

Selected topics from the Final Document of the Synod 2024

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission (26 Oct. 2024)

<https://bit.ly/synod-2024-final-document-english>

<https://bit.ly/synod-2024-document-final-français>



Introduction

March 15 letter of Cardinal Grech: "In particular, «the local Churches and groupings of Churches are now called upon to implement, in their different contexts, the authoritative proposals contained in the Document through the processes of discernment and decision-making provided for by law and by the Document itself». In light of these indications, therefore, the implementation phase of the Synod should be understood not as merely the "application" of directives from above, but rather as a process of "reception" of the orientations expressed in the Final Document, adapted appropriately to local cultures and the needs of communities.... In line with the indications of the Final Document, the aim is to concretely realize the perspective of the exchange of gifts between Churches and within the whole Church concrete (cf. nn. 120-121).

What is synodality?

28. The terms 'synodality' and 'synodal' derive from the ancient and constant ecclesial practice of meeting in synods.

The word 'synod' refers to institutions and events that assumed different forms over time... what unites them is gathering together to dialogue, discern and decide.

Synodality is the walking together of Christians with Christ and towards God's Kingdom, in union with all humanity. Orientated towards mission, synodality involves gathering at all levels of the Church for mutual listening, dialogue, and community discernment. It also involves reaching consensus as an expression of Christ rendering Himself present, He who is alive in the Spirit. Furthermore, it consists in reaching decisions according to differentiated co-responsibilities.

In simple and concise terms, synodality is a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform that enables the Church to be more participatory and missionary so that it can walk with every man and woman, radiating the light of Christ.

Synodality invites the whole Church, including those who exercise authority, to conversion and reform. (no. 33)

"Specifically, synodality designates three distinct aspects of the life of the Church:

a) in the first instance, it refers to "the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church";

b) synodality denotes those structures and ecclesial processes in which the synodal nature of the Church is expressed at an institutional level: local, regional and universal

c) synodal events in which the Church is called together by the competent authority in accordance with the specific procedures laid down by ecclesiastical discipline, involving the whole People of God in various ways on local, regional and universal levels ... to discern the way forward and to take particular decisions and directions with the aim of fulfilling its evangelising mission." (30)

"Synodality not an end in itself, but always at service of mission." (32)

In the synodal Church "the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions" for mission". (87)

"It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium." (Pope Francis, 2015)

Discernment:

"Exercising discernment is at the heart of synodal processes and events.... Communal discernment allows us to discover God's call in a particular historical situation" (ITC, no. 113).

"The ability to imagine a different future for the Church and her institutions, in keeping with the mission she has received, depends largely on the decision to initiate processes of listening, dialogue, and community discernment, in which each and every person can participate and contribute" (Synod of Bishops, "Preparatory Document," 2021, no. 9).

82. Ecclesial discernment is not an organisational technique but rather a spiritual practice grounded in a living faith. It calls for interior freedom, humility, prayer, mutual trust, an openness to the new and a surrender to the will of God.

The local context / the Archdiocese and our task:

"Synodal renewal fosters an appreciation of local contexts as the place where the universal call from God manifests and fulfils itself." (39)

"The Church cannot be understood apart from its roots in a specific territory, in that space and time where a shared experience of encounter with the saving God occurs.

This local dimension to our Church preserves the rich diversity of expressions of faith that are grounded in a specific cultural and historical milieu." (110)

40. The appreciation of contexts, cultures and diversities, and of the relationships between them, is key to growing as a missionary synodal Church...

53. The call to renewed relationships in the Lord Jesus flourishes in the different contexts in which His disciples live and carry out the Church's mission. The plurality of cultures requires that the uniqueness of each cultural context is taken into account.

Towards implementation:

9. The synodal process does not conclude with the end of the current Assembly of the Synod of Bishops but also includes the implementation phase.

11. "The call to mission is, at the same time, the call to the conversion of each local Church and of the whole Church."

"Without concrete changes in the short term, the vision of a synodal Church will not be credible, and this will alienate those members of the People of God who have drawn strength and hope from the synodal journey. Local Churches need to find ways to implement these changes." (94)

Closing remarks from Pope Francis at the Synod:

In light of what has emerged from the synodal journey, there are and there will be decisions to be made. I do not intend to publish an Apostolic Exhortation; what we have approved is sufficient.

There are already highly concrete indications in the Document that can be a guide for the mission of the Churches, in their specific continents and contexts.

This is why I am making it immediately available to everyone ... to recognize the value of the synodal journey accomplished, I hand this Document over to the holy faithful people of God. This Final Document is a gift to all the faithful people of God ... Not everyone will set out to read it. (!) It will largely fall to you, together with many others, to make what it contains accessible in the local Churches.

