



Archdiocese of Cape Town



Centre for Pastoral Development

ARCHDIOCESAN PHASE IMPLEMENTATION TRAINING



FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH

Communion | Participation | Mission

The Archdiocesan Phase: To Journey and to Listen

1. What are Synods?

[Adapted from Vatican News] On 2 March 2018 the International Theological Commission produced a document entitled “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church.” This document sketches out the origins of the Synod in the life of the Church, and its current pastoral and theological implications. Pope Francis calls Synodality “walking together with”, and “an essential element of the Church”. He grounds his observation in *Lumen Gentium*, from Vatican II.

The first ecumenical or universal council of the Church is reported in Acts 15, when the apostles and elders of the Church came together to decide whether pagans had to become Jews first before they became Christian. The community heard the testimony of Paul, Barnabas and Peter, reflected upon what they heard and they discussed it, before coming to a decision which James said was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Church synods were introduced as the forum in which cases could be resolved that a local bishop was not competent to handle. These synods were either provincial (presided over by the local bishop), metropolitan (presided over by the metropolitan bishop) or patriarchal (presided over by the patriarch). The *Canons of the Apostles*, a text dating to the 4th and 5th centuries, states that the local bishop should do nothing “significant” without the agreement of the bishop who was his superior, and that the superior bishop should not do anything “without the consensus of all”. But there were soon issues that concerned the entire Church. Thus, the first Ecumenical Council was convened in Nicea in 325. This Council “was the first institutional expression, on the universal level of the power or authority of the risen Lord guiding and directing the way forward for the People of God in the Holy Spirit” The experience of the Church gathered in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-5) motivated Pope Paul VI to “permanently establish a special Council of bishops, with the aim of providing for the continuance after the Council of the great abundance of benefits that We have been so happy to see flow to the Christian people during the time of the Council as a result of Our close collaboration with the bishops.”

The Synod of Bishops provides an important channel for the voice of the faithful to contribute to the lived experience of a Church still in search of a response from her Risen Lord on those difficult matters that present themselves from time to time. Pope Francis describes this synodal process that continues to take place: “Consultation of the faithful must be followed by discernment on the part of the Bishops chosen for the task, united in the search for a consensus that springs not from worldly logic, but from common obedience to the Spirit of Christ. Attentive to the *sensus fidei* of the People of God – ‘which they need to distinguish carefully from the changing currents of public opinion’ – the members of the Assembly offer their opinion to the Roman Pontiff so that it can help him in his ministry as universal Pastor of the Church.... When it is therefore a question involving the faith itself, the *consensus ecclesiae* ... is the outcome of the working of the Spirit, the soul of the one Church of Christ’ ” (*Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio**, no. 7).

TOWARDS A SYNOD ON SYNODALITY: RENEWING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

By Fr Gerard Walmsley

Introducing the Synod: The Call to “Journey Together

A. Initial Remarks: Announcing the Synod

- A *Surprising and Intriguing Proclamation*: A Synod in which every parish and diocese is invited to contribute to a discernment about the future of the Church
- The Theme*: ‘For a Synodal Church, Communion, Participation, and Mission’
- A *Serious Invitation*: For Pope Francis this is a serious matter/ It is “decisive for the life and mission of the Church”/ It follows from the call to ‘Renewal’ already proposed by Vatican II/ It involves a “rediscover of original synodality” found in early Church life.
- Sense of Urgency*: “Francis rebuild my Church, which is everywhere in ruins”/ The theme is almost ‘How to save the Catholic Church’/ This is a historic moment, potentially as important as Vat II/ Do we share this sense of urgency?
- Controversial Yet Critically Important*.

B. Why call for a Synod Now? Reading the Signs of the Times?

-Responding to “epochal changes in society generally” and “crucial changes in the Church particularly”:

Global Tragedies: Covid-19, Violence and War, Inequality, Injustice. Abuse of Human Rights, Racism and Xenophobia, which frustrate the effort of the Church to defend human dignity or promote the common good or practice a preferential option for the poor according to Catholic Social Teaching.

Tragedies within the Church: Abuse, Scandal, Ambition and Power, Clericalism, Insensitive Authority, lack of pastoral care, which cannot be responded to without Lay participation.

C. The Required Response: Repentance, Conversion and Renewal

- We need a rediscovery of our Catholicism: a “refounding of Christian and ecclesial life” by means of an “enlarged Synodality”
- The People of God are authorized to contribute to this by their very experience of suffering when the Church is dysfunctional.

II. Synodality is more than a Practical Necessity: It is a Constitutive Element of the Whole Church

Why have a Synod? Because it is essential to the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ: We all need to live and work together as members of a greater whole! So this is not a totally new thing but a deeper appreciation of the implications of what we already believed.

- Emerging Synodality*: The appreciation of Synodality as a sharing of life and mission, found in the early Church, was lost sight of as the hierarchical structure became emphasized. Then, it began to reemerge with Vatican II with the notion of collegiality between Pope and Bishops. This led to the establishment of the Synod of Bishops as a consultative body for the Pope.
- Enlarged and Inclusive Synodality*: After Vatican II “the Church increasingly realizes that Synodality is the path for the entire people of God”. Already in Lumen Gentium there was a realization existing as the people of God sharing the same life, rooted in Baptism, was more important, in a way, than existing as a hierarchically structured institution (shared life continues in heaven but not the structures required for this life).

