
Synod: 368 participants, including two Chinese bishops

Two Chinese bishops will take part in the works of the Second session of the Synod of Bishops to be held in the Vatican from 2 to 27 October. Cardinal **Mario Grech**, secretary general of the General Secretariat of the Synod, confirmed this on Monday in response to questions from journalists at a press conference held at the Holy See Press Office. "The list of participants in the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops does not show any major changes compared to those of the first session," said Cardinal **Jean-Claude Hollerich**, Archbishop of Luxembourg and general rapporteur of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. There are 368 members in total, 272 of whom are vested with the episcopal munus, plus 96 non-bishops and 8 special guests - including, as in the first session, Luca Casarini, one of the founders of *Mediterranea Saving Humans* - and the Fraternal Delegates, whose number has increased from 12 to 16. "Pope Francis has granted an increase in their number in light of the great interest shown by the Sister Churches in this synodal journey," said Hollerich: "The ecumenical impact of the Synod is self-evident", he remarked. When asked about the final assessment of the synodal assembly, Grech stressed that "until now, there has always been a communication from the People of God to the Holy Father at the end of the session." Compared to the first session, there were 26 changes in the list of participants: "Some will not be attending for health reasons, others have decided not to return, but there was no case where the Pope excluded anyone, these were all decisions made individually," he pointed out. Highlights of the Synodal journey include a Penitential Vigil on 1 October in St Peter's Basilica, presided over by the Holy Father, at the end of the first of the two spiritual retreats planned prior to the opening of the works and in the final phase that will open with the testimony of three survivors of the sin of abuse, the sin of war and the sin of indifference in the face of the plight of the increasing phenomenon of all migrations. The listening phase will be followed by the confession of some sins, which does not amount to "reporting the sins of others, but rather recognising oneself as a cause of suffering, guilty of hurting the innocent and defenceless". In particular, the following sins will be confessed: "the sin against peace; the sin against creation, against indigenous peoples, against migrants; the sin of abuse; sins against women, against the family, against young people; the sin of using the Magisterium as a stone to be hurled at; sinning against poverty; sinning against synodality, failure to listen, lack of communion and participation of all". Finally, on behalf of all the faithful, Pope Francis will ask forgiveness "from God and from the sisters and brothers of all humankind." The penitential celebration, organised jointly by the General Secretariat of the Synod and the Diocese of Rome, in collaboration with the Union of Superiors General (USG) and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), is open to everyone, especially young people. It will be broadcast live on Vatican media," announced Paolo Ruffini, Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication and President of the Commission for Information of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. As in the previous session, all participants are bound by a pledge of confidentiality and discretion regarding the proceedings of the Synod. The experience of an ecumenical prayer with the Holy Father, with the Fraternal Delegates present in the Synod Hall and other representatives of Churches and ecclesial Communities based in Rome, in collaboration with the Taizé Community, will be repeated on the evening of 11 October. On 9 and 16 October, from 6 p.m. to 7.45 p.m., there will be four pastoral-theological forums - four meetings open to the public - in which aspects of four themes relevant to the Assembly's agenda will be presented from different perspectives. There will be a day of spiritual retreat on 21 October for discernment on the draft Final Document.

"How to be a synodal Church in mission?"

This is the subject of the *Instrumentum laboris*, which will serve as guidance for the second session of the bishops' assembly. Father **Giacomo Costa**, special secretary of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, explained that "the Assembly is tasked with outlining the steps to

be taken to grow as Synodal Church with respect to the themes proposed by the Instrumentum laboris.” The Synod work will be divided into five modules, with each module comprising sessions in the Plenary Assembly (General Congregations) and in Working Groups, which will alternate. The initial four modules will address a specific theme from the *IL*, whereas the concluding module will concentrate on the deliberations and approval of the Final Document, which will then be presented to the Holy Father for consideration and subsequent release to the wider Church. The method of Conversation in the Spirit, previously employed during the First Session, will inspire the structural framework of the Groups' work in each Module. An expert facilitator will be assigned to each Working Group.

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