

*“...the path of Synodality is the path God expects of the Church of the third millennium. What the Lord asks of us is already contained, in a sense, in the word ‘synod’, which means ‘walking together; - Laity, Pastors, Bishop of Rome... A synodal church is a church that listens, with the understanding that listening ‘is more than hearing’. It is reciprocal listening in which everyone has something to learn.”*

*Pope Francis, (to Bishops on Commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops)*

Excerpts on Synodality, taken from

*Synodality: A New Way of Proceeding in the Church; Rafael Luciani 2022*

Listening cannot be understood as a simple act. It is not hearing. Listening becomes a communicative dynamic that redefines and reconfigures the identities and relationships among all the faithful or ecclesial subjects in which the whole people of God – pope, bishops, laity, and so on – take part.

In a synodal church, we are asked not only to walk together – but rather, and above all, it highlights the relations and the communicative dynamics happening while walking together. It involves the dynamic of praying, meeting, and working together, but also of discerning and making, and taking decisions together. A new way of taking advice and building consensus. A synodal model involves the entire ecclesial community to seek new ways of proceeding as one people of God. Therefore, it requires the constant reassessment of lifestyles, discernment practices, and governance structures.

Synodality is not just a specific event nor a functional method. It is a constitutive dimension that defines a new way of proceeding for the Church as the people of God.

For Pope Francis, reform is not an end in itself, but rather a process of growth and above all of conversion.

*“Reform will be effective if and only if it is carried out with ‘renewed’ persons and not simply with ‘new’ men and women occupying positions in a Church that has not yet converted in her structures. It is not enough only to change personnel; the members [of the Curia] must be led to renew themselves spiritually, personally, and professionally. Reform [of the Curia] does come about with a simple change of persons – but with the conversion of persons. Permanent conversion and purification are above all necessary. Without a change of mentality our effort will be useless.”*

*(Pope Francis to Roman Curia, 2016)*

A rethinking of the Church’s mission demands authority be exercised in light of the relations of *equality* that emerges from the *sensus fidelium* – the laity must participate in discernment, decision-taking, planning and implementation.

(Aparecida 371)

The International Theological Commission (ITC) describes Synodality as a

“Constitutive dimension of the whole Church” because it characterizes the Church’s *“specific way of living and working...Synodality involves constant review of life-styles (spirit) and discernment practices (method) at all levels and structures of government. It is the application of the classical medieval principal “what affects everyone must be discussed and approved by everyone.”*

Bernard Franck argues that “the essence of Synodality is a spirit rather than a principle” because it stresses and reconfigures the *relationships and processes* among subjects to achieve “unity in plurality”, the “whole in the parts.”...this is achieved through participatory dynamics such as ‘reciprocal listening, exchange and communication, sharing and solidarity, the desire to reach consensus and common conviction. This requires the willingness to collaborate and not just cooperate, to accept and welcome, to give and to receive. This supposes relationships steeped in respect and charity, humility and poverty. This is the ‘synodal’ spirit.

Pope Francis reminds us that a synodal Church is a Church that listens, because it is aware that listening ‘is more than hearing’. It is a reciprocal listening in which

everyone – faithful people, episcopal college, Bishop of Rome – has something to learn, each one listening to the others, and all listening to the Holy Spirit,

To implement this, Pope Francis says (building on the thought of Alphonse Borras, Louvain 1994)

*“all are invited to listen to one another, to discern pastoral decisions and implement them together, with all doing their part. It is a matter of discerning what the Spirit of Christ is saying to the Church, which he is building in this place. For the Spirit ‘speaks’ through diverse mediations, such as our hearing the Gospel, the silence of prayer, the reviewing of life and events in the light of faith, the confrontation of differing viewpoints. Etc.”*

Defining a synodal Church, the International Theological Commission (ITC)

1. “In the synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God’s will”
2. “A synodal Church is a Church of participation and co-responsibility. In exercising Synodality, it is called to allow for 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 are called to serve one another through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit.”