



Synodality – Revolution in Listening

“It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” - Pope Francis, 2015

Pope Francis has called the Universal Church to unprecedented two-year process of *listening* to the People of God in the firm belief that God speaks through them.

The 2022 Synod of Bishops was postponed to 2023 to give Bishops time to listen for the Spirit’s voice in the People of God. This is not a parliament, but a discernment of the Spirit’s call for our times.

Synodality – from **σύν** (“with”) + **ὁδός** (“way”)

A synod is a meeting, but it means more: it is a *journey together on the way*. Its roots lie in the Exodus (“a way out”) when God led the Hebrews from slavery to freedom. It is the image of a pilgrim Church whose oldest name is “*The Way*.” Jesus calls us to follow on his way.



God is always at work in the people he has gathered together. This is why “*the entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole people's supernatural discernment in matters of faith when from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful, they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals*” (*Lumen Gentium*, 12). The Council further points out that such discernment is animated by the Holy Spirit and proceeds through dialogue among all peoples, reading the signs of the times in faithfulness to the teachings of the Church.

*The Theme of Synod
on Synodality is
“Communion,
Participation and
Mission”*

Having Real Conversations

– Listening, Not Lobbying

Politics have invaded the Church. Synodality is not lobbying, but listening and understanding the situation of people. We are tempted to focus on what we will say in response instead of listening to what the other is saying. How can we hear the Spirit’s call if we can’t understand others in their situation? Practice listening; seek to understand.

– Discerning, Not Voting

Take listening deeper, be attentive to what the Spirit might be saying through others. Listening and discerning must become the new normal for us if we are to be led by the Spirit in the Church.

– Praying, Not Politicking

The Synod is a gathering in liturgy and prayer. It requires docility to the movement of the Spirit when we are gathered in prayer. It utters the prayer of Samuel:
Speaks, Lord, your servant is listening.

Who Is Invited? Everyone!

“Special care should be taken to involve those persons who may risk being excluded: women, the handicapped, refugees, migrants, the elderly, people who live in poverty, Catholics who rarely or never practice their faith, etc. Creative means should also be found in order to involve children and youth. ...

Together, all the baptized are the subject of the *sensus fidelium*, the living voice of the People of God. At the same time, in order to participate fully in the act of discerning, it is important for the baptized to hear the voices of other people in their local context, including people who have left the practice of the faith, people of other faith traditions, people of no religious belief, etc. *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality – The Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches*

Pitfalls (Excerpts from *Vademecum (lit., Go with me)* for the Synod on Synodality” – *Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches.*)

- 1) The **temptation of wanting to lead ourselves instead of being led by God.** Synodality is not a corporate strategic exercise. Rather it is a spiritual process led by the Holy Spirit. We are all together on a journey.
- 2) The **temptation to focus on ourselves and our immediate concerns.** “The Synodal Process is an opportunity to open up, to look around us, to see things from others’ points of view, and to move out in missionary outreach to the peripheries.”

*What is God's plan for
the Church now?
How can we implement
God's dream for the
Church on the local
level?*

The Pitfalls *continued*

- 3) The **temptation to only see “problems.”** “We can miss the light if we focus only on the darkness. Instead of focusing only on what is not going well, let us appreciate where the Holy Spirit is generating life and see how we can let God work more fully.”
- 4) The **temptation of focusing only on structures.** “The Synodal Process will naturally call for a renewal of structures at various levels of the Church, in order **to foster deeper communion, fuller participation, and more fruitful mission.** ... The conversion and renewal of structures will come about only through the on-going conversion and renewal of all the members of the Body of Christ.”
- 5) The **temptation not to look beyond the visible confines of the Church.** ... “A Synodal Process is a time to dialogue with people from the worlds of economics and science, politics and culture, arts and sport, the media and social initiatives. It will be a time to reflect on ecology and peace, life issues and migration. We must keep the bigger picture in view to fulfil our mission in the world. It is also an opportunity to deepen the ecumenical journey with other Christian denominations and to deepen our understanding with other faith traditions.”
- 6) The **temptation to lose focus of the objectives of the Synodal Process.** “[T]he Synodal Process maintains the goal of discerning how God calls us to walk forward together. No one Synodal Process is going to resolve all our concerns and problems. Synodality is an attitude and an approach of moving forward in a co-responsible way that is open to welcoming God’s fruits together over time. It is vain to try to impose one’s ideas on the whole Body through pressure or to discredit those who feel differently.”
- 7) The **temptation to treat the Synod as a kind of a parliament.** “This confuses synodality with a ‘political battle’ in which in order to govern one side must defeat the other. It is contrary to the spirit of synodality to antagonize others or to encourage divisive conflicts that threaten the unity and communion of the Church.”
- 8) The **temptation to listen only to those who are already involved in Church activities.** This approach may be easier to manage, but it ultimately ignores a significant proportion of the People of God.
- 9) The **temptation of conflict and division.** “That they may all be one” (John 17:21). This is the ardent prayer of Jesus to the Father, asking for unity among his disciples. The Holy Spirit leads us deeper into communion with God and one another. The seeds of division bear no fruit.”



Process

- Phase 1 **Opening of the Synod in Every Diocese - October 17, 2021**
 - Lineamenta (*a preparatory text for a Synod*), Questionnaire, & Handbook Guidelines
- Phase 2 **Diocesan Consultation - October 2021-April 2022**
- Phase 3 **Continental Phase - September 2022-March 2023**
 - Preparation of the First Working Document
- Phase 4 **Universal Synod – October 2023**
 - Second Working Document Submitted to Synod of Bishops

Beginning The Synodal Process in the *Catholic Community at Stanford*

- Step 1 **A Steering Committee is being formed who will design a process of prayer, listening and conversation.**
- Step 2 **Begin with yourself!**
 - A) Read some of the resources available.
 - B) Search out some YouTube videos. Be global in your search.
 - C) Ask yourself: *What do I think God is asking of the Church in our day?*
Do I know a story that reveals God’s acting in others or calling the Church in our day?
- Step 3 **Begin talking with others!**
 - A) Begin praying and sharing with others your reflections about the God and the Church.
 - B) Are there people you know, Catholic or non-Catholic, scholarly or traumatized, an entrepreneur or a homeless person, etc., who have a message or story that we should hear? Send it to the Steering Committee via Fr. Xavier (xavierop@stanford.edu) or Sister Gloria Marie Jones, OP (gmjones@stanford.edu)
- Step 3 **Commit to prayer and to participating in the events that will be organized by the Steering Committee.**

Some Resources that can be found by a Google Search

- *“Vademecum for a Synodal Church”*, The Official Handbook for the Synod.
- Articles: Commonweal, *“Speak Boldly”*; La Croix, *“Speak Boldly, Listen Carefully”*; America Magazine, *“So, what exactly is a synod?”*
- YouTube titles: *“Power shift: The Catholic Synod”* from the Church in Australia, *“Austen Ivereigh on Pope Francis’ vision for a Synodal Church”* from England; *“Synodality in Practice with Brian*

Grogan” from the Church in Scotland. See also Pope Francis, - A New Way of Being Church, from Boston College.