



74<sup>a</sup> General Assembly of CEI  
(Rome, 24-27 May 2021)

## **The Final Communiqué**

*The prayer presided over by Pope Francis and his dialogue with the Bishops opened the 74<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Italian Bishops' Conference that took place at the Ergife Palace Hotel in Rome from 24 to 27 May 2021 under the guidance of the Cardinal President, Msgr. Gualtiero Bassetti.*

*The Assembly focused on the topic, "Proclaiming the Gospel in a time of rebirth – In view of starting a synodal path". Starting from the key report, the Bishops exchanged their views both in the working groups and during the final debate. It emerged that it is urgent and important that the Italian Church starts a process aiming at strengthening the "ecclesial Us" in accordance with the synodal path of the universal Church outlined by the Pope. The Assembly did not fail to focus its attention on the challenges that Italy is facing: the country is worn out by the pandemic and its social and economic effects.*

*The General Assembly was attended by 200 members and 13 emeritus bishops.*

*It also included the election of the vice-presidents for Northern and Central Italy, the presidents of the twelve Bishops' Commissions, and the members of the Council for Economic Affairs.*

*The Assembly was also the occasion for updating the bishops on the "Social Week of Italian Catholics" (Taranto, 21-24 October 2021), on the application of the Motu Proprio Mitis iudex Dominus Iesus and on the steps made two years after approval of the "Guidelines for the Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Persons". The bishops were informed on the activities of Caritas at a national and local level during the pandemic and on the "Day for the Pope's charity" as well as on the work of the media of CEI (Avvenire, Tv2000, radio InBlu2000, SIR press agency).*

*The General Assembly approved the establishment of various patron saints and performed the following legal and administrative procedures. Approval of the annual balance sheet of CEI for the year 2021; approval of the distribution and allocation of the amounts deriving from the "8 per mil" for the year 2021; presentation of the final balance sheet for the year 2020 of the Central Institute for the Support of the Clergy. Finally, the Assembly approved a further extraordinary allocation of 60 million Euros in favour of the Italian dioceses to face the Covid-19 emergency.*

## **Dialogue with Pope Francis**

Pope Francis opened the 74<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, for which the Italian Bishops gathered from 24 to 27 May 2021 at the Ergife Palace Hotel in Rome. In his keynote, the Pope drew the audience's attention on three issues: seminars, ecclesiastic tribunals, and the "synodal path". In particular, he asked the participants to resume the key points outlined by the National Convention in Florence in 2015 and to develop a path that starts from the grassroots and focuses on the people of God. The dialogue with the Pope focused on the issue of synodality. The Bishops expressed their great appreciation for the words of the Pope. They are aware that the Florence Convention was a fundamental event for the life of the Church in Italy, both thanks to the horizon outlined in the Pope's speech and due to the conditions of implementation, which turned it into a real exercise of synodality.

## **The Bishops start the "synodal path"**

The "synodal path" was the focus of the Assembly. In his introduction, the Cardinal President defined it as "the necessary process, which will allow our Churches who are in Italy to continuously develop a style of presence in history that must be credible and reliable". The participants shared the view that it is urgent to implement this path, and this was further confirmed by the Pope's decision to start a new synodal process for the 16<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will consist of three phases (from October 2021 to October 2023), going from the diocesan to the universal level. This situation will require a harmonization between the path of the universal Church and that of the Church in Italy, and any diocesan synod that has just concluded or is still under way has to be taken into account. While synodality must be understood as a permanent "style" in the Church, it is equally important – so it emerged from the Assembly – to express and explain its content, such as the *kerygma*, the central place of the Word of God as a criterion of discernment, and spiritual life.

The challenge consists in building paths that express the specific features of the ecclesial communities in the country within a broader "ecclesial Us". From this viewpoint, it becomes evident that synodality should not be considered in a sociological perspective, but in its spiritual dimension: it is not about procedures, but ecclesial conversion, that the Pope has repeatedly reminded us about. This is the goal that must be pursued with courage, overcoming the risk of inconclusive and frustrating abstractions and adopting effective measures so that the diversification of the Italian territory does not thwart the possibility of shared decisions. Besides, the synodal path must be seen as a providential event, since it meets today's requirement, i.e. to give life to a Church that is more missionary and ready to listen to the questions and expectations of all men and women.

