

Synod Press Briefing Summary

Cardinals Robert Prevost & Dieudonné Nzapalainga; Archbishop Timothy Broglio; & Doctor Nora Kofognotera Nonterah shared their experiences of the General Assembly at Wednesday's press briefing at the Holy See Press Office.

Dr Paolo Ruffini, *the Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication and President of the Commission for Information; and Sheila Pires*, *the Secretary of the Commission, described the work of the General Assembly at the daily press briefing.*

They announced that the text of the Letter to the People of God was distributed to participants at the General Congregation on Wednesday morning, as was the text of the final synthesis document.

The Letter was approved Wednesday afternoon, while the synthesis document will be read aloud on Saturday morning, and voted on that afternoon.

Pires: **The "Letter to the People of God"**

The Letter to the People of God, "modified based on the suggestions of the Assembly through oral interventions and written comments" submitted since Monday when the draft was read in the Assembly, was "delivered to the members

today, translated into various languages," Pires explained.

"As **Cardinal Grech** said at the beginning of today's session, it is a 'simple text' that aims to recount the 'positive experience we are living in these days,'" **Pires** continued. Initially, she mentioned, there was the suggestion that the letter might be approved by acclamation; this plan was discarded to allow more time for discussion on the synthesis document.

"As changes were requested in translations into various languages," **Pires** recalled, "the Synod Secretariat announced on Monday that the Letter would be put to a vote today, and it would be possible to submit integration proposals, in addition to those already made in the general congregation, until 6:00 pm on Monday."

In conclusion, **Pires** noted that only Synod members would be able to vote on the Letter, and that the vote would be electronic and secret to ensure personal freedom for each.

Ruffini: **The process for approval of the "Synthesis Document"**

Ruffini then took the floor, explaining that "this morning, the final synthesis document of this first session of the Synod was also presented and distributed." The text is 40 pages long and was distributed in Italian and English, with

working translations in other languages. He also explained how the discussion and voting on the document would take place.

Furthermore, **Ruffini** added, “it was also an opportunity to reaffirm the nature and authority of the Assembly, even with the presence of non-bishop members. It was emphasized that this is a consultative Assembly. The participation of non-bishops is provided for in the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio*. The assembly phase we are in does not constitute a new beginning but another step in the synodal process envisaged by *Episcopalis communio*. The episcopal character of the Assembly is not compromised by the presence of members not invested with the episcopal ‘munus.’” Their presence, he emphasized, does not change the nature of the Assembly, which remains episcopal. “The presence of non-bishop members is justified on the basis of their witness: they remind everyone that this Assembly is not an isolated event but an integral part and a necessary step in the synodal process, extending and deepening, throughout the Church, the listening and ecclesial discernment initiated by the Holy Father on October 10, 2021.”

Ruffini affirmed, “The synodal process will continue in the second session and conclude next year.” On Wednesday afternoon, in the General Congregation,

the discussion of the text will begin after the vote on the Letter, with interventions in the Assembly and discussions in the small groups. Only members eligible to vote will be able to intervene.

“The discussion will continue tomorrow morning in the small groups, and tomorrow afternoon in the general congregation, [which was] initially intended to be dedicated to collecting proposals on methods and stages for the next phase of the synodal process,” the Prefect explained.

However, “to allow more time for discussion,” he added, “it has been decided to provide an additional general congregation, which will be held on Friday morning, a day originally dedicated to a break. The Friday morning congregation will be devoted to gathering proposals for the next phase of the synodal process before the session next year.” The decision to “provide this additional congregation was put to a vote,” the Prefect explained: “There were 347 present; the absolute majority was 174, those in favor were 252, and those opposed were 95. Therefore, the proposal was approved, and the discussion on the Synthesis Document will continue throughout the day tomorrow.”

“Each small group and each individual member,” **Ruffini** pointed out, “can submit proposals for the elimination,

addition, or replacement of passages in the Report, with the so-called ‘modi’ [amendments]. In particular, the ‘modi’ of each small group must be approved one by one with an absolute majority of those present who are eligible to vote. In addition to collective ‘modi,’ members can always submit a personal ‘modo,’ whether or not presented in the groups or approved by the groups. The final text of the Assembly’s Synthesis Report will be read on Saturday morning and voted on Saturday afternoon.”

Cardinal Prevost: *The Latin American Experience*

American CARDINAL ROBERT FRANCIS PREVOST OSA, Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America the Archbishop-Bishop Emeritus of Chiclayo in Peru, first recalled his experience with the Order of Saint Augustine. He was certain that St Augustine and the consecrated life have much to offer to the Church. In the Peruvian diocese where he served as a bishop for nine years before being called to Rome by the Pope, there were synod-style assemblies with representatives from ecclesial movements, parishes, consecrated life, and priests to collectively explore the type of Church needed today to reach the poor and to those who are distant from the Church.

In this sense, the synodal style of promoting the life of the Church is well known in Latin America, the Cardinal said. Regarding the current Synod, the Cardinal emphasized the importance of learning to listen to all, engaging in dialogue with trust, always seeking the truth, and striving to understand what the Lord asks of the Church. He added that it is natural for there to be difficulties, as in any human experience.

Cardinal Nzapalainga: *In the name of peace*

CARDINAL DIEUDONNÉ NZAPALAINGA, CSSP, Archbishop of Bangui in the Central African Republic, and a member of the Ordinary Council of the Synod’s Secretariat, stressed that he comes from a country marked by war in these times torn by conflicts.

He noted that the war was already raging “when we began the synodal journey together, Protestants and Catholics. Together, we went to talk to the rebels, imploring them to lay down their arms in the interest of our nation,” in the name of peace. The Cardinal also recalled when Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of Bangui’s cathedral, “a moment of great emotion in the country, thanks to which all of us, but especially the rebels, understood the journey that had been made and the contribution that each one is called to give.”

In the current global situation, he reiterated, “We are here to share the pain of many with the brothers and sisters present.” This is because, as the Cardinal observed, silence, where the Holy Spirit resonates, and humble listening to those before us are essential in the Synod. Only in this way can we “discover the beauty of the other; only by creating silence can we gather their riches.” From this mutual enrichment, he concluded, can the “dream of what the Church of tomorrow should be” become a reality.

Archbishop Broglio: *Members of military desire peace*

ARCHBISHOP TIMOTHY BROGLIO, the Archbishop for the Military Services, USA, and President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, began by sharing his experiences in the Holy See’s diplomatic service, which allowed him to experience “very living expressions of the Church as the Body of Christ” and that “we can draw from the richness of different traditions.”

He then spoke about his fifteen years of pastoral ministry among the U.S. military. He noted that the Synod is an experience of listening and dialogue among people from different backgrounds. He stated that if we listened more, we could have a world more open to others and more respectful of human dignity. Referring to his recent experience, Broglio

affirmed that “the military has the greatest desire for peace” because “they recognize what war is and what the cost represents.” In this sense, the atmosphere of listening and dialogue in the Synod “might provide an example for the world to see and perhaps to imitate in resolving world conflict.”

Nonterah: *The wisdom of African women*

Doctor Nora Kofognotera Nonterah, a Ghanaian theologian and university lecturer who is participating in the work of the General Assembly as a witness of the synodal process for Africa, spoke next. She said she felt heard as a layperson, a woman, and an African woman in a Church that in the past often did not give voice to, nor benefit from, the wisdom of African women. “But as I come to the Synod,” she said, “I come to the Synod with the hopes, the joys, the dreams, the anxieties, the lamentations, but also the resilience of the African women, lay people from the continent, and in fact, the entire church, that might not always get to sit at the center of the table of discourse.”

She added, “Inspired by the significance of the maternal role of our lady, Mother Mary, I tend to believe that African women can teach the church how to be a mother for all, how to be a visionary mother for all her children.”

Dr Nonterah continued, “My convic-

tion is that synodality is the best way to live as a church that can give true witness to the Gospel. However, for us to emerge as a synodal church, in my opinion, can only be possible if we have true and authentic and deep formation that is rooted in conversation in the spirit. And the spirit always invites us to celebrate our differences, not to hide them, but to recognize and celebrate them. Also important to this same issue is my conviction that we need to give a preferential option for the laity in the educational fields of the church, like theology, canon law, social teachings of the church, ministry of leadership. This should become the norm and practice of a synodal church.”

The theologian concluded by recalling the wisdom of African women with a song dedicated to an African mother.

The Synod is a Spiritual Experience

DURING the question and answer period, **Cardinal Prevost** responded to a question about the topic of abuse, noting that it had been discussed in the small Circles. **Pires** added that it had emerged from the discussions that Episcopal Conferences had created offices to address this issue, which was stimulating for those Conferences that did not have them. Nonterah explained that children are afraid to speak out, so synodality must begin within Christian families. “And it is only when we

become a synodal church, but also when our Christian families become synodal domestic churches, that synodality can really play this role in safeguarding of minors,” she said.

A question for **Cardinal Prevost** concerned the potential for involving the laity in consultations on the appointment of bishops. The Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops said that, although the process is somewhat reserved, efforts are being made to include more laypeople and religious in the consultations about potential episcopal appointments.

In response to a question about divisions expressed in the Synod, **Cardinal Prevost** explained that there were more differences of opinion than divisions. There was respectful listening, which was crucial given the variety of participants. Unity was always sought, not uniformity. **Archbishop Broglio** saw the need for encouraging greater participation in the future. **Cardinal Nzapalainga** added that differences were not a handicap but a source of richness, and divergent views were not synonymous with hostility but aspects to consider.

Regarding a question about the revision of Church structures, **Cardinal Prevost** recalled that the Church has many dimensions, but this Synod does not pertain directly to institutional ones, but instead has been focusing on the charismatic, spiritual, human, and relational aspects of the Church. **Archbishop Broglio** was asked whether

the US bishops had promoted participation in the Synod, and he expressed his hope for good ideas to encourage wider participation.

Regarding a question about LGBT individuals, **Archbishop Broglio** emphasized the need for inclusion, emphasizing that “anyone who meets Jesus Christ does

not go away the same.” He noted that Jesus “reached out” to groups that were considered sinners, “but He reached out so that there would be a moment of conversion. Concerning Catholics who are attached to “the traditional form of Mass,” he stated that the Church is large enough to welcome everyone.