

10 things to think about when you hear the word *synodality*

with quotations from the Synod on Synodality's 2024 *Final Document (FD)* and from 2025 document *Pathways for the Implementation Phase of the Synod (Pathways)*

1. A synodal church is a church that listens. This synodal process we have been a part of these past years is a deep invitation to listen to the Holy Spirit, to the Word of God, to one another, to those in need, to the world in which we live. It is a lengthy learning process as we listen to each other; listening is a critical starting point.

In his introductory note to the Synod on Synodality's Final Document (2024, henceforth *FD*), Pope Francis wrote: "The Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops gathers the fruits of a journey marked by listening to the People of God and by the discernment of Pastors."

It has been the most extensive consultative process in human history. It began with listening, continues with listening at all levels, and the listening doesn't come to an end.

2. It invites a spiritual listening, leading to a spiritual discernment. This isn't a political strategy of the church. It's not a democracy-in-action model. It's about listening for the voice of God, about an encounter with the Risen Lord, the Holy Spirit.

"It is no coincidence that the FD begins by testifying how 'we felt His presence in our midst as we lived conversation in the Spirit and listened to one another: the presence of He, who, in bestowing the Holy Spirit, continues to build among His people a unity that establishes harmony amidst differences.' This is also the experience that has been and continues to be made in local Churches and in various groupings of Churches" (*Pathways*, p.8).

"The fishing has not borne fruit, and it is now time to return to shore. Yet a voice rings out, in an authoritative tone, inviting the disciples to do something that they alone would not have done, pointing to a possibility that their eyes and minds could not grasp: 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' During this synodal journey, we have sought to hear this Voice and to welcome it. In prayer and dialogue, we have recognized 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 (*FD*, no. 79).

"A reading of the FD should be supported and sustained by both communal and personal prayer, centred on Christ, the Master of listening and dialogue (cf. *FD*, no. 51) and open to the action of the Spirit" (*Pathways*, p. 17).

"The synodal method is not reduced to a series of techniques for managing meetings, but it is a spiritual and ecclesial experience that involves growing in a new way of being Church, rooted in the faith that the Spirit bestows on all the Baptized with His gifts, beginning with the *sensus fidei* (*Pathways*, p. 21; cf. *FD*, no. 81).

3. It is focused on the Church's mission. This whole process of synodality is about being more deeply rooted in the Church's mission and more deeply engaged in it.

"The synodal form of the Church is at the service of its mission, and any change in the life of the Church is intended to make it more capable of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and witnessing to the Gospel of the Lord to the men and women of our time. This is the key to faithfully interpreting the FD and, above all, to putting it into practice. We live in a world that is caught up in a spiral of violence and endless war, which increasingly struggles to create opportunities for encounter and

dialogue, with a view to the common good and peace. More than ever, it needs a Church that knows how to be ‘in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race’ (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 1; cf. *FD*, no. 56). It is the urgency of this mission that drives us to implement the Synod...” (*Pathways* p. 3).

It is inviting a renewal in the Church’s mission in each local context. “The *FD* invites local Churches to also identify ‘formation pathways to bring about a tangible synodal conversion in the various ecclesial contexts’ (*Pathways*, p. 7, citing *FD*, no. 9).”

“The *FD* proposes to the whole Church and to every baptised person the prospect of a journey of conversion: ‘the call to mission is, at the same time, the call to the conversion of each local Church and of the whole Church’” (*Pathways*, p. 17, citing *FD*, no. 11).

4. A synodal church wants to hear the voices of all. It is committed to dialogue. It calls us to be a church in dialogue.

Pope Leo, in his interview with *Crux* in Sept. 2025, put it this way: “I think that synodality is an attitude, an openness, a willingness to understand. Speaking of the Church now, this means each and every member of the church has a voice and a role to play through prayer, reflection... through a process... of dialogue and respect of one another. To bring people together and to understand that relationship, that interaction, that creating opportunities of encounter, is an important dimension of how we live our life as church.”

“Since synodality is ‘a constitutive dimension of the Church’ (*FD*, no. 28), this cannot be a path limited to a core group of ‘supporters.’ On the contrary, it is important that this new process contribute concretely ‘to expand possibilities for participation and for the exercise of differentiated co-responsibility by all the Baptized, men and women’ (*FD*, no. 36) in a spirit of reciprocity. Moreover, it is crucial that it aims to involve those who have so far remained on the margins of the ecclesial renewal process established by the Synod, such as ‘between individuals and groups with diverse cultural identities and social conditions’” (*Pathways*, p. 9).

5. A healthy synodal church is always wanting to reach out to those in need, reaching beyond its structures and even beyond its parish community and to those who are hurt in one way or another.

“The *FD* embraces the conciliar vision of a Church in the world, in dialogue with everyone, with other religious traditions (cf. *FD*, no. 41) and with the entire community (cf. *FD*, no. 42). Growing as a synodal Church capable of dialogue has a prophetic value that includes a commitment to social justice and integral ecology” (*Pathways*, p. 18).

“The *FD* firmly promotes a Church that is increasingly courageous in its outreach, to the extent that it asks communities to see themselves as ‘primarily devoted to the service of a mission that the faithful carry out within society, in family and working life. They will, therefore, not remain focused exclusively on the activities that take place within their own communities and upon their own organizational needs’ (*Pathways*, p. 18 citing *FD*, no. 59).

