Shepherd revealed in Christ Jesus, and not to dominate or impose certain personal whims. In what is involved in engaging God's people in the life of the Church we must always keep in mind the ecclesial and ministerial character. This is achieved by encouraging the establishment of parish pastoral councils, which can make a useful contribution to revitalising the life of faith in parishes and to changing a mentality which sees the priest as a central figure and attributes only a marginal role to the faithful. The inestimable value of the lay faithful in the life of the Church and their involvement in the life of the apostolate has been repeatedly stressed by the contemporary Magisterium, since:

Our times do not demand less zeal on the part of the laity, but, on the contrary, present conditions require them to carry out an ever more intense and extensive apostolate. Indeed, the continual growth of the population, scientific and technical progress, closer relations between people, have not only broadened indefinitely the scope of the apostolate of the laity, much of which is accessible only to them, but have also raised new problems which demand their careful concern and effort. Such an apostolate becomes all the more urgent as the autonomy of many sectors of human life has increased, as is only right and proper, sometimes involving a certain alienation from the moral and religious order, putting Christian life in grave danger. It should be added that in many areas where there are too few priests or, as is sometimes the case, where they lack the necessary freedom of action, the Church could not

(SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, DECREE ON THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY *APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM*, No. 1).

For an authentic and unified pastorate, in which ordained ministers are images of the Good Shepherd in the faith communities entrusted to their pastoral care, there is a need to overcome some outdated and harmful prejudices: on the part of priests - that they are the only effective driving force in the life of parish communities, and on the part of the lay faithful - a certain fear that they are not able to act competently or effectively. In this sense:

In supporting the participation of the laity in the life of the Church, it has been found that there is also a need for openness on the part of priests, in some cases even a change of pastoral mentality. If all pastoral work remains on the shoulders of the priest, his work will remain very limited and limited. (SYNODAL JOURNEY IN THE ROMAN-CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF TIMISOARA).

The relationship between the faithful and priests, with its joys and shortcomings, is an aspect that the faithful have particularly stressed as one of the ways in which the Church can develop and fulfil its synodal character.

## **7. A Church matured in hope, oriented towards the future.**

The Synod of Bishops is not simply a pastoral initiative of the Holy Father, nor is it convened to gather documents, but to awaken the conscience of God's people and their connection with God, following the presentation of their experience of life and faith. In the future it is welcome to identify new areas for the formation of the laity: Christian spirituality (the fundamental patrimony of the spirituality of the great Saints of the Church), in order to respond to the need to promote authentic models of holiness in society. Another area worth supporting is vocational catechesis (psychological and spiritual approach), to identify the needs and requirements of the Christian community. In this regard, three catechetical components have been identified: discernment, interpretation of God's will and choice of life state. These are determining factors for a Church that is mature in faith, alive and made up of believers who are aware of their identity. Therefore:

*The journey together* must continue to value these experiences. Starting from these testimonies, we will continue to be ever more attentive to those who are our companions on the way to the Kingdom of God, regardless of their position and training in society (UNITED ROMAN CHURCH WITH ROME, GRECO-CATHOLIC. SYNTHESIS OF THE SYNODAL JOURNEY 2022).

Faith implicitly invites us to assume an attitude of hope in everyday life. Legitimate changes in mindset and way of acting require time, discernment and balance, all of which are synonymous with the ongoing *conversion* to which we are continually called. A conversion of heart that will also be visible in the coming *pastoral conversion*, which is so necessary in our times, when events follow one another in rapid succession and their influence on society and even the Church is greater than we expect. We must understand, on the other hand, that although the Church is always in the process of reform, changes must



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always make reference to the will of its Head, our Lord Jesus Christ, who wants "that all may be one" (cf. *Jn* 17:11) in faith and life.

### Conclusion

The Church is called to look to the present and the future with gratitude, trusting in Jesus Christ, the Lord of time and history. The synodal journey has brought to light lights and shadows, expectations and observations, which invite us to concrete actions, which highlight the reality of the awareness of the need for a continuous conversion, which takes into account the will of God, the signs of the times and the expectations of our brothers and sisters. The community journey itself, at all levels, forms us for the style of life and action "in the flesh". Therefore, the community vocation that we have facilitates the journey together, mutual listening and dialogue.

This Synod of Bishops, through the unique form of celebration proposed by the Holy Father Pope Francis, has challenged us to speak out and give voice to our own dreams and aspirations. Their fulfilment, based on a balanced and mature discernment and in the light of present and future social and cultural conditions, is intended to be an opportunity to understand that the Church is not a rigid institution, locked in the past, but is a living organism, in constant development, made up of *living* people who are not afraid to open their hearts and be heard.

This synodal synthesis, which reflects certain aspects of the richness of the way of thinking and understanding the beauty of the faith in these lands, is a testimony that we, the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church in Romania, want to live a *living faith*, worthy of the precious heritage of the faith witness of our forefathers and of their martyr sacrifices, which we bear with piety in thought and heart and which we want to value in the future, under the gentle but constant inspiration of the Holy Spirit.