

Rooted and pilgrims

Among social and cultural changes impacting pastoral care today, the recent Synod of Bishops noted the changed experience of space and time that characterizes people's lives. Here are some paragraphs from Part IV of the Final Document of the Synod that consider this theme. We only briefly report reflections of the Document on the phenomenon of migration and the implications of digital culture. as we have dealt with, and will continue to deal with, these topics in special issues of Ekklesia (1/2025 and 2/2026).

111. The experience of [the local rootedness of the Church] means grappling with profound socio-cultural changes that are transforming the understanding of place. 'Place' can no longer be conceived in purely geographical and spatial terms but evokes, in our time, one's belonging to a network of relationships and to a culture whose territorial roots are more dynamic and flexible than ever before. Urbanisation is one of the main factors driving this change. Today, for the first time in human history, most of the global population lives in cities. Large cities are often urban masses without a history and identity in which people live an isolated existence. Traditional territorial bonds are being redefined, blurring the borders of dioceses and parishes. Living in such contexts, the Church is called to rebuild community life, to put a face to faceless entities and to strengthen relationships in this milieu. To this end, we must not only continue to value still useful structures; we also need "missionary creativity" to explore new forms of pastoral action and identify concrete processes of care. It remains the case that rural contexts, some of which constitute genuine existential peripheries, must not be neglected and require specific pastoral attention, as do places of marginalisation and exclusion.

112. ...[O]ur times are marked by a growth in population mobility. Refugees and migrants often form dynamic communities, including of religious practice, rendering [places where they settle] multicultural ...

113. The spread of digital culture, particularly evident among young people, is profoundly changing their experience of space and time; it influences their daily activities, communication and interpersonal relationships, including faith. The opportunities that the internet provides are reshaping relationships, bonds and boundaries. [...]

114. These social and cultural developments challenge the Church to reconsider the meaning of 'local' in its life and to review its organisational structures so that they can better serve its mission. It is essential to understand 'place' as the real and actual setting in which we come to experience our humanity, without denying that there is a geographical and

cultural dimension to this as well. Here, where the web of relationships is established, the Church is called to express its sacramentality (cf. LG 1) and to carry out its mission. [...]

115. The relation between place and space leads us also to reflect on the Church as “home”. When it is not thought of as a closed space, inaccessible, to be defended at all costs, the image of home evokes the possibility of welcome, hospitality, and inclusion. Creation itself is our common home, where members of the one human family live with all other creatures. Our commitment, supported by the Spirit, is to ensure that the Church is perceived as a welcoming home, a sacrament of encounter and salvation, a school of communion for all the sons and daughters of God. [...]

117. The parish is one of the main organising units in the local Church present throughout our history. The parish community that gathers in the celebration of the Eucharist is a privileged place of relationships, welcome, discernment and mission. Changes in how we experience and live our relationship with locality require us to reconsider how parishes are configured. What characterises the parish is that it is a community that is not self-selecting. People gather there from different generations, professions, geographical origins and social classes and status. Responding to the new needs of mission requires opening up to new forms of pastoral action that take into account the mobility of people and the space in which their life unfolds. By placing a special emphasis on Christian initiation and offering accompaniment and formation, the parish community will be able to support people in the different stages of life in fulfilling their mission in the world. In this way, it will become more evident that the parish is not centred on itself but oriented towards mission. The parish is then called to sustain the commitment of so many people who in so many ways live and bear witness to their faith in through their profession, in social, cultural and political activities. In many regions of the world, small Christian communities or basic ecclesial communities are the terrain where meaningful relationships of closeness and reciprocity can flourish, offering the opportunity to experience synodality concretely.

118. We recognise that institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life, as well as associations, movements and new communities, have the ability to take root locally and, at the same time, connect different places and milieus, often at a national or international level. Their action, together with that of many individuals and informal groups, often brings the Gospel to highly diverse contexts: to hospitals, prisons, homes for the elderly, reception centres for migrants, minors, those marginalised and victims of violence; to centres of education and training, schools and universities where young people and families meet; to the arenas of culture and politics and of integral human development, where new forms of living together are imagined and constructed. We look with gratitude also to monasteries, which are places of gathering and discernment and speak of a “beyond” that concerns the whole Church and directs its path. It is the particular responsibility of the Bishop or Eparch to animate these diverse bodies and to nurture the bonds of unity. Institutes and associations are called to act in synergy with the local Church, participating in the dynamism of synodality.