

## **Synod on Synodality and Consecrated Life: Communal Participation And Mission**

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### **What is the Synod on Synodality?**

Synod is from a Greek word "Concilium" which is at the ideal of renewal. It is an ancient and vulnerable word which denotes working together, the church stands for a name working together, it is all about equality.

The term synod simply means a journey by companion marked by fellowship and sharing and corresponds to the image of the church as a pilgrim people.

Synod in the Catholic Church refers to an event, like gathering of Bishops and other bodies to discuss some challenges that faces the church and also look for a way forward.

Synodality on the other hand refers to a character of the church. It has to do with listening, dialogue, collective discernment and journeying together. Therefore, the synod on synodality is an event in the church that deals with the ways to build a more synodal church; a church that can journey together with the tools of listening and dialogue.

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In journeying together in communion, participation and mission, the synod on synodality is undoubtedly a mandate to listen and to learn, to love and to live, to let go and to let God.

The synodal church is where there is unity in faith and where all participate actively in the prophetic mission, a mission of evangelization and proclaiming the Good News of salvation and liberation, of announcing the gospel of life of Justice and peace.

Synodality is established to bring the people together. A fulfilment of having the Lord Jesus present, since people are gathered in his name. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:19–20.)

The Synod on Synodality is a two-year process that Pope Francis began in October, 2021. Officially known as “Synod 2021-2023: For a Synodal Church,” it is a process that allows bishops to consult with Catholics – from Parishioners all the way up to Priests – in a spirit of collaboration and openness. This includes official dialogue with some activists who actively dissent from Church teachings.

Synodality is a style, a culture, a way of thinking and being that reflects the truth that the Church is led by the Holy Spirit who enables everyone to offer their own contribution to the Church's life. This synod process seeks to “strengthen cooperation” in all areas of the Church's mission, to enhance communion, participation and mission.

While “Synodality is an expression of the Church's nature, her form, style and mission” (Pope Francis, 18 September 2021), the Church in our day lacks the habit and practice of synodality. This is what Pope Francis invites us to examine and discern for the future.

Synodality is also reflected in a synodal style of governance, in which people participate in decision making, share responsibility for the

Church's mission, and cooperate and collaborate more in the day to day life of the Church. Some call this “co-responsibility”. Church is neither a monarchy nor a democracy. Pope Francis has made clear that the synod is not a parliament, or a convention, or an opinion survey. Although it has many elements familiar to political and similar processes – listening, speaking, taking votes – what differentiates a Synod is that it is a spiritual process that takes place within the Church. “The Synod is an ecclesial event and its protagonist is the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit is not present, there will be no Synod” (Pope Francis, 09 October 2021). (Synodus Episcoporum, 2021)

### **How important is the Synodal Journey for young people, including those in formation houses?**

Synodal journey enable us journey together. This happens through listening to one another in order to hear what God is saying to all of us. It is realizing that the Holy Spirit can speak through anyone to help us walk forward/together on our journey as the People of God.

The Synodal journey helps young people to be open to change. This change is not an outward change but one that leads to personal and communal fulfilment. This change happens when there is dialogue and when people journey together. The synodal journey will teach those in formation houses to cultivate the spirit of dialogue and journeying together so as to achieve communal fulfilment.

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:19–20.) Our communal prayer is a typical example. This expresses the Church's constant conversion and response to his grace in other to journey through life in fulfilment of his kingdom. This response includes formation for the spirituality of communion: i.e learning to live together as one family in Christ who is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, living in Communion will bring about the spiritual.

Furthermore, the following are outlined as the importance of Synodal Journey for young people, including those in formation houses.

- It gives a sense of belonging to the young and makes the young take religious/spiritual matter (s) to heart.
- It enlightens the young and influences a positive growth in their relationship with Christ and the things of the Church.
- It encourages unity and promotes the united nature of the Church.
- It exposes the youth to be more equipped in the knowledge of the Church; to promote the doctrines and traditions of the Church; and to get their opinions and ideas on the matters of the Church.

### **What steps were taken in your institute to participate in the Synodal Journey?**

Designated members of the institutes have sent out questionnaires regarding synodality and some discussions have also been made. This shows some of the tools of synodality namely: dialogue and listening. The questionnaires and the dialogue help to understand how individuals feel with regard to synodality and the ideas they have to make the church a synodal church.

### **How are the people of God listening to the Holy Spirit in communities of your institutes?**

Through Common Prayers/Daily Meditation and the Eucharist; Community meetings; Spiritual Direction/Consultations; Seminars and Spiritual Readings among others.

The Common Eucharistic Celebration; Prayers; Daily Meditation help members of the community to listen to the Holy Spirit. Listening to the

Holy Spirit in the breaking of the Word of God and also taking part in the same Communion.

Community meetings also help the community to discern the Spirit. Community meetings always start with a prayer to the Holy Spirit. The community will ask the Holy Spirit to guide them in their discussion and in the decisions they will take.

Superiors also have personal meetings with members in form of consultation and seminars are also conducted. These have helped and are helping the community to listen to the Spirit of God.

Our daily Spiritual Readings from the Bible (sharing)/Spiritual Books is another avenue through which we listen to the Holy Spirit.

Research into different documents of the Church and the communal living and practice of synodal requirements are also channels of listening to the Holy Spirit.

### **What do candidates in formation want from the Synod on Synodality?**

1. Candidates in formation will like to be more involved in the Church's activities/the mission of the Church. This is because formation is for mission.
2. Candidates expects that the Synod on Synodality should be able to relegate the problems of differences and divisions in the way to celebrate the liturgy.
3. They will also want Synod on Synodality to heal the polarization and the marginalization that exists in the Church; to promote the unity and standard of the Church; and discourage tribalism and embrace unity.

4. The principle of subsidiarity should be observed especially in rural areas
5. The act of politicization should be discouraged.
6. Internal affairs resulting to misunderstanding should be amicably settled within the Church.
7. The Mission mandate of the Church should be the priority
8. Communal relationship between the priest, religious and the lay faithful should be promoted
9. There should be equality in the Church.

**What are the disposition and attitude needed to live Synodality in Religious Communities?**

1. Openness: Community members are called to be open and to share their views and their difficulties. This will help to live a synodal life in the community.
2. Ability to listen to others: Community members should be able to listen to the ideas and problems of other community members
3. Creating time to share: The community should create time for coming together to discuss.
4. Overcoming certain beliefs and mentality: Members of the community should not hold on to a particular style and pattern of carrying out an activity. The community should be flexible in decision making.

5. The disposition and attitude needed to live Synodality in Religious Communities can also be outlined as qualities/virtues as follows:
- Understanding
  - Togetherness
  - Equality
  - Communication
  - Openness
  - Faithfulness
  - Attentiveness
  - Love
  - Forgiveness
  - Interpersonal relationship
  - Acceptance
  - Humility and
  - Sacrifice.

**What message do you have for fellow candidates in formation and formators?**

We encourage our fellow Candidates in formation and Formators to be fully involved.

The Candidates and Formators should always be interested in participating in the synodal life of the Church.

Candidates in formation and Formators should try to have/create time for dialogue and they should be open to the Holy Spirit. They should come together for common prayers, meals and recreation. This will help to build a synodal spirit, thereby fostering the church's desire to become a synodal church. It is from the communities that we can *foster synodality in the church*.

Consistency and Commitment is key.

**Note:** Charity Begins at Home.

## References

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