Starting from "the grassroots", as the Pope demanded, means listening to the rank and file, then continue at ever higher levels, also reaching far away people, well beyond the borders of the "insiders", touching the ecumenical and interreligious field as well. In this way, and in keeping with the words of the Cardinal President, the "synodal path" can really be a guarantee of an inclusive "ecclesial Us", as an expression of the Church as "people of God".

Finally, the General Assembly voted on the following motion: “With this Assembly the Italian Bishops start the synodal path according to the indications of Pope Francis, as proposed in a first draft of the charter of intents submitted to the Holy Father. At the same time, they give the Permanent Council the task of appointing a working group to harmonize its topics, times of development, and forms, taking into account the Note of the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops dated 21 May 2021, the draft of the charter of intents, and the considerations of this Assembly”.

### **Looking at the wounds of society**

The Italian Bishops are worried about the country’s social and economic situation: the pandemic had a very strong impact not only on healthcare, but also on the social fabric. The data of Caritas, which were mentioned by the Cardinal President, and the reports submitted by several regions impose a massive effort in favour of the families, businesses, young people, and the outcast. From this viewpoint, the “National Plan for Recovery and Resilience” (PNRR) can be a growth opportunity to give the country new strength and provide it with new resources from which everyone may benefit. Italian society has been deeply impacted by the negative effects of the present health emergency on the economy, on employment, on human relationships, and on the Church. In fact, Covid-19 has taken off the veil from some processes that were latent in the Italian Church but came into light in various surveys and statistics, such as the reduction in active participation in religious celebrations and in the life of the Church. However, in a society that we may define as “dechristianized” there are also many people in search of God – a demand that is not dormant and asks to be met. According to the bishops, this is a favourable time for a renewal of the Church as well as a starting point for many kinds of ecclesial projects, which must always have the human being at its centre, since the dignity of human beings is independent from their geographic origin, sexual orientation, or social standing. In this context, with respect to the draft bill concerning “Measures to prevent and fight discrimination and violence for any reasons connected with sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability” the Bishops agreed that it is necessary to establish an “open dialogue”. They expressed their wish for a solution that is free from ambiguity and legislative stretches and that combines the refusal of any discrimination with freedom of expression.

The words of the Cardinal President about migrants had a wide positive response. In light of the many tragedies occurring in the Mediterranean Sea and on the Balkan Route, the Bishops reaffirmed that the issue must be dealt with jointly, at a European level, and that there is an alternative to illegal migration and to so many people dying in the Mediterranean Sea. Some bishops underscored that importance of Italy ratifying the UN Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Once again, the Assembly prayed for the fourteen victims of the tragedy of Stresa-Mottarone and their families, and they expressed their get-well wishes for the surviving child.

### **Concrete proximity**

During the time of the pandemic, the focus on the wounds of society turned into concrete proximity: in the face of new requirements (or old requirements with a new livery) among poor people or the so-called “new poor”, the Church’s response has been prompt and creative. As far as charitable activities are concerned, Caritas made an enormous effort at a national and local level throughout all phases of the emergency. As explained in a report, right from the onset action was taken to provide assistance and reception to homeless persons; to adapt soup kitchens and food distribution services to the rules for containment of the spread of the virus; to supply food stuffs to an ever-increasing number of people; to meet the requirements to small businesses and occasional workers not receiving support from the State, to freelance professionals and seasonal workers, to employees waiting to receive payroll subsidies; to ensure that children, adolescents, and youngsters have the possibility to follow long-distance lessons by supplying them with various devices; to provide psychological support to adolescents, young people, and seniors who are worn out by the pandemic.

In order to face the pandemic’s medical, economic, and social effects and to support not only persons and families in situation of poverty and difficulty, but also corporations and associations working in emergency situations and ecclesiastic corporations (including parishes) in distress, the Assembly resolved further extraordinary payments to the Dioceses totalling 60 million Euros. This new contribution follows another one made last year in an amount of 200 million Euros. The relevant amounts will be used by the end of February 2022 and their use will be reported to CEI not later than April 2022.

