

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission

The Church of God is convoked in synod by Pope Francis

The Holy Father has called each one of us to participate

From the official universal Preparatory Document, there follow **ten themes** that articulate different facets of “**lived synodality**.” **The hope** is that the different groups of questions might inspire moments of prayer, formation, reflection – and talking to each other.

We are all ‘convoked in synod’ – called to walk the synodal path.

Before we begin the planned conversations that will take place in our parish, it would be wonderful if each one of us could read - and give some real thought to – these themes. None of us will be expected to answer all the questions – they are there as **prompts to ourselves...** to help us to discern how we feel about our church (parish... diocese... universal...) right now – and how it (we) could do better. **Pope Francis asks us to dream of the Church that could, or should, be...**

I. THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS: In the Church and in society, we are side by side on the same road. In your local Church, who are the ones “journeying together”? When we say: “our Church,” who is part of it? Who is asking us to journey together? Who are the road companions, including those outside the ecclesial perimeter? What persons or groups are left on the margins, expressly or in fact?

II. LISTENING: Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices. Who does our particular Church “need to listen to”? How are the Laity, especially young people and women, listened to? How do we integrate the contribution of Consecrated Men and Women? What space is there for the voice of minorities, the discarded, and the excluded? Do we identify prejudices and stereotypes that hinder our listening? How do we listen to the social and cultural context in which we live?

III. SPEAKING OUT: All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, integrating freedom, truth, and charity. How do we promote a free and authentic style of communication within the community and its organizations, without duplicity and opportunism? And in relation to the society of which we are a part? When and how do we manage to say what is important to us? How does the relationship with the media system (not only Catholic media) work? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

IV. CELEBRATING: “Journeying together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. How do prayer and liturgical celebration inspire and direct our “journeying together”? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the Faithful in the liturgy and the exercise of the sanctifying function? What space is given to the exercise of the ministries of the reader and acolyte?

V. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION: Synodality is at the service of the Church's mission, in which all her members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is each Baptized person called to be a protagonist in the mission? How does the community support its members committed to service in society (social and political commitment, in scientific research and teaching, in the promotion of social justice, in the protection of human rights, and in caring for the Common Home, etc.)? How do you help them to live out these commitments in a logic of mission? How is discernment about mission-related choices made, and who participates in it?

VI. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY: Dialogue is a path of perseverance that also includes silences and sufferings, but which is capable of gathering the experience of persons and peoples. What are the places and modes of dialogue within our particular Church? How are divergences of vision, the conflicts, the difficulties addressed? How do we promote collaboration with neighbouring Dioceses, with and among religious communities in the area, with and among lay associations and movements, etc.? What experiences of dialogue and shared commitment do we have with believers of other religions and with non-believers? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the world of politics, economics, culture, civil society, the poor...?

VII. WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS: The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one Baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relations do we have with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations? What areas do they concern? What fruits have we drawn from this "journeying together"? What are the difficulties?

VIII. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION: A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How do we identify the goals to be pursued, the way to achieve them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority exercised within our particular Church? What are the practices of teamwork and co-responsibility? How are lay ministries and the assumption of responsibility by the Faithful promoted? How do synodal bodies function at the level of the particular Church? Are they a fruitful experience?

IX. DISCERNING AND DECIDING: In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit. By what procedures and methods do we discern together and make decisions? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchically structured communities? How do we connect the consultative phase with the deliberative one, the process of decision-making with the moment of decision-taking? How and with what tools do we promote transparency and accountability?

X. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY: The spirituality of journeying together should be reflected in all formation – of the human person and of the Christian, of families, and of communities. How do we form people, especially those who hold roles of responsibility within the Christian community, to make them more capable of "journeying together," listening to one another and engaging in dialogue? What formation do we offer for discernment and the exercise of authority? What tools help us to read the dynamics of the culture in which we are immersed and their impact on our style of Church?