SELECTED TOPICS:

Synodal renewal for mission

Pope Francis. “During each stage, the journey was characterised by the wisdom of the ‘sense of faith’ (*sensus fidei*) of the People of God ... there is a call to joy and to the renewal of the Church in following the Lord, in committing to service of his mission, and in searching for ways to be faithful.”

39. “Synodal renewal fosters an appreciation of local contexts as the place where the universal call from God manifests and fulfils itself. It is a call to be part of God’s People, to participate in that Reign of God, which is ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom 14:17).”

50. “To be a synodal Church, we are required to open ourselves to a genuine relational conversion that redirects each person’s priorities, and we must once again learn from the Gospel that attending to relationships is not merely a strategy or a tool for greater organisational effectiveness.”

87. “In the synodal Church, ‘the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern, and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions’ for mission.” (quoting the International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the life and mission of the Church,” 2 March 2018, no. 68).

Listening within our parishes: renewal and parish councils, finance councils

103. The Baptised participate in decision-making, accountability and evaluation processes through institutional structures, primarily through those already provided for the local Church set out in the existing Code of Canon Law. In the Latin Church these are: Diocesan Synod (cf. CIC, can. 466), Presbyteral Council (cf. CIC, can. 500, § 2), Diocesan Pastoral Council (cf. CIC, can. 514, § 1), Parish Pastoral Council (cf. CIC, can. 536), Diocesan and Parish Finance Council (cf. CIC, cann. 493 e 537). Members participate on the basis of their ecclesial role and their differentiated responsibilities and capacities (charisms, ministries, experiences, competencies, etc). Each of these bodies plays a role in the discernment needed for the incultured proclamation of the Gospel, for the community’s mission in its milieu, and for the witness of the Baptised. They also contribute to the decision-making processes through established means. These bodies themselves become the subject of accountability and evaluation, as they will need to give an account of their work. Participatory bodies represent one of the most promising areas in which to act for rapid implementation of the synodal guidelines, bringing about perceptible changes speedily.

104. A synodal Church is based upon the existence, efficiency and effective vitality of these participatory bodies, not on the merely nominal existence of them.

For this reason, we insist that they be made mandatory, as was requested at all stages of the synodal process, and that they can fully play their role, and not just in a purely formal way, in ways appropriate to their diverse local contexts.” (104)

105. Furthermore, the structure and operations of these bodies need to be addressed. It is necessary to start by adopting a synodal working method.

Role of Women in the Church

52. “We bear witness to the Gospel when we seek to live in relationships that respect the equal dignity and reciprocity between men and women. The widely expressed pain and suffering on the part of many women from every region and continent, both lay and consecrated, during the synodal process, reveal how often we fail to live up to this vision.”

60. “By virtue of Baptism, women and men have equal dignity as members of the People of God. However, women continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, vocation and roles in all the various areas of the Church’s life. This is to the detriment of serving the Church’s shared mission.”

... “This Assembly asks for full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law with regard to the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain underutilised.

... “There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped.

... “Additionally, the question of women’s access to diaconal ministry remains open. This discernment needs to continue.”

Youth and young adults

61. “Within the Christian community, special attention should be given to children. Not only do children need accompaniment in their growth, but they have much to give to the community of believers. The Church cannot be synodal without the contribution of children, who are bearers of missionary potential, being valued.”

62. “Young people also make a contribution to the synodal renewal of the Church. They are acutely aware of the values of fellowship and sharing while rejecting paternalism or authoritarian attitudes. At times, their attitude toward the Church can come across as critical, yet often, it manifests positively as a personal commitment to the creation of a welcoming community dedicated to fighting against social injustice and for the care of our common home. The request that they made at the 2018 Synod on Young People to ‘walk together in daily life’ corresponds exactly to the vision of a synodal Church.”

Liturgy

27. There is a close link between ... the Eucharistic assembly and the synodal assembly. In both cases, albeit in different forms, Jesus’ promise to be present where two or three are gathered in His name is fulfilled (cf. Mt 18:20). Synodal assemblies are events that celebrate the union of Christ with His Church through the action of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who ensures the unity of the ecclesial body of

Christ in the Eucharistic assembly as well as in the synodal assembly. The liturgy is a listening to the Word of God and a response to His covenantal initiative. Similarly, the synodal assembly is a listening to this same Word, which resounds as much in the signs of the times as in the hearts of the faithful, and also a response of the assembly that is discerning God's will in order to put it into practice. Deepening the link between liturgy and synodality will help all Christian communities, in the diversity of their cultures and traditions, to adopt celebratory styles that make visible the face of a synodal Church. To this end, we call for the establishment of a specific Study Group which would be entrusted with reflection on how to make liturgical celebrations more an expression of synodality. It could also consider the topic of preaching within liturgical celebrations as well as the development of catechetical resources on synodality from a mystagogical perspective.