### **Miscellaneous**

*Ecclesiastical tribunals.* The bishops were updated on the application of the *Motu Proprio Mitis iudex Dominus Iesus*. Following the Pope’s recent statements, they started discussion and exchanges so that proximity is not understood merely in geographical terms, but as a commitment of the Dioceses to implement a process whereby the spouses experiencing a crisis are not kept far away from the tribunals. The pastoral aspect should be strengthened and canonical justice should be made easy and accessible. Taking into account the fact that the native judge – as far as he is the pastor – is the bishop, the family counselling centres play an essential role in listening to separated and/or divorced persons and in supporting the procedures for the start of any action in court.

*Safeguarding of minors.* Another update concerned the National Service for the Safeguarding of Minors. Two years after the approval of the “Guidelines for the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable persons” the Bishops were informed on the work done for the prevention of any abuse of power and conscience and of sexual abuse in the local Churches and in the Institutes of consecrated life, as well as in associations and movements. During this time, 16 Regional Services with 16 Coordinators were established along with 16 bishops in charge of them, as well as 219 Diocesan Services for the safeguarding of minors, plus various “listening centres” in some Dioceses. This means that a process of public awareness and accountability has started, with the help of various documents as well as information and training programmes.

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*Legal and administrative procedures.* As it happens every year, the bishops performed the required legal and administrative procedures: approval of the annual accounts of CEI for the year 2021; approval of the distribution and allocation of the amounts deriving from the “8 per mil” for the year 2021; and presentation of the 2020 financial statements of the *Central Institute for the Support of the Clergy*.

*Patron Saints.* The General Assembly approved the establishment of the following patron saints. Saint Martin of Tours as patron saint of Italian volunteers. Saint Giuseppe Moscati as patron saint of physicians, nurses, and helpers of the Italian emergency healthcare service as well as of Italian emergency medical doctors and surgeons. Saint Giovanni Bosco as patron saint of labour inspectors. Our Lady of Graces from the bridge of Porretta Terme as patron saint of Italian basketball. The above require a ratification of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

### **Communications and information**

The General Assembly received various pieces of information. The first topic was the 49<sup>th</sup> Social Week of Italian Catholics, scheduled to take place in Taranto from 21 to 24 October 2021 with in-person presence (in small numbers). The Dioceses are preparing for this Social Week with initiatives and events organized on the basis of the *Instrumentum Laboris*. It will focus on the care for our planet, starting from the analysis of some emblematic “wounds” of the country, such as the city of Taranto itself, the so-called “land of fires” in Campania, and other 41 sites “of national interest” where environmental disasters are destroying the most basic conditions for work and social life.

Another topic was the “Day for the Pope’s charity” (Sunday, June 27<sup>th</sup>), an opportunity to rediscover the importance and value of the essential and to provide the Pope – in very difficult times – with a sign of love by concretely supporting his activities with respect to magisterium, guidance of the universal Church, and charity. In 2019, the Italian Dioceses gave the Holy See 1,877,830.31 Euros; the amount received by the Holy See pursuant to can. 1271 of the Code of Canon Law was 4,026,490.00 Euros, of which: 4,000,000.00 Euros from CEI; 21,490.00 Euros from the Archdiocese of Genoa; 5,000.00 Euros from the Diocese of Lamezia Terme. The media of the Italian Church (*the daily newspaper Avvenire, Tv2000, Radio InBlu2000, Sir press agency*) and of the individual Dioceses – starting with the diocesan weeklies associated in the Italian Federation of Catholic Weeklies (FISC) – will continue to support the initiative with various activities in 2021.

The third topic concerned the implementation of the *Motu Proprio Spiritus Domini* and the *Motu Proprio Antiquum ministerium*. The bishops were informed that the Secretariat General of CEI has organized a working table with the intention of getting information on the real situation of local Churches. This table should give precious indications in view of drawing up a text (to be worked out by the competent bodies of CEI and approved by the Assembly) expressing common orientations and establishing the required training programme and the regulatory criteria to access the lay ministries. This is done in the aim of finding the forms that are best suited to the service that these people will be called to provide in accordance with the content of the Apostolic Letters.

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The last communication concerned the media of CEI (Sir, Avvenire, Tv2000, and Radio InBlu2000), especially the efforts made in providing information and giving voice to local units during the medical emergency.

The schedule of the CEI activities for the pastoral year 2021 – 2022 was presented to the General Assembly. Among other events, it includes the National Eucharistic Congress, scheduled to take place in Matera from 22 to 25 September 2022.

