



SCHOOL FOR
SYNODALITY

The Synodal Process – where is it leading the Church?

Avril Baigent



What is synodality?

- Ancient practice of the church for discerning and decision-making
- An outflow of the Second Vatican Council – learning what it means to live as the Pilgrim People of God as expressed in Lumen Gentium
- An event happening in Rome – part of a four-year process
- Structures and processes – Assemblies, synodal/pastoral councils, diocesan/national Synods
- A way of being a listening, discerning and acting Church
- No one definition!



What is synodality?

“a readiness to enter into a dynamic of constructive, respectful and prayerful speaking, listening and dialogue. At the root of this process is the acceptance.. of something that is both a gift and a challenge: to be a Church of sisters and brothers in Christ who listen to one another and who, in so doing, are gradually transformed by the Spirit.”

Instrumentum Laboris 18





Global Synod 2021-2025?

Emphasis on local discernment and inculturation

- Diocesan phase Oct 2021-April 2022 – writing of diocesan syntheses
- National phase April – September 2022 – writing of national syntheses
- Writing of Document for the Continental Stage (*Enlarge the space of your tents*)
- Continental stage Jan – April 2023 – continental documents
- Writing of Instrumentum Laboris, heads of terms for Rome Synod June 2023
- Global Synod meeting Rome October 2023
- Second Synod meeting Rome October 2024
- Report from the Synod – November 2024
- Apostolic Exhortation – April 2025??

What we have heard:

We are

- A global Church
- A Church that serves suffering people
- A Church that desires to speak
- A Church that is beginning to recognise its own failures

‘This enables us to understand the importance of taking the local Church as a privileged point of reference’

Instrumentum Laboris 4-6



A synodal church is...

- Is rooted in the vocation of all the baptised
- Exercises co-responsibility
- Listens to the signs of the times – is open to being disturbed
- Uses gracious listening and gracious speaking skills to create safe spaces where all can be heard
- Holds tension without forcing it into uniformity
- Through discernment - is open to the Holy Spirit
- Moves to action – leaders have to be decision-takers
- Is not a personal burden but a task for the whole community

Instrumentum Laboris, A1



Where is it leading us? Inwards...

Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*
(*Evangelii Gaudium*)

“And so the biggest threat of all gradually takes shape: the grey pragmatism of the daily life of the Church, in which all appears to proceed normally, while in reality faith is wearing down and degenerating into small mindedness. A tomb psychology thus develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum...Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization!” EG 83



“we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a “mystique” of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage.”

Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*
(*Evangelii Gaudium*)



Changing the culture of our communities

Conversation in the Spirit is the supreme tool of synodality. It is **not**:

- Led from the front
- About right and wrong answers
- Getting through an agenda
- A parliamentary process of winners and losers

Instead it is:

- Held in the round
- Hears a variety of voices
- A common search for the Holy Spirit
- Holds tension without forcing it into uniformity

Lectio Divina is a prayer practice that embodies these values



Habits and practice

- Introduce lectio divina at the beginning of any meeting
- Consider using conversation in the Spirit for tricky topics, for getting something new started, or any time where you don't want "the usual voices"



Transforming our decision-making

- Think about accountability and transparency. What decisions are made where? Are the names of those involved public (eg your finance committee)? Are your parish finances public?
- Can existing parish structures (eg finance committees, parish councils) be re-imagined as open to the Holy Spirit and the voice of the other?
- Think about marginal voices – who is on the margins
 - Of your parish
 - In your neighbourhood
 - What are their concerns? What are their stories?



Where is it leading us? Outwards...

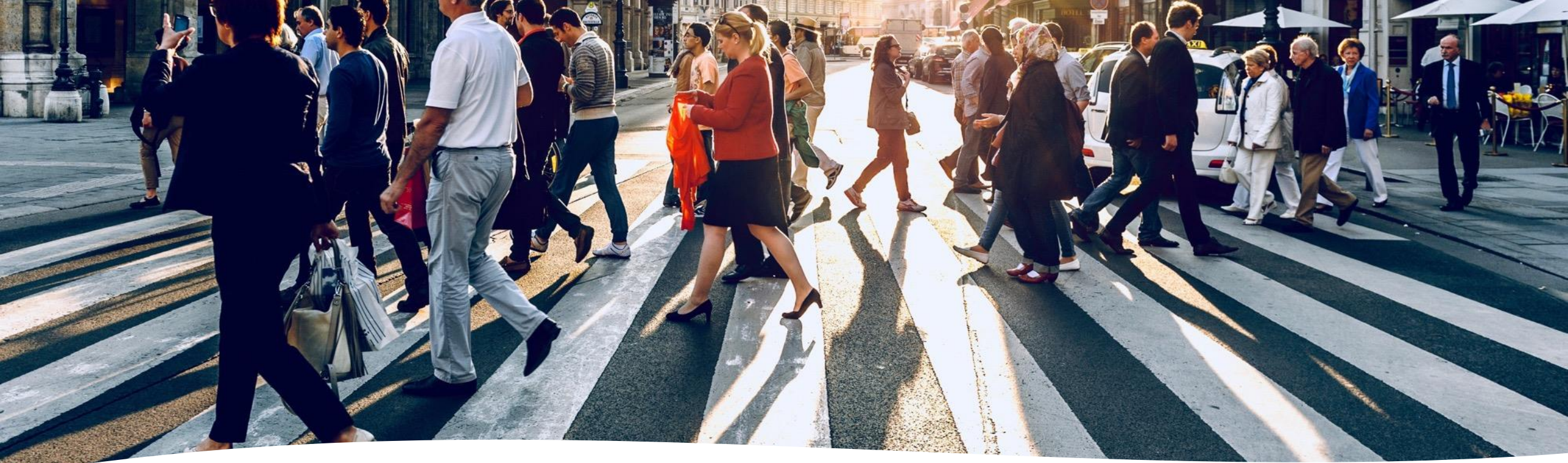
1. Synodality has consequences
– *we can't hear people's stories without wanting to respond*
2. When we hear different voices we start to reflect:
*Who are our neighbours-
what is our charism?*
3. What is the purpose of our parishes?
*Vision drives finances,
not the other way round*





The SVP and synodality

- Explicitly invite the Holy Spirit into your conversations
- Lectio Divina is a powerful prayer that enables us to share faith with one another and reconnect to our purpose
- Use Conversation in the Spirit for
 - Healing
 - Vision
 - Getting out of a rut
- Think about whose voices you are not hearing



Why do this?

- It is our calling
- It is our mission
- To remind the Church that we are for the world, not for ourselves
- To enable the Church to meet hurting people where they are
- To be the Caravan of Solidarity, not the Zombie Church

We are the synodal Church

“Encounter and listening are not ends in themselves, leaving everything just as it was before. On the contrary, whenever we enter into dialogue, we allow ourselves to be challenged, to advance on a journey. And in the end, we are no longer the same; we are changed....

Pope Francis, Homily for the Opening of the Synod Path, 10th October, 2021





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- <https://www.synod.va/en.html>
- <https://www.schoolforsynodality.org.uk>
 - Resource sheets for lectio divina and conversation in the Spirit
 - Webinar series – synodality 101
 - Conversation in the Spirit cards
 - Pastoral Council briefing paper
 - The best of the best from around the world
 - Online facilitator workshops 3 sessions from 4th July, 7pm