

Synodality

'A synodal Church is a discerning Church, in which everyone listens to each other, in order to listen to the Holy Spirit.'

The synodal pathway

Synodality is an ancient concept in the life of the church which has been given new emphasis and vitality through the teachings of Pope Francis.

Fundamental to these teachings is the principle that the whole people of God must take part in the process of discernment that guides the church in its sacred mission to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Rooting the entire process of synodality in the baptismal call of all believers, Francis holds that "all of the baptized, whatever their position in the church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and **it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization that would be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients.**" Quite bluntly, the Holy Father states, "the flock has an instinctive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the church."

The basic idea in the pope's teaching is that the grace of baptism makes someone part of the body of the church and, therefore, responsible for its life and mission. *Bishop McElroy*

Synodality, which has been present in Christianity since its very beginning, is not simply about involving people in decision making, but involving all the baptized in discerning God's will and listening to the Holy Spirit. The goal always is to find the best ways for every baptized person to fulfill the church's mission of proclaiming God's love and salvation in Jesus Christ to the world.

"A synodal church is a church of participation and co-responsibility. In exercising synodality she is called to give expression to the participation of all, according to each one's calling, with the authority conferred by Christ on the College of Bishops headed by the pope. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit." *America Magazine*

"A synodal vision challenges us to transform clericalist practices in which an individual or a group in the church makes decisions without listening and consulting, as if existing beyond the people of God. Synodality demands that we listen and engage in dialogue to establish binding relationships that build church."

"'Binding' means 'mutual need,' as *Lumen Gentium* reminds us. It is more than collecting opinions or running surveys. Synodality is an invitation to foster processes of conversion as we listen to one another and to the larger society while reading the signs of the times together."

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/closer-look-synodality-and-its-promise-more-inclusive-church>

"It is great that we have such different voices, because it means that our topic has just gone live. The discerning Church is no longer just an academic question. For we... are a microcosm of the Church. Some voices are saying one thing, others another, and still others are yet to speak. There are different voices, and there are diverse spirits moving us. So, we have no choice but to discern. Our task is no longer just to discuss a topic of shared curiosity; we have to become, here and now, the discerning Church ourselves."

“The challenge that ... faces the whole Church, as we attempt to understand better where the Lord is calling us in the manifold challenges of our day, is not just to talk or write about the discerning Church, but to begin together to become the discerning Church.”

Pathways to God

The laity represents the overwhelming majority of the People of God, and there is much to be learned from their participation in the different expressions of the ecclesial community: popular piety, commitment to ordinary pastoral care, competence in the different areas of cultural and social life (EG §126). And if the status and experience of clerical life generate certain unconscious biases, we can hope for a devoted laity to play the attentive, loving observer who helps everyone become conscious of them. When asked about the role of the laity, St John Henry Newman replied: ‘The Church would look foolish without them.’

It is therefore necessary to overcome the obstacles that come from a lack of formation and the harmful effects of the clerical mentality that risks relegating the lay faithful to a subordinate role, by opening up spaces in which the laity can express themselves and share the wealth of their experience as disciples of the Lord (EG §102).

The co-responsibility of the entire People of God for the mission of the Church requires beginning consultative processes in which the laity participate and speak more actively. This is not a question of establishing a sort of ‘lay parliamentarism,’ since the authority of the episcopal college does not depend on the faithful delegating it by an electoral process; but it appears rather as a particular charism with which the Spirit has endowed the ecclesial body. This means making full use of the resources and structures that the Church already has.

<https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/church-becoming-synodal-part-1-lumen-gentium-and-inverted-pyramid>

Pope Francis launched the whole church into a journey of synodality. It is a beautiful word, a powerful word, but one that as Francis himself admits, is not easy to put into practice. Perhaps because it entails a challenging journey to be "relational, inclusive, pluricultural" in a church that has far too long been patriarchal, clerical, hierarchical.

The challenge is to be at the frontlines of the conversion and reconciliation this necessitates - A conversion that concretely starts with myself. To be willing to step out and accept roles of responsibility in the church, actively be part of the listening, reflection and discernment toward the birthing of a synodal church. To be midwives of the gift of a renewed church that God wants to give his people. The gift can only be welcomed by hearts that live this deep grace of conversion.

<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/religious-life/news/call-listen-spirit-sisters-embrace-churchs-synodal-process>

Sr. Prudence Allen, Sister of Mercy: Descriptors of synodality:

- Disciples journeying together
- Companions on the journey are to be of mutual service to one another
- People walking in history toward the fulfillment of the kingdom

- Walking together with Christ in a new boldness of speech with humility of heart
- A journey of dialogue where we learn how to recognize the presence of Christ walking beside us

Questions for Reflection and Sharing

As you think about becoming a synodal Church, what gives you hope? What inspires you?

Most of us have had both a synodal experience of church and a more clerical experience of church. Share a story of experiencing one or the other.

What difference would a synodal church make for *you*? For our parish community? For your children?

What questions or concerns do you have about College Church's transition?

What consolations or desolations does this bring up for you that are important for College Church to consider?