A Lasallian at Synod 2021-2023

On October 9 and 10, Pope Francis presided at the Vatican the beginning of the synodal process towards the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which has as its theme “For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission”.

Four commissions have been set up to advise and collaborate in this synodal process which will last for two years until the actual conduction in October 2023: The Theological Commission, the Methodology Commission, the Spirituality Commission and the Communications Commission. In the latter, Dr. Óscar Elizalde Prada, a Colombian from the Lasallian District of Bogotá, has been appointed as a member representing the Latin American Church.

Oscar Elizalde holds a doctorate in Social Communications from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre (Brazil), a master’s degree in development studies and management, and a bachelor’s degree in education with a specialization in Religious Sciences from the University of La Salle in Bogota (Colombia). Since 2006 he has been linked to the Lasallian Formation Department of this University and is part of the research group Intersubjectivity and Higher Education.

Since 2018, with the creation of the Communications and Marketing Department of La Salle University in Bogota, linked to the Office of the Vice-Rector for Promotion and Human Development, Dr. Elizalde has assumed the role of Director, also providing valuable assistance to the Communications Service of the Institute. In 2020 he was also invited to participate in the Spirituality *think tank* coordinated by the Institute’s Secretariat of Association.

In his communicative career in the Church, Dr. Elizalde has been part of the editorial team of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM in Spanish) that accompanied the Pan-Amazonian Synod in 2019, he is a permanent collaborator of the Spanish journal *Vida Nueva (New Life)* and other Church publications. He was chief editor of the Colombian version of *Vida Nueva* and coordinated the VidaNuevaDigital.com portal for the Andean region. He has also worked for the Latin American Confederation of Religious (CLAR in Spanish) and is a communications advisor for the Inter-American Confederation of Catholic

Education (CIEC in Spanish) as well as for the Amerindia network, at the continental level.

In 2020, as part of the process of renewal and restructuring of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM in Spanish), he was invited to coordinate the reflection group on communications. He is currently part of the CELAM Staff as interim Advisor of the Center for Communication, and has participated in the meeting of the Presidency of CELAM with the Holy Father on October 9.

Walking together

In a dialogue with the Communications Service of the Institute, Dr. Elizalde assesses the challenges of the synod and its communicative implications:

Question: What does this new Synod, which has been called "the Synod of Synodality", consist of?

Unlike other recent synods such as the Synod on the Family, the Synod on Youth or the Synod of Pan-Amazonia, this synod focuses on an essential element of the Church itself, "synodality". Synod means "walking together". "Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, together", Pope Francis reminded us at the opening Eucharist on October 10. And this synod invites us to do so on the basis of three fundamental accents: communion, participation and mission.

A synod for encounter, listen and discernment

Question. You had the opportunity to participate in the opening of Synod 2021-2023 and in the meetings of the synod commissions. What is your assessment of these days?

They have been four very intense, profound days of exchanges, of getting to know and listening to one another, as well as of dialogue, at the level of the synod's commissions. But I remain with the three verbs that Pope Francis postulated in his homily at the inaugural Mass of the synodal process: encounter, listen and discern. "we too are called to become experts in the art of encounter," the Pope told us. But this is not enough, we must listen without haste, "listen with the heart," as Francis stressed, to allow everyone to express themselves: the laity, religious life, priests and deacons, and bishops and cardinals. All the People of God, no one can be left out. Finally, we must be ready to discern, because this

synod is a path of spiritual and communal discernment, deeply ecclesial, accompanied by prayer and guided by the Word of God.

An invitation to participate

Question: How can we Lasallians participate in this synod?

We already have a Preparatory Document and a Vademecum, which is a kind of handbook that will help us to generate dynamics of participation. In these instruments we find methodological aspects so that all Lasallians, as baptized persons, can get involved in each of the phases of the Synod: in our dioceses, in our countries, in our continents. Initially in the local Churches, through the dioceses and parishes, it is hoped that a significant number of people will respond to a simple questionnaire that aims to promote a true experience of mutual listening, guided by the Holy Spirit, which I personally hope will allow us to better understand the "signs of the times" and help us to be a Church that goes out with more audacity, more committed to the peripheries…in our case, from the world of education and based on our Lasallian charism. We cannot let this opportunity pass us by!

Dr. Oscar Elizalde, AFSC
Synod of Bishops Communications Commission