



# Utume Theological e-Journal

Don Bosco Utume

VOL. 3 (August 2022)



## Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church

### Featuring Topics:

1. Towards a more Decentralized Church: An Ecclesiological Contribution to the Synodal Process.
2. Synodality: A New Way of Walking Together.
3. Towards a Synodal Church through Collaborative Ministry among the Agents of Evangelization: A Pastoral Perspective.
4. Synodality Synod Envisions a Different Church.
5. Synodality: Expression of the Ecclesiology of Communion.
6. Synodal Church: Vocation, Communion, Participation and Mission.
7. Implanting of the Synodality in the History of the Church.
8. The Impact of Synodality in the Growth of the Church.
9. Roots, Expressions and Future of Synodality in the Church Today.

**DON BOSCO UTUME, SALESIAN THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE**

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## **Word of Introduction from the Director**

I am happy to write this short note for the Vol. 3 of *Utume Theological e-Journal* which has its theme “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church”. Pope Francis has invited all the faithful spread throughout the world to consider this time of preparation for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, whose theme is “For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission”, as an opportune time to listen and to rediscover the synodal nature of the Church. This rediscovery of the synodal roots of the Church will involve a process of humbly learning together how God is calling us to be as the Church in the third millennium.

New and creative pathways are to be found for working together among families, parishes religious communities and dioceses in order to bring this Synodal Process to completion. In simple terms we are invited at all levels to begin this journey of listening to one another as an authentic experience of discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit. Authentic discernment is made possible where there is time for deep reflection and a spirit of mutual trust, common faith, mutual forgiveness and a shared purpose. We all are called to actively participate in this process wherever we find ourselves sharing in the life and mission of the Church.

While the concept of Synodality refers to the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church, all of us are invited in our own places where we belong to express in simple and ordinary ways that involvement in the life and mission of our communities, families, and other Christian groups for ever better participation and communion. A synodal Church walks forward in communion to pursue a common mission through the participation of each and every member. As groups and communities in the Church each entity

will have a common mission to achieve and it is a challenge for all of us in our own capacities to aim towards maximum participation of all the members in the group.

We are in a process of constant change and growth and hence our aim is not to give onetime solution to the numerous challenges that we face but to put ourselves in a process of ongoing discernment as how to move forward as believers who openly search for the will of God and carry out his plan in our own times. We have the example of the ‘the apostolic Council of Jerusalem’ (cf. Acts 15, and also Galatians 2,1-10) as we consider the ‘Synodal Church’. There we can see a synodal event coming into being, in which the apostolic Church, in a very decisive moment of its development, lives out its call to be the visible sign of Risen Lord who welcomes all to Himself and enlightened by His living presence in their midst came up with a permanent solution that the Church of Christ is a welcoming Church. In a true spirit of discernment, the apostles came together led by the Spirit of the Risen Lord and opens the door of the Church to all, Jews and gentiles, men and women, saints and sinners. Across the centuries, this event has been interpreted as the paradigm for Synods celebrated by the Church.

In view of the important and controversial question facing them, the community at Antioch decides to consult “the Apostles and Elders” (15,2) of the Church in Jerusalem, and sends Paul and Barnabas there. The community in Jerusalem, the Apostles and the Elders promptly meet (15,4) to examine the situation. The whole process was marked by joy and spirit of openness (15, 3-4) in their effort to know what God wants to communicate to the community manifested especially by their keen interest in listening to one another (15, 12). Paul and Barnabas explain what has happened. A lively and open discussion follows (15,7a). They listen particularly to Peter’s authoritative witness and profession of faith (15,7b-12).

Everyone plays an active part, though with varied roles and contributions. A careful reading of Chapter 15 of Acts of the Apostles gives us much inspiration today how to be Synodal Church that allows maximum participation of various participants who are involved. It is of particular importance to note that for the first instance those consulted are the Apostles (Peter and James each give a speech) and the Elders, who exercise their specific ministry with authority.

The decision is taken by James, who guides the Church in Jerusalem, guided by the active presence of the Holy Spirit, who guarantees fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus: “It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves” (15,28). After listening to the opinion of all the assembly guided by the Apostles, they were able to move towards the consensus and unanimity that helped them to overcome personal interests and benefits and to seek the will of God.

The way the Council of Jerusalem handled challenging situation of admitting the gentiles to faith in Christ has left a model for the People of God to move forward in an orderly and well-thought-out way in which each person has a specific position and role (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,12-17; