

## Synod Press Briefing with Fraternal Delegates

**Fraternal delegates lend 'ecumenical character' to Synod press briefing: Thursday's synod press briefing had a significant "ecumenical" character, with two non-Catholic "fraternal delegates" contributing to the discussion.**

*At the press briefing on Thursday, Dr Paolo Ruffini, the Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication and President of the Information Commission, and Sheila Pires, the Secretary of the same Commission, announced that the General Assembly is currently working on the synthesis document, which will be published on Saturday, after the Letter to the People of God was approved and released yesterday afternoon.*

### **Pires: The Vibrancy of Free Speech**

"Yesterday afternoon, the eighteenth General Congregation was held with 348 members present, and we first proceeded to vote on the Letter to the People of God," Pires reported. "Each member voted using the tablets provided. The question was: 'Do I approve of the Synod letter?' The result of the vote was 336 in favor and 12 against. As you know, Pope Francis also intervened in the open discussions," Pires stated.

"In the free interventions," she emphasized,

"the need for a missionary audacity of the Church was highlighted, and it was also mentioned that the encounter with Jesus is at the center of faith and missionary enthusiasm. The Church is constituted as such in the announcement of the Gospel, and one cannot think of the Church independently from the mission."

Pires continued,

"There was also talk of the importance of prayer and prayer groups. The fundamental importance of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation was reaffirmed. The liturgical dimension of synodality was emphasized, synodality as a liturgical act, and the Synod as a maternal place in liturgy."

Furthermore, Pires reported that the "importance of *sensus fidei* [the sense of the faith] was emphasized. There was talk about the appreciation of women and the opportuneness of referring to the many women who accompanied Jesus. Concerning the Church's listening, the ability to listen, console, advise, which is typical of women was also emphasized. It was also said that women should not be objects but subjects of the Church."

Pires also mentioned that the issue of "abuses, not only physical ones" was addressed. Then,

"the importance of the concept of the Kingdom of God was emphasized: the Church is for the Kingdom and not for itself. It was said that, for this reason, the Church must be welcoming."

In the discussions in the Assembly, it was recalled that

"reference was made to the teachings and hermeneutics of Vatican II.

There was talk about the great mission of Christian unity, dialogue with other religions, and relations with non-believers.”

“The forms of cultural colonialism of the global North towards the global South” were another issue raised in the Assembly, as well as

“the importance of emphasizing the presence of the Church in the world’s crises. It was said that the Church is not outside the world and cannot ignore what is happening: wars and the desire for peace.”

From this perspective, Pires stated,

“The situation of suffering of those who still need to understand how to raise and educate their children in a reality where children die every day due to conflicts and in situations of severe inequality was also mentioned.”

Furthermore,

“the evangelical request to place the poor at the center of the Church’s journey was also emphasized: a Christological aspect, not a social one.”

Pires finally reported that the forthcoming synthesis document is intended to encourage the People of God to whom it is destined.

### **Ruffini:**

#### ***The contents and purpose of the “Synthesis Report”***

Dr Ruffini reported that “this morning, the examination of the draft *Synthesis Report* began by the Small Circles for the presentation of the

collective ‘modi’ [amendments], which can be integrative, substitutive, or eliminative. There were 349 present in the Assembly” in the morning session.

This morning, “before the start of the work in the Circles, after the prayer, the Commission for the drafting of the Synthesis Document shared with the Assembly the criteria underlying the Document that will be submitted for a vote on Saturday, and which we are now examining,” the Prefect explained. He clarified that

“the Document that will be submitted to the Pope as the outcome of the Synod will be the one approved in the next Assembly in October 2024.”

While “the Document under discussion now has a different nature; it is transitory.”

Ruffini said,

“Its main purpose is to help us understand where we are, to remember what has been said in these weeks of discernment, and to restart, in a circular process, a journey that began at the beginning of this Synod and will end in October 2024.”