- C. *Synodality essentially is the bond of Sensus Fidei and Magisterial Function*: The living voice of the Church as People of God is in dialogue with the teaching authority of Pope and Bishops.
- D. *Ongoing Discovery of Synodality*: But the dialogue needs to deepen and mature. We still need to discover the “face and form of a Synodal Church” in which “everyone has something to learn” (People can and do teach Priests in many ways). How can we balance equality of dignity rooted in Baptism with a Synodality which operates with a hierarchically structure church?
 - The Church is not a democracy with everything decided by voting but it has a democratic dimension in that everyone has a voice.

III. Why have a Synod on Synodality Now?

The present synod differs from previous synods such as the synod on the family or the synod on youth. It is a synod on synodality which reflects on the meaning and practice of an enlarged synodality.

- A. *Exploring the Core Meaning of Synodality*: The aim is to make explicit the different aspects of synodality: Synodality involves communion and the unity of a shared life; it involves participation according to varied talents and gifts and charisms; it leads to cooperation in mission.
 - But in the concrete, there is division and disunity to consider; full participation may not always be fostered or welcomed; often the People of God are not sufficiently involved in mission.
- B. *Offering an Opportunity for the Whole Church to Practice this Re-discovered and Enlarged Synodality*: This is only the beginning of an ongoing process which will become more and more mature through practice. Both People and Pastors have much to learn about this.

The Challenge: What will Synodality in Action really look like? Where is dialogue between Pastors and People urgently called for? The general notion of consultation and dialogue seems fine but what particular issues will show how important this is? Where can the dialogue be fruitful?



TO WHOM ARE WE CALLED TO LISTEN?

Pope Francis, in calling the Synod on Synodality, has expressed the desire that the Church reach as many people as possible and to listen to their experiences of where God has been active in their lives and in the life of the church. In the words of the Vademecum, "It is important that we try our best to listen to the voices of everyone, especially those who are marginalized." The outcomes of the 2019 archdiocesan synod also pointed out a number of groups within the church and society that we should be reaching out to, or making a particular effort to include in our discussions. This includes youth (3d); women (4d); LGBT+, the poor and homeless, lapsed Catholics and the unchurched (5d). It is for these reasons that we are reaching out to each and every member of our parish communities, as well as those whom we may often overlook or dismiss, and in particular, those identified by the 2019 Archdiocesan Synod.

WHAT ARE LISTENING CIRCLES?

Listening circles are a way for groups of people to come together and share their thoughts and experiences while focused on a particular theme. It is often better to have fewer questions which can be explored deeply, rather than have many questions that would be covered superficially. We propose that you send the following to those participating ahead of time, and reflect on it within the listening circles:

A Synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, 'journeys together.' Drawing on the fundamental question of the synod, we invite you to reflect on the question: How is this journeying together happening in your local church (parish/ archdiocese)?

To help clarify your reflection process, consider the following experiences within the church:

- What inspires and animates you, what makes you thankful and grateful about your Catholic life?
- What disappoints or wounds or even disillusion you?
- Where in particular is the spirit calling for growth and change in our thinking and practices?

Perhaps one or more of the topics from the pastoral plan resonates with you in this process: Evangelization, Empowerment of Laity, Life of Priests and Deacons and Bishops, Family and Youth, Justice and Peace, Healing and Reconciliation, Care of Creation.

HOW DO WE USE LISTENING CIRCLES?

In this method there are three rounds of sharing, focused on the reflection question. It is important to emphasize that these are LISTENING circles, not discussion groups. The first round of sharing/listening is about us and our experiences. The second round is our response to what we have heard from others. The third round is what we have heard from God.

First Round: one at a time sharing

One at a time, each person shares the fruit of his/her experience and reflection. The others listen attentively. During this first round, there are no interactions between the participants except to ask an explanation about a word or a wording. Ask yourselves what experiences in your particular Church the fundamental question calls to mind; Reread these experiences in greater depth: What joys did they provoke? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered?

What wounds have they brought to light? What insights have they elicited? Then, take between 3 and five minutes for silent reflection to ask yourself certain questions, such as,

- What impressed me as the others shared?
- Where did I experience deeper union with the others?
- What new insights did I gain?

Second Round: sharing the impact of what you have heard In the second round, participants share what struck them most in the first round and what moved them during the time of silence. Once again this is followed by a time of silence.

Third Round: conversation with the Lord

Finally in the third round participants reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation and what moved them most deeply. New insights and even unresolved questions are also noted. Spontaneous prayers of gratitude can conclude the conversation. Usually each small group will have a facilitator and note-taker. Gather the fruits to share: Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound? What is the Spirit asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are opening up for our particular Church?

