

Synodality

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For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

To better understand the idea of synodality and its history



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graph TD; A[To better understand the idea of synodality and its history] --> B[To reflect on its benefits and challenges]; B --> C[To attempt "conversations in the spirit" as a framework for listening and discernment.];
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To reflect on its benefits and challenges

To attempt “conversations in the spirit” as a framework for listening and discernment.

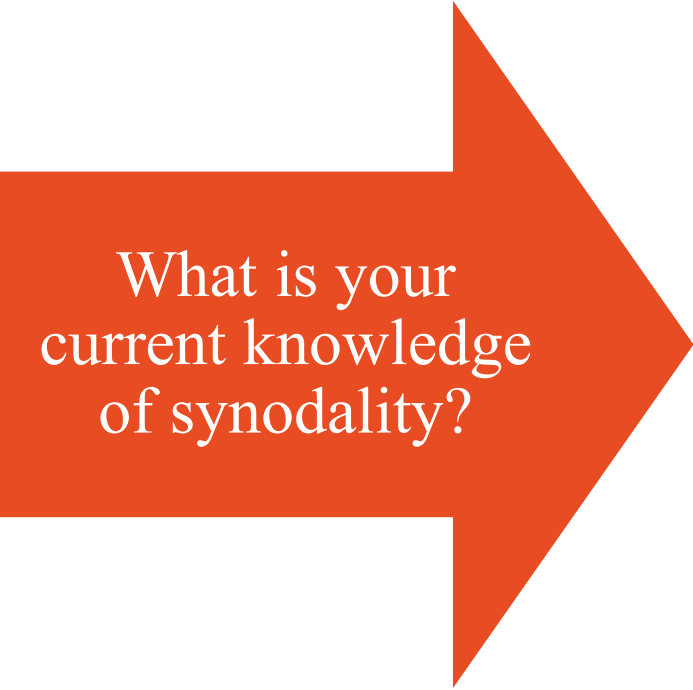
Aims:



Why the interest?



Questions...



What is your
current knowledge
of synodality?



What sort of
feelings does the
term elicit?

A Definition:



“the concept of synodality refers to the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church”



“The fruits of the renewal promised by Vatican II in its promotion of ecclesial communion, episcopal collegiality and thinking and acting ‘synodally’ have been rich and precious. There is, however, still a long way to go in the direction mapped out by the Council”



Context: Biblical Roots

- Old Testament :
 - Sinai
 - Tribes of Israel
 - Prophets
- The person of Jesus:
 - “Living communion according to the standard of Jesus’ new commandment means walking together in history as the People of God of the new covenant, in a way that fits the gift received”
- Acts of the Apostles – the Council of Jerusalem
 - “Across the centuries, this event has been interpreted as the paradigm for Synods celebrated by the Church.”

"The Israelites At Mount Sinai"

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html Synodality in the life and mission of the Church (2 March 2018)



The Ignatian Tradition

- “One of the most significant contributions to synodal spirituality consists in the discernment of spirits.”
- “Even if it is known as a method, in order for it to be integrated into spirituality it should become a way of life, an attitude.”
- “There can be no discernment without a constant renewal of life, what St. Ignatius calls a “permanent reformation of life””
- “Synodal spirituality includes discerning spirits together, in common.”

https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/resources/spirituality/ignazio/EN_Spiri_Kafka_Sosa.pdf



St. John Henry Newman

- Newman “positioned “the body of the faithful” as a locus of infallible teaching alongside the pope and the bishops gathered in an ecumenical council.”
- “What Newman was advocating was actually less about the structures of the church as such and more about an operative style of being the church and of theological discernment.”

<https://dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1402&context=spiritan-horizons>

The *Sensus Fidelium*

“the *consensus fidelium* is a sure criterion for determining whether a particular doctrine or practice belongs to the apostolic faith”



https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/ctf_documents/rc_20140630_sensus-fidel_en.html



Vatican II

“Although synodality is not explicitly found as a term or as a concept in the teaching of Vatican II, it is fair to say that synodality is at the heart of the work of renewal the Council was encouraging.”



Pope Francis

- “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium”
- “is an essential dimension of the Church”, in the sense that “what the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word 'synod'”
- synodality "offers us the most appropriate framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself"
- "only to the extent that these organizations keep connected to the 'base' and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape"
- "to walk together is *the constitutive way* of the Church; *the figure* that enables us to interpret reality with the eyes and heart of God; *the condition* for following the Lord Jesus and being servants of life in this wounded time.



Benefits and Tensions of Synodality

WHAT BENEFITS AND TENSIONS DO YOU SEE IN THIS SYNODAL PROCESS?



