

# **Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (CEBs) in the 2023 Synod *Synthesis Document*<sup>1</sup> (English Translation)**

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The *Synthesis Document* of the recent Synodal Assembly meeting in the Vatican in October, 2023 makes us see that yes, the *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs)<sup>2</sup> are “a seed” that has become “a big bush.” With us and many other like-minded groups, Synodality is here to stay.

## **A. Let's Notice First**

1. The *Synthesis Document* is the memory of the reflections that were given during the Synodal Assembly in Rome in October, 2023 based on the *Working Document* delivered by the Secretariat Team of the Synodal Assembly.

2. The *Working Document* was the result of the contributions of the dioceses and the summaries of the National and Continental Bishops Conferences.

3. The *Synthesis Document* will now be reflected upon in parishes and dioceses to reflect and choose what needs to be done/what needs to change as we move towards greater synodality.

4. These reflections and proposals will be reviewed again at a Second Synodal Assembly in Rome in October, 2024.

## **B. Pope Francis Has Won His Bet to Put the Church in a Process of Synodality**

1. This process began in 2015 with his famous speech on the importance of Synodality (17 October, 2015), on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the first Synod convoked by Pope Paul VI.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the original Spanish: *Las CEBs en el Documento de Síntesis*.

<sup>2</sup> In Spanish: *Comunidades Eclésiales de Base* (CEBs) or simply *Comunidades de Base* (CBs).

In Portuguese-speaking Brazil: *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* (CEBs).

In Portuguese-speaking Africa: *Pequenas Comunidades Cristãs* (PCCs).

In French: *Communautés Eclésiiales de Base* (CEBs) or simply *Communautés de Base* (CBs) or *Petites Communautés Chrétiennes* (PCCs).

Also In Spanish: *Pequeñas Comunidades Cristo* (PCCs).

In English the most common terms are Small Christian Communities (SCCs), Basic Christian Communities (BCCs), Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) and Base Communities (BCs).

2. The process then began in Rome on 10 October, 2021. The final sentence of his speech is very striking (see **Appendix**).

3. At the end of October, 2023 the first session of the Synodal Assembly of some 400 delegates came to an end, including lay women and men, priests and nuns with the right to speak and vote.

4. Pope Francis managed to get everyone to talk and listen to each other based on a *Working Document* that summarized the contributions of groups, parishes and dioceses from all over the planet.

5. The result of this Synodal Assembly is a *Synthesis Document* that collects the reflections made during four weeks in groups of a dozen people gathered around about 35 round tables. There was no shortage of moments of prayer, celebration and pilgrimages.

6. The title and greeting of this *Synthesis Document* is the first thing that is novel and striking. "The Synodal Church in Mission", a title that recalls the theme of the Fifth Episcopal Conference of Aparecida (Brazil) in 2007 where the coordinator of the Secretariat Team was Jorge Bergoglio himself. The simple greeting puts women first: "Dear sisters, dear brothers."

7. The relatively brief *Synthesis Document* reflected the desire to move decisively forward in Synodality despite the strong resistance not only of a dozen cardinals particularly opposed to the choices of Pope Francis, but also the reluctance of many bishops, the rejection of many parish priests and the disinterest of many Catholics who prefer a quiet and sleepy Christianity.

8. The challenge of the Synodal Process has been launched and we have a year to start processing it at all levels.

9. The *CEBs*, which the Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean held in Mexico in 2021 described as a "synodal Church experience," have a particular responsibility in this process to set in motion another way of being church as we have begun to be.

### **C. The CEBs in the Synthesis Document**

1. It is true that the *CEBs* are mentioned directly only once in the *Synthesis Document*: "Widespread in many parts of the world, Base Communities (also called Grassroot Communities) or Small Christian Communities encourage practices of listening by and among the baptized. We are called to enhance their potential, also exploring how they can be adapted to urban contexts." (16, m)

2. We can feel that *CEBs* are included indirectly in another two paragraphs where the document speaks of "new communities" and "catechists" as animators of Christian Communities: "The most precise configuration of councils and councils with representatives of Lay Associations, Ecclesial Movements and new communities". (10, i) "In many regions, the life of Christian Communities and the mission of the Church depend on the figure of catechists." (8, e)

3. But several important aspects of such an assembly smack of *CEBs*:

- Group meetings around a round table that create equality, closeness, trust. (1, c)
- The working method: "See, Discern and Act."

- The importance given to prayer and the Word of God.
- The option for the poor: "Learn from them" because "the similarity of their life to that of the Lord makes the poor heralds of a salvation received as a gift and witnesses of the joy of the Gospel". (4, h)

#### **D. Reflections and Questions To Work On in Our CEBs**

1. Convince many people that:

- As a church we need to improve substantially,
- Synodality is a valid way to achieve a more evangelical Church.
- We can undertake it with confidence.

2. On the basis of the *Synthesis Document* of the Synodal Assembly, we ask ourselves:

##### **See:**

- What are the biggest challenges and problems in our church? And where do they come from?
- What aspects of our church do we think are important to improve or change, and for what reasons?

##### **Discerning/Illuminating:**

- What do we mean by Synodality and what are its main characteristics?
- Which points of the document stand out to us the most and for what reasons?

##### **Act:**

- What paths proposed by the document seem to us to be priorities for the renewal of our church and its service in society?
- How can we achieve this in Synodality?
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**Appendix:** *Prayer of Pope Francis for the Synod* (10 October, 2021).

“Come, Holy Spirit, you who raise up new tongues and put words of life on our lips, deliver us from becoming a museum church, beautiful but mute, with much past and little future. Come into our midst, so that in the synodal experience we do not allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by disenchantment, we do not dilute prophecy, we do not end up reducing everything to sterile discussions.

Come, Spirit of love, open our hearts to listen. Come, Spirit of holiness, renew the holy People of God. Come, Creator Spirit, renew the face of the earth.”

"The way this whole process has been woven has generated a collaboration that becomes irreversible."

*A Synodal Church in Mission*, 41-page English text of the "Summary Report" of the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. 29 October, 2023.  
[2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report\\_IMP.pdf \(synod.va\)](#)