In particular,

“the Document should contain points where discernment is more advanced and those that require further exploration. It should faithfully represent everything. We are in a process of circularity. The Assembly will return to the People of God their own discernment, just as the People of God, when listened to, offered theirs.”

“This is a journey,” Ruffini insisted, “and certainly, due to the nature and brevity of the Document – it is 40 pages; it wouldn’t make sense to have a transitory text of 100 or 200 pages – it cannot contain every detail.”

The language should be conversational, he added, and

“the Document will serve to encourage those who are already on the journey: all the baptized, laymen and laywomen, deacons, priests, bishops, consecrated persons. Everyone should feel encouraged and thanked for embarking on or continuing the journey. Many are already on the march.”

“There are many beautiful things in the Church that unfortunately sometimes do not appear,”

the Prefect continued. “The Document should also serve to bring energy and joy to this synodal experience.” In this regard, he concluded,

“The motivation of the Document must be clear: it will help us understand and learn how to walk together, to seek solutions together, hand in hand, without excluding anyone.”

In the awareness that

“the People of God need priests and laity who walk together serenely, without yielding to the temptation of clericalism.”

**Murray:**

### ***The Significance of Fraternal Delegates’ Presence***

“Following the practice, fraternal delegates from various Churches and ecclesial communities are participating in the XVI General Assembly of the Synod,”

said Christiane Murray of the Holy See Press Office, who moderated the briefing. In order to have a broader representation, 12 fraternal delegates from the four major Christian traditions were invited: three from the Orthodox Church, three from the Oriental Orthodox Churches, three from historic Protestant Communion, and three from Pentecostal-Evangelical communities.”

According to “the Synod tradition,” Murray explained,

“fraternal delegates are not mere observers but are invited to participate in the discussions, especially in the Small Circles. They also participated in the spiritual retreat in preparation for the Synod, which took place from October 1 to 3.”

**Cardinal Koch:**

### ***Ecumenism, synodality, and mission***

In this context, Cardinal Kurt Koch, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, spoke about the ecumenical dimension of the Synod.

He emphasized that the presence of fraternal delegates demonstrates that the participation of other Churches and ecclesial communities is at the heart of the ecumenical experience, saying,

“Baptism is what unites us, [it is] the foundation of ecumenism, and the basis of synodality.”

The Prefect highlighted the liturgical dimension of synodality, stating that “we pray and walk together” because “common prayer is very important.” He reiterated that Pope Francis is convinced that this synodal process must be ecumenical and that the ecumenical journey must be synodal because “there is a reciprocity between ecumenism and synodality.” It should be remembered that ecumenism began as a missionary movement.

**Iosif, the Orthodox Metropolitan of Western and Southern Europe, who was present at the Synod as a fraternal delegate, spoke next.**

“As the Orthodox Church, we are very pleased to be part of this process,” he began, recalling that reflection on synodality and primacy has been ongoing for ten years within the International Joint Commission for Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue.

“Among the Christians of the world, a true ‘fraternity’ is being built after ages marked by tensions and divisions. We seek together what unites us,”

he affirmed. As an example of cooperation, the Metropolitan pointed out that in Italy,

“the Catholic Church lends more than 300 churches to the Romanian Orthodox Church.”

Moreover, he added, “ecumenism happens at the grassroots,” through the testimony of many mixed families that have formed in Europe and around the world.

**Onyinah:  
an act of humility by the Pope  
and the Church**

Opuku Onyinah, a representative of the World Pentecostal Federation and former president of the Church of Pentecost in Ghana, also present at the Synod as a fraternal delegate, is a member of the International Catholic-Pentecostal Joint Commission.

“The invitation which was thrown to the ecumenical bodies and other churches was humility on the part of the Pope, and as such, the Catholic Church,”

he said,

“represented an act of humility on the part of the Pope and the Catholic Church.”

The synodal process, he added,

“is very open, transparent, and offers people equal opportunity to share their views.”