Conversations in the Spirit

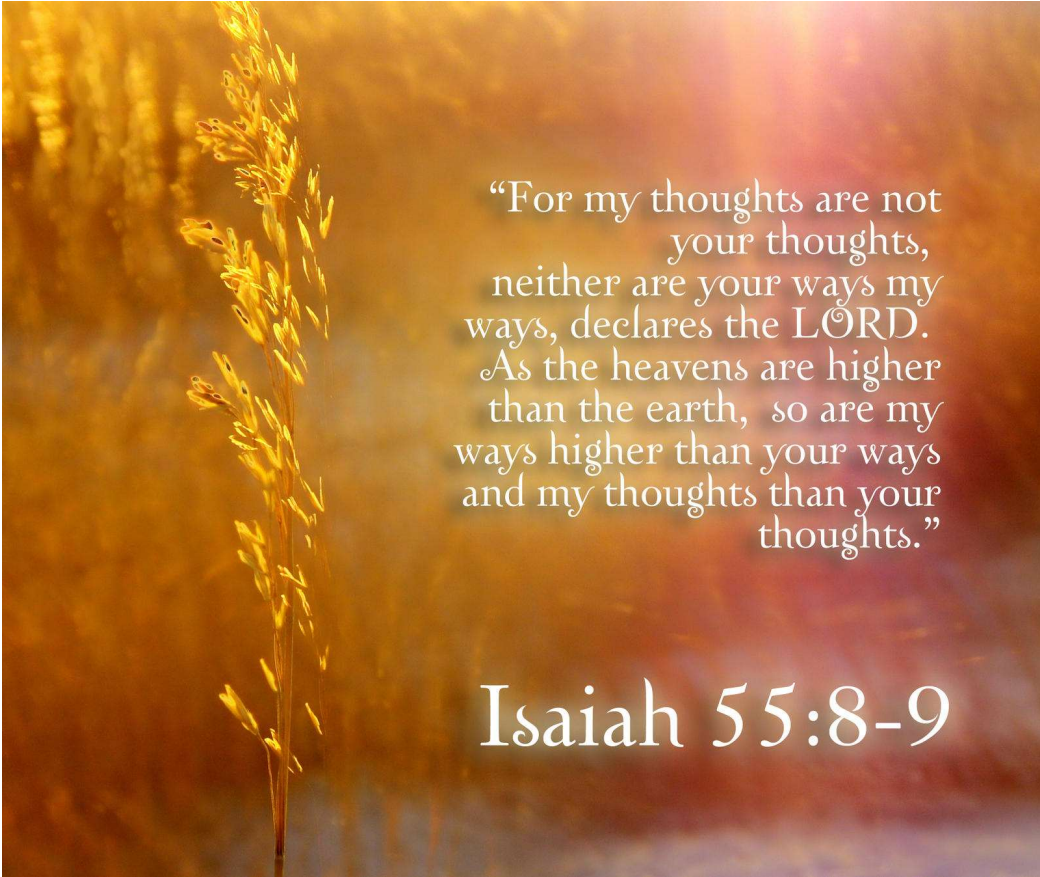
“‘Conversation in the Spirit’, or Spiritual Conversation, is an ancient practice of the Church and a key tool of Synodality. A prayerful method, it allows for space for the spirit as well as voices usually not heard and can be used for faith sharing, difficult conversations, or when lots of creativity or ideas are needed.

Conversation in the Spirit is a strangely practical art. It relies on good communication – being able to hear and understand one another. It can be an excellent tool to ground any conversation in the Spirit, open us to new voices and possibilities, and move us to action when appropriate.’”

<https://www.schoolforsynodality.org.uk/our-resources/conversations-in-the-spirit-a-how-to-guide> Conversations In the Spirit - a How To Guide — School for Synodality

The Steps:

1. **Preparation:** Before coming to the group meeting, participants carry out a time of personal prayer and reflection over the question at hand.
2. **Gathering:** Ideally each group can comprise about 6-8 persons. An opening prayer is said, and each person may share one or two words that describe his or her interior state at that moment.
3. **The First Round**
4. **Silence**
5. **The Second Round**
6. **Silence**
7. **The Third Round**
8. **Review and Report:** Finally, the group can briefly review and reflect on how the conversation proceeded, and decide on the main points they will report from the conversation.



“For my thoughts are not
your thoughts,
neither are your ways my
ways, declares the LORD.
As the heavens are higher
than the earth, so are my
ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your
thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:8-9

Our Reflection

ISAIAH 55

Round 1

Each person takes turns to share about what happened during the personal prayer time and shares the fruits of his or her prayer. Everyone is given the same amount of time to speak (e.g. 3 minutes). The focus is to listen to one another rather than simply think about what one wants to say.

Silence: A time of silence is observed, during which participants attend to how they have been moved during the first round, what struck them as they listened, and what were the notable points of consolation or desolation if any.

Round 2

Participants share what emerged within them during the time of silence.

- How was I affected by what I heard?
- Is there a common thread in what was shared?
- Is there something missing that I had expected would be said?
- Was I especially touched by a particular sharing?
- Have I received any particular insight or revelation? What is it?
- Where did I experience a sense of harmony with others as we shared with one another?

This second round enables the group to realise what unites them. It is here that signs of the action of the Holy Spirit in the group begin to manifest themselves, and the conversation becomes an experience of shared discernment.

Round 3

Participants share what emerged from the preceding time of silence. They may also take note of the ways in which the Holy Spirit may be moving the group. A prayer of thanksgiving can conclude the conversation.

Final Reflections

The Prophetic Dimension of Synodal Discernment

“Synodal discernment should not be limited to generating consensus but should open spaces for the prophetic action of the Church. Tensions and crises, when well accompanied and processed, can also offer new insights from the Spirit if they are properly discerned.

Are we willing to embrace tensions as part of the journey toward conversion, rather than avoiding them out of fear of division? Pope Francis has repeatedly expressed that all voices must be heard. There must be room for "everyone, everyone, everyone."

From the perspective of Ignatian spirituality, tension is not something to be avoided but embraced as part of the discernment process.”

<https://www.synodresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Lights-and-Shadows-of-the-Synod-on-Synodality.-An-Ignatian-Perspective.-Article.pdf>