### **Statutory Procedures**

The Assembly elected two Vice Presidents of CEI, the members of the Commission for Economic Affairs, and the Presidents of the Bishops' Commissions.

The Assembly elected as Vice Presidents: His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Erio Castellucci, Archbishop Abbot of Modena – Nonantola and Bishop of Carpi, for Northern Italy, and His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Giuseppe Andrea Salvatore Baturi, Archbishop of Cagliari, for Central Italy.

The following four persons were elected as members of the Council for Economic Affairs: His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Simone Giusti, Bishop of Livorno; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Mauro Parmeggiani, Bishop of Tivoli and Palestrina; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Rocco Pennacchio, Archbishop of Fermo; and His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Luigi Testore, Bishop of Acqui Terme.

The following were elected as Presidents of the Bishops' Commissions. His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Franco Giulio Brambilla, Bishop of Novara, President of the Commission for the doctrine of the faith, the proclamation of the Gospel and catechesis; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Gianmarco Busca, Bishop of Mantua, President of the Commission for liturgy; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Carlo Roberto Maria Redaelli, Archbishop of Gorizia, President of the Commission for the service in charity and healthcare; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Paolo Martinelli, Auxiliary Bishop of Milan, President of the Commission for the clergy and consecrated life; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Angelo Spinillo, Bishop of Aversa, President of the Commission for the laity; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Paolo Giulietti, Archbishop of Lucca, President of the Commission for the family, youth, and life; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Giuseppe Satriano, Archbishop of Bari – Bitonto and Apostolic Administrator of Rossano – Cariati, President of the Commission for the evangelization of peoples and the cooperation between Churches; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Dario Olivero, Bishop of Pinerolo, President of the Commission for ecumenism and dialogue; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Claudio Giuliodori, General Ecclesiastic Assistant of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, President of the Commission for Catholic education, schools, and universities; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Luigi Renna, Bishop of Cerignola – Ascoli Satriano, President of the Commission for social issues and labour, justice and peace; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Domenico Pompili, Bishop of Rieti and Apostolic Administrator "vacant seat" of Ascoli Piceno, President of the Commission for culture and media; His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Gian Carlo Perego, Archbishop of Ferrara – Comacchio, President of the Commission for migrations.

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In the framework of the General Assembly, the Permanent Bishops' Council met on May 26<sup>th</sup> to approve the "Application regulation concerning the grant of financial contributions of CEI for ecclesiastic cultural heritage and religious buildings" and the publication of the Message for the 16<sup>th</sup> National Day for the Safeguarding of Creation (1 September 2021) on the topic "Walking in a new life" (Rm 6:4). The *ecologic transition for the care of life*, prepared by the Commission for social issues and labour, justice and peace and the Commission for ecumenism and dialogue.

The Permanent Council also decided that during the first months of the year to come Florence, the city of Giorgio La Pira, will host an event to provide continuity to the project, "Encounter of reflection and spirituality; the Mediterranean region as a frontier of peace", which took place in Bari from 19 to 23 February 2020. This event will involve ecclesial and civilian communities of the Mediterranean region.

Finally, the Permanent Council made the following appointments:

- National President of the Italian Catholic Action (ACI): Prof. Giuseppe Notarstefano (Palermo).
- National ecclesiastic assistant of the Italian Adult Catholic Scouts Movement (MASCI): Don Angelo Gonzo (Trento).
- National ecclesiastic counsellor of the National Federation of Farmers (Coldiretti): Don Nicola Macculi (Lecce).
- National ecclesiastic assistant of the "Opera Assistenza Malati Impediti" (OAMI) (Work for the Disabled Sick Persons): His Most Rev. Excellency Msgr. Gastone Simoni, Bishop emeritus of Prato.
- National Coordinator of the pastoral care for Latin American Catholics in Italy: Fr. Luis Fernando Lopez Gallego (Sonson Rionegro, Columbia).
- President of the Ecclesiastic Movement for Cultural Commitment (MEIC): Mr. Luigi D'Andrea (Messina-Lipari-Santa Lucia del Mela).
- National President of the Italian Catholic Women Students' Federation (FUCI): Ms. Allegra Tonnarini (Rome).

Rome, 27 May 2021