

SYNOD ON SYNODALITY: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION

Pope Francis has called listening the first step on the journey of faith. In a homily at the close of the 2018 Synod of Bishops, *Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment*, Francis spoke of listening as *the apostolate of the ear*.

Francis described “three distinct and complementary sensitivities” that listening requires: one is patient attentiveness to another person, the attentiveness that Jesus displayed as he listened to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after his death and resurrection (Lk 24:13-35). Another sensitivity is listening deeply, exploring beyond whatever is on the surface, in order to understand another’s desires and intentions. Jesus demonstrated this kind of listening in the story of blind Bartimeus (Mk 10:46-52). Jesus does not assume that he knows what Bartimeus desires; instead Jesus asks *what do you want me to do for you?* The third sensitivity is listening for, or discerning, where grace (or temptation) is present, how the Holy Spirit is moving and guiding the people that you are listening to (CV 291-294).

The Main Question for the Synod on Synodality:

How is “journeying together” happening today in your parish and local Church (diocese)?

What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together.”

1. Companions on the Journey

A certain rich man came up to Jesus “as he was setting out on his journey” (Mk 10:17) The gospels frequently show us Jesus “on a journey”; he walks alongside people and listens to the questions and concerns lurking in their hearts. He shows us that God is not found in neat and orderly places, distant from reality, but walks ever at our side. Today, as we begin this synodal process, let us begin by asking ourselves – all of us, Pope, bishops, priest, religious and laity – whether we, the Christian community, embody this “style” of God, who travels the paths of history and shares in the life of humanity. Are we prepared for the adventure of this journey? Or are we fearful of the unknown, preferring to take refuge in the usual excuses: “It’s useless” or “We’ve always done it this way”? (Homily from Opening Mass of the Synodal Path)

1. **Companions on the Journey:** *In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road.*

Our parish mission statement says that St. Agnes is an inclusive community. Are there some in our community who seem further apart? Are there others we need to reach out to and include?

2. Listening

Let us ask ourselves frankly during this synodal process: Are we good at listening? How good is the “hearing” of our heart? Do we allow people to express themselves, to walk in faith, even though they have had difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without being hindered, rejected, or judged? Participating in a synod means placing ourselves on the same path as the Word made flesh. It means following in his footsteps, listening to his word along with

the words of others. It means discovering with amazement that the Holy Spirit surprises us, to suggest fresh paths and new ways of speaking. It is a slow and perhaps tiring exercise, this learning to listen to one another and to avoid artificial and shallow and pre-packaged responses. (Homily 10 October 2021)

2. Listening: *Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice.*

Are we listening to laity, women, youth, minorities, those on the peripheries? How can we hear these voices better? How is God speaking to us through these voices?

3. Speaking Out

Only the Spirit can awaken diversity, plurality and multiplicity while at the same time building unity. Here too, when we are the ones who try to create diversity and close ourselves up in what makes us different and other, we bring division. When we are the ones who want to build unity in accordance with our human plans, we end up creating uniformity, standardization. But if instead we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit, richness, variety, and diversity never become a source of conflict, because the Spirit impels us to experience variety within the communion of the church. (The Church of Mercy – Pope Francis)

3. Speaking Out: *All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth and charity.*

What enables or hinders us speaking up courageously, candidly and responsibly in our local church and community about what is important to us?

Do we as a parish take public stands? Should we? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community? Are there others who should?

4. Celebration

This is a beautiful image illustrating that the Church is like a great orchestra in which there is great variety. We are not all the same, and we do not all have to be the same. We are all different, varied, each of us with our own special qualities. And this is the beauty of the Church: everyone brings their own gifts, which God has given, for the sake of enriching others. And between the various components there is diversity; however, it is a diversity that does not enter into conflict and opposition. It is a variety that allows the Holy Spirit to blend it into harmony. Here let us ask ourselves; in our communities do we live in harmony or do we argue among ourselves? The Church is everyone in harmony. Let us accept others; let us accept that there is a fitting variety, that this person is different, that this person thinks about things in this way or that. Or do we tend to make everything uniform? But uniformity kills life. The life of the church is variety and when we impose uniformity on everyone, we kill the gifts of the Holy Spirit. (The Church of Mercy, Pope Francis)

4. Celebration: *“Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.*

Do our prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community, or how might they be more inspirational, especially inspiring us in making the most important decisions?

How well do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy?