Furthermore,

“every contribution is considered as very important.” a

According to Onyinah, this is

“a sign of maturity at the highest level that has been demonstrated by the Catholic Church.”

**Archbishop Gadecki:  
A method for dialogue**

Archbishop Stanisław Gadecki, the Archbishop of Poznan and the President of the Polish Episcopal Conference, spoke about his experience, expressing amazement that,

despite inviting other Christians, Jews, and non-believers, discord was avoided. “Rarely,” he explained,

“does this happen in human encounters between different positions. Instead, the method used was positive: first, express your ideas, then listen to others, and finally engage in discussion, even with silence. Thus, we have demonstrated that there is a method for dialogue with the help of the Holy Spirit, which can bring peaceful discussions in this world, even outside the Church, to make progress on issues such as wars and global conflicts.”

Regarding the ecumenical aspect, the President of the Polish Bishops’ Conference stressed that this synodal process is moving toward unity while respecting differences in confessions, spirits, and cultures.

**Dr Clifford:**  
***With the style of continuous and open dialogue***

Dr Catherine Clifford, a Canadian and a professor of systematic and historical theology at St. Paul University in Ottawa, and a member of the International Catholic-Methodist Joint Commission, is participating in the Synod as a representative of the synodal process for North America. She highlighted that every bishop in the world

“the desire of all the world’s bishops to take on the theme of synodality as the priority for the present synodal process is the fruit of decades of reflection in a long process of maturation that has been

nourished by the dialogues that go on on a regular basis between ecumenical partners.”

Regarding the pre-synodal journey in the Canadian context, she noted that

“Important exchanges took place between representatives of other Christian churches who shared their own experiences with us concerning their practices of synodal church governance. This is an important example of what we call receptive ecumenism, learning from one another’s best practices, each church recognizing the need for renewal and growth so that we might all better live the gospel. Finally, synodality has also become a preferred image or paradigm for our common journey toward becoming a church that is fully reconciled.

The faith that we share in Jesus Christ, the source of salvation for all humankind is much greater than the questions that continue to divide us.”

***Answers to journalists’ questions***

In response to a question, Dr Clifford highlighted the importance of Pope Francis’s invitation to take the Church as the People of God more seriously. She pointed out that in the last 30 years, important conversations have taken place among theologians about a common understanding of the Church. It is notable that this parallels the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, which sees the Church as a mystery of communion and the People of God.

Archbishop Gadecki added that, concerning future priests in Poland, the training period has been extended to seven years, including a propædeutic year, and various sciences are applied to ensure that candidates are effectively trained, fostering relationships with others so that future priests do not become detached from the world.

When asked about the role of ecumenism in the new evangelization, Cardinal Koch explained that this is an important issue. Archbishop Gadecki echoed this, stating that mission has accompanied the lives of both Jewish and ecclesial communities. Regarding the need to discern the signs of the times, the prelate mentioned the example of the young Blessed Carlo Acutis as a witness of holiness. Dr Clifford, for her part, explained that Pope Francis calls for a missionary conversion in *Evangelii gaudium*.

When asked whether the same members would be present next year, Dr Ruffini replied that the assembly is expected to remain the same.

The Romanian Metropolitan was then asked about the limits of synodality in the Orthodox experience. He replied that the difficulties lie in reaching consensus. According to Cardinal Koch, synodality is simple if there is an awareness that “the faith of the believers is at the center of our service.”

A final question touched on the lack of vocations and the possibility of the ordination of married men.

Dr Ruffini mentioned that it was touched upon but not one of the most discussed topics. Cardinal Koch recalled that it was discussed in the Synod for the Amazon, but in the end, the Pope did not make a decision because he explained that, although he had listened to too many voices, he had not heard that of the Holy Spirit.

“We Orthodox, after millennia of married priests, remind Catholics that this possibility exists,”

echoed Metropolitan Iosif. Dr Clifford concluded by saying that the topic was not absent from the discussions.