Welcoming in our parishes, cultural diversity

112. For a variety of reasons, our times are marked by a growth in population mobility. Refugees and migrants often form dynamic communities, including of religious practice, rendering multicultural the places in which they settle. Some maintain strong bonds with their country of origin, especially with the help of digital media, and thus can find it difficult to form connections in their new country; others find themselves living without roots. The inhabitants of destination countries, too, find the welcoming of newcomers challenging. All experience the impact resulting from encountering diverse geographical, cultural and linguistic origins and are called to build intercultural communities. The impact of the phenomenon of migration on the life of the Church should not be overlooked.

117. "The parish is one of the main organising units in the local Church present throughout our history. The parish community that gathers in the celebration of the Eucharist is a privileged place of relationships, welcome, discernment and mission. Changes in how we experience and live our relationship with locality require us to reconsider how parishes are configured. What characterises the parish is that it is a community that is not self-selecting."

Listening to the marginalized/the pain of the world

48. The willingness to listen to all, especially those who are poor, stands in stark contrast to a world in which the concentration of power tends to disregard those who are poor, the marginalised, minorities and the earth, which is our common home.

56. Listening to those who suffer exclusion and marginalisation strengthens the Church's awareness that taking on the burden of wounded relationships is part of its mission.

121. The Church, both at the local level and by virtue of its Catholic unity, aspires to be a network of relationships which prophetically propagates and promotes a culture of encounter, social justice, inclusion of the marginalised, communion among peoples and care for the earth, our common home. The concrete realisation of this requires each Church to share its own resources in a spirit of solidarity, without paternalism or subordination, with respect for diversity and promoting healthy reciprocity. This includes, where necessary, a commitment to healing the wounds of memory and to walking the path of reconciliation.

151. The concerns of the Church's social doctrine, commitment to peace and justice, care for our common home and intercultural and interreligious dialogue, must also be more widely shared among the People of God so that the action of missionary disciples can influence the construction of a more just

and compassionate world. The commitment to defending life and human rights, for the proper ordering of society, for the dignity of work, for a fair and supportive economy, and an integral ecology is part of the evangelising mission that the Church is called to live and incarnate in history.

Listening to those hurt by church

55. Many of the evils that afflict our world are also visible in the Church. The abuse crisis, in its various and tragic manifestations, has brought untold and often ongoing suffering to victims and survivors, and to their communities. The Church needs to listen with special attention and sensitivity to the voices of victims and survivors of sexual, spiritual, economic, power and conscience abuse by members of the clergy or persons with Church appointments. Listening is a fundamental element of the path to healing, repentance, justice and reconciliation. At a time characterised by a global crisis of trust, which encourages people to live in distrust and suspicion, the Church must acknowledge its own shortcomings. It must humbly ask for forgiveness, must care for victims, provide for preventative measures, and strive in the Lord to rebuild mutual trust.

150. Another area of great importance is the promotion in all ecclesial contexts of a culture of safeguarding, making communities ever safer places for minors and vulnerable persons. The work to equip Church structures with regulations and legal procedures that enable the prevention of abuse and timely responses to inappropriate behaviour has already begun. It is necessary to continue this commitment, offering ongoing specific and adequate formation to those who work in contact with minors and vulnerable adults so that they can act competently and recognise the signals, often silent, of those experiencing difficulties and needing help. It is essential that victims are welcomed and supported, and this needs to be done sensitively. This requires great humanity and must be carried out with the help of qualified people. We must all allow ourselves to be moved by their suffering and practise that proximity, which, through concrete choices, will uplift them, help them and prepare a different future for all. Safeguarding processes must be constantly monitored and evaluated. Victims and survivors must be welcomed and supported with great sensitivity.

Transparency and accountability

79. “In prayer and dialogue, we have recognised that ecclesial discernment, the care for decision-making processes, the commitment to accountability and the evaluation of our decisions are practices through which we respond to the Word that shows us the paths of mission.”

95. Decision-making does not conclude the discernment process. It must be accompanied and followed by practices of accountability and evaluation undertaken in a spirit of transparency inspired by evangelical criteria.

96. In particular, it has been requested that greater light be shed on the meaning of transparency. The synodal process has connected it to words such as truth, loyalty, clarity, honesty, integrity, consistency, rejection of obscurity, hypocrisy and ambiguity, and absence of ulterior motives.

97. The attitude to transparency we have just outlined safeguards the trust and credibility needed by a synodal Church that is attentive to relationships. When this trust is violated, the weakest and the most vulnerable suffer the most. Wherever the Church enjoys trust, the practice of transparency, accountability, and evaluation helps to strengthen its credibility. These practices are even more critical

where the Church's credibility needs rebuilding. They are particularly important in regard to the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults.