5. Sharing Responsibility for our Common Mission

I dream of a “missionary option,” that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion. (Evangelium Gaudium)

5. **Sharing Responsibility for our Common Mission:** *Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate.*

What is the mission of the Church? How are the laity called and enabled to participate or hindered from participating in the Church’s mission?

What areas of mission are we neglecting?

How do we help our members discern our Christian mission(s)?

How do we support our members in serving our community/society and living out our service in a missionary way?

6. Dialogue in Church and Society

Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word “dialogue.” If we want to encounter and help one another, we have to dialogue. There is no need for me to stress the benefits of dialogue. I have only to think of what our world would be like without the patient dialogue of the many generous persons who keep families and communities together. Unlike disagreement and conflict, persistent and courageous dialogue does not make headlines, but quietly helps the world to live much better than we imagined. (Fratelli Tutti)

6. **Dialogue in Church and Society:** *Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding.*

Do we provide ways for dialogue among diverse people/points of view in our parish and community?

How do we address divergences of vision or conflicts and difficulties among us, and are there particular issues in the Church and society that we need to pay more attention to?

How do we promote collaboration among local parishes, with other Churches and in our community?

How does the Church dialogue and learn from other sectors of society: the spheres of politics, economics, culture, civil society and people who live in poverty?

7. Ecumenism

It follows that we believers need to find occasion to speak to one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor. This has nothing to do with watering down or concealing our deepest convictions when we encounter others who think differently than ourselves. . . For the deeper, richer and stronger our own identity is, the more we will be capable of enriching others with our own proper contributions. The truth is that violence has no basis in our fundamental religious convictions, but only in their distortion. (Fratelli Tutti)

7. **Ecumenism:** *The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey.*

What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations?

How do we dialogue, share, collaborate and journey together?

What have been the fruits of our journeying together and what are the difficulties?

How can we take the next steps in walking forward together, and what are they?

8. Authority and Participation

The pastors, established by God as “authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole church,” should not be afraid to listen to the flock entrusted to them. . . It is in the fruitful bond between the sensus fidei of the People of God and the magisterial function of the Pastors that a unanimous consensus of the whole church in the same faith is realized. “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good” (1 Thess 5:19-21)

8. **Authority and Participation:** *A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church.*

How does our parish/diocese set goals and achieve them?

How and by whom is authority exercised in our parish and local Church/diocese, and how are teamwork, co-responsibility and accountability put into practice?

How are lay ministries and the responsibility and authority of lay people promoted?

Have we had fruitful experiences of synodality on a parish and local Church (diocesan) level, and how can we foster a more synodal approach?

How do synodal bodies (diocesan and parish pastoral councils, finance councils, Presbyteral Council, etc.) function?

9. Discerning and Deciding

The synod is a process of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment, that unfolds in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God. God’s word is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the divisions of soul and spirit, of joint and marrow. And discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12).

That word summons us to discernment and it brings light to that process. It guides the Synod, preventing it from becoming a Church convention, a study group or a political gathering, a parliament, but rather a grace filled event, a process of healing guided by the Spirit. In these days, Jesus calls us to empty ourselves, to free ourselves from all that is worldly, including our inward-looking and outworn pastoral models; and to ask ourselves what it is that God wants to say to us in this time. And the direction in which he wants to lead us. (Homily 10 October 2021)

9. **Discerning and Deciding:** *In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through the whole community.*

What methods and processes do we use in decision-making in our parish; how do we promote participation in decision-making in a hierarchical structure; and how can we improve?

Do we listen to the whole People of God in decision-making? Who do we miss?

How do we understand the relationship between consultation and decision-making and how do we practice both?

Are we transparent and accountable? How?

How do we do better at prayerful communal discernment/decision-making?

10. Forming Ourselves in Synodality

The humble are those who are not concerned simply with the past but also with the future, since they know how to look ahead, to spread their branches, remembering the past with gratitude. The proud, on the other hand, simply repeat, grow rigid and enclose themselves in that repetition, feeling certain about what they know and fearful of anything new because they cannot control it. All of us are called to humility, because all of us are called to remember and to give life. We are called to find a right relationship with our roots and our branches. Without those two things we become sick, destined to disappear. (Pope Francis' Christmas Address)

10. **Forming Ourselves in Synodality:** *Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning.*

How do we become more capable of "walking together," listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue?

How do we learn to be better at discernment (in decision-making) and the exercise of authority in a synodal way?