

## An interview with the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops on the appointment of two new Under-secretaries



### **Cardinal Grech: The Church is reinforcing its commitment to grow in synodality**

**An interview with the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops on the appointment of two new Under-secretaries who will work alongside him so that the Church becomes ever more synodal, as Pope Francis desires.**

This step forward is very important. It reinforces the General Secretariat of the Synod and provides renewed impetus toward a synodal and missionary Church. So comments Cardinal Mario Grech to Vatican Media, speaking about the appointment of the two Under-secretaries of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops announced on Saturday. The Maltese prelate reflects in particular on the appointment of Sr Nathalie Becquart who is the first woman to receive this office and on the prospects that this appointment opens regarding the role of women in the life of the Church:

***Cardinal Grech, the appointment of two Under-secretaries in the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops was announced today. Sr Nathalie Becquart's appointment stands out in particular. For the first time, a woman will hold this office. What significance does this choice have regarding the synodal path that Pope Francis has so much at heart?***

Pope Francis has reminded us often that a synodal Church is a Church characterized by listening: by reciprocal listening by which everyone – the faithful, bishops and the Bishop of Rome – learns from each other; and above all, by listening to the Holy Spirit all together.

The appointment of Sr Nathalie Becquart as Under-secretary will thus help us to remember in a concrete way that on this synodal way the voice of the People of God has a specific place and that it is fundamental to find ways to encourage the effective participation of all the baptized along this way.

This perspective has characterized the way in which Pope Francis has interpreted the Synod in his entire pontificate. We saw it during the Synod on Young People and then during the Synod on the Amazon: the listening and the participation of young people and indigenous populations had a crucial impact on the preparation and development of the work.

***As Under-secretary, Sr Nathalie Becquart will have the right to vote at the next Synod whose focus is a synodal Church. The question regarding the right of women to vote during the Synod was very important during the last synodal assemblies. Does this appointment represent the possibility that the right to vote during a Synod will also be open to other women?***

During the last Synods, numerous synodal fathers emphasized the need that the entire Church reflect on the place and role of women within the Church. Even Pope Francis highlighted several times the importance that women be more involved in the processes of discernment and decision making in the Church. Already in the last synods, the number of women participating as experts or auditors increased. With the appointment of Sr Nathalie Becquart, and the possibility that she will participate with the right to vote, a door has been open. We will then see what other steps could be taken in the future.

***Something else that is new is that the General Secretariat will have two Under-secretaries. What specific contribution will Under-secretary Fr Luis Marín de San Martín bring since he comes from such a great spiritual tradition as the Augustinian tradition?***

Fr Luis Marín de San Martín has a vast experience in accompanying communities in decision making processes and his knowledge of the Second Vatican Council will be precious so that the roots of the synodal way remain always present. In addition, the fact that both Under-secretaries are religious, each one having matured in a specific spirituality, says how important it is that the synodal Church take into consideration the various charisms present in the Church as well.

***Accompanying these appointments, will the Synod operate in a new way? Can we expect anything else to change in the structure of the General Secretariat?***

Undoubtedly. These appointments highlight the importance that the journey of a synodal Church be accompanied by a group that works together: the structure and the way the General Secretariat works must itself be synodal! Working together as a team allows the laity greater participation within the dynamics of responsibility.

I would like that the three of us, and all of the staff of the Synod Secretariat, work out of the same spirit of collaboration and experience a new style of “synodal” leadership, a leadership of service that is less clerical and hierarchical, that allows participation and co-responsibility without at the same time abdicating the responsibilities entrusted to them. So, we will try to follow Pope Francis’s example.

***In the last few days, the Pope encouraged the Church in Italy to initiate a synodal process. Other Churches have initiated or are initiating synodal journeys. How do you evaluate this renewed willingness of the local Churches to assume a “synodal style”?***

Pope Francis has emphasized that “it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium”; and he has insisted on the connection between synodality and the mission of evangelization. The situation created by the pandemic has highlighted even more how important it is that the Church and society “walk together” and responsibly take on the connections that unite us to each other.

The announcement of the theme of the next Synod on synodality is already nourished by the synodal dynamics that are being implemented in the local Churches, even though the contexts and models are different. If the Church in Italy should go in that direction, it could also enrich the universal Church's reflection. As the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, we follow with interest all these various synodal processes that are in course and we offer our availability to put ourselves at their service. They are occasions for seeking together how to promote and develop that "synodal style" that Pope Francis desires and to which many believers throughout the world aspire.

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*This is a working translation of the original Italian interview.*