98. These practices contribute to keeping the Church faithful to its mission. The absence of these practices is one of the consequences of clericalism, which is thus fuelled. Clericalism is based on the implicit assumption that those who have authority in the Church are not to be held to account for their actions and decisions as if they were isolated from or above the rest of the People of God.

Formation of all the baptized

143. "One of the requests that emerged most strongly and from all contexts during the synodal process is that the formation provided by the Christian community be **integral, ongoing, and shared**. Such formation must aim not only at acquiring theoretical knowledge but also at promoting the capacity for openness and encounter, sharing and collaboration, reflection and discernment in common. Formation must consequently engage all the dimensions of the human person (intellectual, affective, relational, and spiritual) and include concrete experiences that are appropriately accompanied."

... "There was also a marked insistence throughout the synodal process upon the need for a common and shared formation, in which men and women, laity, consecrated persons, ordained ministers, and candidates for ordained ministry participate together, thus enabling them to grow together in knowledge and mutual esteem and in the ability to collaborate."

Formation for ordained ministry

72. "In a synodal Church, Priests are called to live their service in a spirit of proximity to their people, to be welcoming and prepared to listen to all, opening themselves up to a synodal style. Priests "constitute along with their Bishop one presbyterium" (LG 28) and collaborate with him in discerning charisms and in accompanying and guiding the local Church with particular regard to the matter of safeguarding unity."

73. "Deacons respond to the specific needs of each local Church, particularly reawakening and sustaining everyone's attention to the poorest in a Church which is synodal, missionary and merciful."

86. It is essential to offer formation opportunities that spread and nourish a culture of ecclesial discernment focused on mission in local Churches, starting from small ecclesial communities and parishes. This is particularly necessary amongst those who hold leadership roles. It is equally important to encourage the formation of facilitators, whose contribution is often crucial to the process of discernment.

Relations between Roman and Eastern Catholics

132. "As guarantor of unity in diversity, the Bishop of Rome ensures that the identity of the Eastern Catholic Churches is safeguarded and that **their centuries-old theological, canonical, liturgical, spiritual, and pastoral traditions are respected**. These Churches are equipped with their own deliberative synodal structures. Relationships among the Latin Church and Eastern Catholic Churches must be characterised by the exchange of gifts, collaboration and mutual enrichment."

133. “The migration of many of the Eastern faithful into regions of the Latin Rite risks compromising their identity. Instruments and norms need to be evolved to strengthen as much as possible collaboration between the Latin Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches to address this situation.”

Ecumenism

23. “All Christians participate in the *sensus fidei* through baptism. Therefore, as well as constituting the basis of synodality, baptism is also the foundation of ecumenism. ... ‘**The journey of synodality undertaken by the Catholic Church is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical journey is synodal.**’ ... Ecumenism is, first and foremost, a matter of spiritual renewal. It demands processes of repentance and the healing of memories of past wounds and, where necessary, finding the courage to offer fraternal correction in a spirit of evangelical charity.”

41. “Dialogue, encounter and exchange of gifts, typical of a synodal Church, are calls to open out to relations with other religious traditions so as ‘to establish friendship, peace and harmony and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love.’”

122. “The exchange of gifts is of crucial significance in the journey towards full and visible unity among all churches and Christian communions. ... **Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an ‘exchange of gifts.’”**

138. “Ecumenical dialogue is fundamental to developing an understanding of synodality and the unity of the Church. It urges us to develop ecumenical synodal practices, including forms of consultation and discernment on questions of shared and urgent interest.”

Interreligious relations

41. “Christians live side by side with people who are not baptised yet serve God by practising a different religion. We pray solemnly for them in the liturgy of Good Friday, and we strive together with them to build a better world, imploring the one God to free the world from the evils that afflict it.”

123. “**A synodal Church commits itself to walk this path alongside the believers of other religions and people of other beliefs wherever it lives.** It freely shares the joy of the Gospel and gratefully receives their respective gifts.”

Digital environment and communications

113. “The spread of digital culture, particularly evident among young people, is profoundly changing their experience of space and time; it influences their daily activities, communication and interpersonal relationships, including faith. Nowadays, we often experience loneliness and marginalisation, even though we are more connected than ever. The internet, constituted as a web of connections, offers new opportunities to better live the synodal dimension of the Church.”

149. “Digital culture constitutes a crucial dimension of the Church’s witness in contemporary culture and an emerging missionary field. This requires ensuring that the Christian message is present online in reliable ways that do not ideologically distort its content. Although digital media has great potential to improve our lives, it can also cause harm and injury through bullying, misinformation, sexual

exploitation and addiction. Church educational institutions must help children and adults develop critical skills to safely navigate the web.”

Questions for Spiritual Conversation

1. What does it look like to function in a synodal way?
2. How do we become a more listening church?
3. What topics do you think are missing? What topics of specific concern for our archdiocese have not been identified today?
4. What topic is specific to your setting?