“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 characterized 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. Listening to those who suffer exclusion and marginalization strengthens the Church's awareness that taking on the burden of wounded relationships is part of its mission (*FD*, no. 55-56).

“We began the Second Session of the Assembly with a penitential vigil, through which, feeling our shame, we asked forgiveness for our sins, and we lifted up our prayers for the victims of the evils of the world. We identified our sins: against peace, against Creation, against indigenous peoples, migrants, children, women, and those who are poor, in our failure to listen and to seek communion. We were brought to a renewed understanding, namely, that synodality requires repentance and conversion” (*FD*, no. 6).

6. It understands and recognizes the church's hierarchy and its structures, but it is not a clerical model of being church, which puts priests, bishops and the pope on pedestals; rather, it focuses on discipleship, and on each person playing their rightful roles at the service of God and of the community. It highlights the need for transparency, accountability and evaluation.

On the need for transparency, accountability and evaluation, the *Final Document* states: “These three practices are closely intertwined. Decision-making processes need ecclesial discernment, which requires listening in a climate of trust that is supported by transparency and accountability. Trust must be mutual: decision-makers need to be able to trust and listen to the People of God. The latter, in turn, needs to be able to trust those in authority. This integral vision highlights that each of these practices depends on and supports the others, thus serving the Church's ability to fulfil its mission. Formation is needed in order to engage in decision-making processes grounded in ecclesial discernment and which reflect a culture of transparency, accountability, and evaluation. The formation required is not only technical; it also needs to explore theological, biblical and spiritual foundations. All the Baptized need this formation in witness, mission, holiness and service, which emphasizes co-responsibility. It takes on particular forms for those in positions of responsibility or at the service of ecclesial discernment” (*FD*, no. 80).

In his homily of Sunday Oct. 26, 2025, Pope Leo stated: “The supreme rule in the Church is love. No one is called to dominate; all are called to serve. No one should impose his or her own ideas; we must all listen to one another. No one is excluded; we are all called to participate. No one possesses the whole truth; we must all humbly seek it and seek it together.”

7. It invites us to focus on the particular characteristics and context of our local church. We are part of a universal church, but we need to discern the needs of our local communities. What are our local challenges? What are the challenges of our rural communities? What are the challenges of all our communities in terms of passing on the faith?

“The *FD* repeatedly emphasizes that ‘Local Churches need to find ways to implement these changes’ (*FD*, no. 94), and in fact, this is the task to be addressed during the implementation phase. It is therefore not possible to indicate among the *FD*'s many areas of attention those that are to be considered universally priority. Local circumstances may quite legitimately make it important and urgent to address a particular issue that does not have the same priority elsewhere” (*Pathways*, p. 19).

8. While it invites each local church to do its own listening and discerning, it fosters a unity which takes into consideration the great diversity of local contexts.

“At the same time – and here we are referring to the polarity between the whole Church and the local Church mentioned above – there is also a pressing need to move forward together as the Church as a whole” (*Pathways*, p. 20).

The Holy Spirit gives gifts to all people in all their roles and the life of the church in the world. We need to share those gifts with each other. How do we live out that exchange of gifts such that the differences become nurturing, nourishing, and enriching to our communities?

“The intention is to ensure that the process move forward with a deep concern for the unity of the Church ‘harmonizing this reception across different ecclesial contexts’ (Letter on the Accompaniment Process of the Implementation Phase of the Synod, 15 March 2025), without undermining the responsibility of each local Church. By placing itself ‘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’ (*Pathways*, p. 4; cf. *FD*, nos. 120-121).

9. This way of living as church invites creative engagement. How do we discern action for responding to the needs in our particular situations? What are the new factors or situations that invite a different way of doing things, a different way of living our communal life as the church? What would bring a renewal of mission and life in the local church?

“The implementation phase aims to examine new practices and structures that will make the life of the Church more synodal, starting from the overall perspective outlined in the *FD*, with a view to more effectively carrying out the mission of evangelization. This work includes the necessary theological and canonical study and, above all, a commitment to discern what is most appropriate and potentially fruitful in different local contexts” (*Pathways*, p. 7).

“The implementation phase is an opportunity to preserve that exchange of gifts which fosters the communion of local Churches within the one Church, manifesting its Catholicity while respecting legitimate diversity. The creativity that inspires new ways of practicing synodality and enhances the fruitfulness of mission springs from these differences. For this reason, the fruits of the experiences gained in different contexts need to be shared, nourishing dialogue between the Churches. In the implementation phase, a new process of dialogue therefore begins in each Church and between the Churches, based on the *FD*.” (*Pathways*, p. 8)

10. It prioritizes the hope that comes with the Gospel. In the call to the church to a greater synodality, you should hear an invitation to be a people of hope, pilgrims of hope, who walk with joy, who carry the gospel within us, and ever to seek to proclaim that in a way that it can be heard and received in the world in which we live.

“We come from all parts of the world, from places marked by violence, poverty and indifference. Together, with the hope that does not disappoint, united in the love of God which has been poured into our hearts, we can not only dream of peace, but commit ourselves with all our might so that, even if we don't say much about synodality, peace may be achieved through processes of listening, dialogue and reconciliation. The synodal Church for mission now needs the words we have shared to be backed up by deeds. And that is the path” (Address of Pope Francis to Synod participants, Oct. 26, 2024).

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