Final Step: preparing the report for feedback

Once the group dialogue has taken place, participants should review and share about their experience of the process within their small group. How was their experience? What were the ups and downs? What new and refreshing insights might they have discovered? What have they learned about the synodal way of proceeding? How was God present and at work during their time together? Participants should then decide on the feedback they wish to communicate to the organizing/facilitation team.

GUIDELINES FOR LISTENING CIRCLES

(The group facilitator can mention these before starting the listening circles)

a. For group members:

- i. Choose someone to be the timekeeper (see below)
- ii. Everyone is co-responsible.
- iii. Listen attentively.
- iv. Each person is the expert on his or her own experience.
- v. Share what you can, and what you want based on the fundamental question.
- vi. Share briefly and clearly.
- vii. The small group is not the place to resolve individual problems
- viii. Times of silence are appropriate.
- ix. Respect what is confidential.
- x. Make "I" statements not "we" statements.

b. For the timekeeper before the group begins:

- i. Have a timer/ cellphone app ready
- ii. Tell everyone at what time the group session will stop
- iii. Remind them that there will be three rounds of sharing
- iv. Say how much time, approximately, each one will have for sharing during the 1st round. (Usually 3minutes per person)
- v. Tell them that your timer will make a noise when the maximum time has been reached, at which point they need to complete their sentence and allow the next person to speak.

c. For group facilitators

- i. Ensure that all participants receive the fundamental question ahead of time to prepare.
- ii. Ensure that your environment is set up well, with chairs ideally placed in a circle or square so that all are able to see one another equally.
- iii. Start the session by introducing yourself, the time- keeper and scribe and your functions.
- iv. Ask everyone to introduce themselves
- v. Go through the guidelines for group members (a- above) and explain that this is a listening and not a discussion group.
- vi. Read the fundamental question once or twice and ask participants to reflect on it for 5 minutes, making notes for when they have an opportunity to share.
- vii. Start round 1 by asking everyone, one at a time to share their reflection for 3 minutes and remind them that an alarm will go off once their time has been reached.
- viii. Depending on how much total time you have, it would be beneficial to allow for a minute of silence after every 3 or 5 people. Ask the participants to reflect on what they had just heard during this time.
- ix. Once everyone has shared their reflection, have a moment of silence and then ask the group their thoughts as per round 2, 3 and the final round (see above). Not everyone has to speak this time, only if they feel called to but participants should also be limited to about a minute each.

d. For scribes

- i. Ensure that you have a copy of the template to submit the feedback accordingly. They have been grouped according to the fundamental question above.
- ii. Only take simple notes of the main points and not everything everyone says. (If people mention the same thing, only write it once)
- iii. Try to ensure that you use the language the participants express themselves with and not your own interpretation of it so that all feedback is as authentic as possible.
- iv. Ensure that you type the notes in the provided template and send it to the designated person at your parish that will collate all of the groups' feedback.

A few tips

- i. Your synod implementation coordinator should meet with the clergy / PPC to discuss the strategy for your parish community. Each community is unique and should make changes according to their needs and time duration possible.
- ii. Consider collaborating with other parishes.
- iii. Consider having opportunities both on a weekday and weekend to accommodate everyone.
- iv. A form is not enough, this needs to be implemented in person or online to allow for actual voices to be heard.
- v. All from your parish should be invited to participate at some point.
- vi. Ensure that each group is as diverse as possible.
- vii. The participants should be a true reflection of the community you're serving (all sexualities, ages, those involved in ministry, those no longer attending Mass, consider all external groups associated with the parish and those who are often marginalized)
- viii. Assign particular parishioners to personally invite those that should be present via a phone call or personal message.

- ix. Although the listening circles can be considered the main part of the listening process, it's important to first introduce the synod (why are we here?) and help the participants get into an appropriate space to share. This can be done through a short liturgy/ reflection and by getting a few different representatives from your community to share their brief testimony.
- x. Ensure that your programme has sufficient time for the listening circles, consider how many people you will have and the time each would take to share.
- xi. Ensure that anything presented beforehand is timed strictly. Doing pre-recordings of testimonies many assist in controlling that.
- xii. During the listening circles, prioritize rounds 1 and 2 and do the rest within the time you have left.
- xiii. Choose strong people with experience leading small groups to be facilitators and guide them through the expectations beforehand.
- xiv. Choose good listeners to be scribes and ensure that they are fully briefed on their expectations.
- xv. Ensure the timers are loud enough for all to hear.
- xvi. Group facilitators should be firm with participants sticking within their allocated time.
- xvii. Assign someone from your parish to collate all of the feedback from the various scribes, this needs to be done electronically within the template.
- xviii. Go through all of the documents on our website at www.adct.org.za
- xix. Visit www.synod.va for other great resources.

All parishes in the Archdiocese of Cape Town needs to send their collated feedback to synodadct@gmail.com by 15 June 2022 in the Microsoft Word format which the template was sent in.

We are excited to be journeying with you, if you have any queries, please contact us at cpdcapetown@gmail.com

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the
wrong path nor partiality influence our
actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to
eternal life and not stray from the way
of truth
and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and
time,
in the communion of the Father and
the Son, forever and ever. Amen.

