



## **Laypeople and Consecrated Persons: Co-responsible in the Mission**

*Presentation by Cuca Maset at the WUCWO webinar on March 24, 2026*

Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. And thank you for this invitation. I am very happy to be able to participate in this gathering—isn't that right?—on a topic that is not merely organizational, but deeply ecclesial and spiritual. I also thank María for her very generous introduction. However, my role is quite simple. I am the executive secretary general of a religious congregation, and what I will share today stems above all from the concrete experience of this role—its processes, its challenges, and also its many untapped potentials. And the question we are asking ourselves today—and which has brought us here to this gathering—is: How can synodality foster authentic collaboration among the consecrated?

We all know that when we speak of synodality, we are not simply speaking of a working method; we are speaking of a way of being the Church. And if I had to sum it up in one sentence, I would say that synodality changes the quality of the relationship. For a long time, collaboration between religious and laypeople has been experienced primarily as support, hasn't it? The mission is conceived and led by the religious, and the laypeople help realize it. In fact, I'm sure some of you are thinking that even today we still encounter situations where collaboration is experienced this way: the religious decide, and the laypeople carry out the work.

But the synodal paradigm invites us to go more in depth, moving from collaboration to walking together in mission. And from my experience, this change is particularly evident on three levels. The first would be listening. For those of you familiar with the synod's final document, you know that it emphasizes that the synodal Church is above all a Church of listening. In my own experience, I have discovered that one of the greatest changes brought about by synodality is learning to truly listen. And it is not just a matter of asking for opinions or involving people in a process, but of adopting a different attitude. It is listening to the other with the conviction that the Spirit can also speak through him or her. And this, I have to admit, is not something that happens automatically; it requires an inner change because it means no longer thinking that you already know or already have the answer, so that you are open to what may emerge in the encounter. And when this happens—as I have said before—something profoundly changes in the relationship. Little by little, the layperson stops being perceived as someone who simply carries out tasks and begins to be recognized as someone who also contributes, who also discerns, who also has something to say; and at the same time, the leadership is also transformed—it ceases to be experienced as control or as a unilateral decision and begins to be exercised more

as service, as accompaniment, as care for the process. I like to say that when listening is genuine, a new space is created—a space where vocational paths do not have to compete or justify themselves, but can meet and enrich one another.

The second level is that of shared discernment, because synodality does not consist in deciding by vote or in summing up opinions; it is something deeper: seeking together what God is asking of us. And this is not easy, especially because we live in a time when we are constantly being invited to step outside the familiar. Often it means leaving our comfort zone, opening ourselves up to new situations, entering into circumstances that we cannot always control. And in my experience, the synodal process has helped us to place ourselves right there, to sit together, to share information, to listen to different points of view, but above all it is helping us to ask ourselves questions that are not merely organizational but deeply spiritual. What is God asking of us at this moment? Who is God calling us to be? What is God calling us to do? And here I have seen something very concrete: that the synodal process is evident when decisions are not predetermined, when there is truly space to think, to discuss, and to let something new emerge among us all. This naturally requires time; it requires patience, humility, and also trust, because not everything is resolved quickly or with immediate clarity. Above all, it is not easy in the world we are living in because we are so accustomed to instant gratification. We live in a culture shaped by technology and artificial intelligence, where we want everything fast. We seek immediate answers; we tend to cut corners in processes. However, discernment takes a different path; it needs time, it needs listening, it needs to leave space for things to mature, and that demands a different approach—one that is more patient, more open. But as I said before, when this process is truly lived out, something really beautiful happens. The mission ceases to be something that some people plan and others carry out, and becomes a mission that we have discerned together and for that very reason, we feel it is our own.

Then the third level is that of co-responsibility. In my experience, I've had to gradually come to understand that co-responsibility doesn't mean that we all do the same thing, but rather it is something much deeper. The fact is that we are all responsible for the mission, each from our own calling. And here I have discovered a great richness, because when this is done well, each vocation contributes something unique. Consecrated life, for example, brings a living memory of the charism, a way of looking at the realities of the Gospel, the richness of community life, and the witness of evangelical radicalism, which are truly a gift to the Church. At the same time, other callings bring something that is equally necessary: a direct engagement with reality, concrete professional experience, and closeness to the cultural, social, and family challenges of our time. What we are experiencing and seeing today is that co-responsibility does not always consist in collaborating better or in dividing up tasks; it is recognizing that the mission does not belong to some or to others, but to everyone, because together we are the People of God. And this, as I said before, truly involves a significant inner change—moving from a culture of delegation, where some are in charge and others carry out the work, to a culture of real participation, where we all feel involved in what is being experienced and what is being decided.

It is clear that we are experiencing a genuine transformation in the way we relate to one another and discern the mission together. But where are we seeing this, and how can we continue to develop this collaboration? Surely many of you here have similar examples, but in my experience today we are seeing this collaboration grow in very specific areas that reflect the profound change we are experiencing in the Church. What we are experiencing primarily in the religious congregation where I work is that we are moving from structures centered on the religious sisters to shared structures where the mission is sustained by all of us. An example that is surely common to many congregations is collaboration in educational structures. For many years, schools were managed almost exclusively by religious sisters. They were the principals, the secretaries, the teachers, and also those responsible for the educational mission. However, today we see a very different reality. The educational mission is largely sustained by lay teams who are deeply committed to the charism. As I said before, this is not merely a substitution of roles; it is a truly shared responsibility in the mission.

Another emerging area—and perhaps the one that affects me most directly—is that of management and institutional governance. More and more congregations are integrating laypeople into roles of management, administration, or coordination, and today we also see this very clearly in the area of finance. This is a reality that many congregations are beginning to experience, and a little later I'll share my specific experience with you.

And finally, an area that is especially significant to me is the transmission of the charism. For a long time, the charism was lived mainly within the religious community. Today, it is increasingly understood that the charism is a gift of the Spirit for the Church and that it can and should be shared and lived by laypeople as well. In the case of the Sacred Heart, this is seen very concretely in the formation of educators and lay teams in the congregation's own spirituality. In many countries, teachers, staff, and what we call partners in mission participate in formation programs on the spirituality, pedagogy, and educational mission of the Sacred Heart. I should also mention, as an example, that there are initiatives such as expanded educational communities or spirituality groups where laypeople and religious share spaces for prayer, reflection, and discernment. And this means that the charism is no longer something that belongs solely to the religious, but is a living reality that is embraced, interpreted, and transmitted by laypeople as well in their lives and work. And all of this shows that the mission is no longer sustained by a single way of life, but by a true complementarity of vocations in the service of the same mission. But be advised that this collaboration doesn't sustain itself; it's like a plant. If it isn't cared for and watered, it ends up withering. That's why it's important for us to ask ourselves and emphasize how we can nourish and strengthen that collaboration. From my experience, I would highlight three very concrete paths. First, shared formation. Not just technical formation, but also spiritual and charismatic formation, because the shared mission requires a common language and a common vision. Second, working to define clear structures, because the shared mission requires defined roles, clear processes, and real spaces for participation and discernment. The synod, moreover, has strongly emphasized this. Without real structures for participation where laypeople can also share in responsibility and decision-making, co-responsibility is not possible. And third and finally,

promoting a true culture of trust, because without trust, collaboration becomes superficial. And perhaps this is the most sensitive point, because often what is at stake is not the organization, but our relationships, our fears, and in some cases our resistance to change. In fact, the synodal process has revealed that there is resistance often linked to fear, to change, or to the loss of certain ways of exercising authority. We know that this path is not without its challenges, but this is where synodality is most needed. Every day, laypeople and religious share many tasks, but we are truly living this as partners in mission. I would like to conclude by emphasizing—and I repeat—the concept I have tried to convey: that the synod has reminded us that synodality becomes concrete when we walk, listen, and take on the responsibility of the mission together. When this happens, collaboration between laypeople and religious ceases to be merely a practical response to needs. It becomes a true prophetic sign for the Church today, because what is at stake is not simply better organization, but the way in which the Church can live the Gospel more faithfully in our time. Thank you very much.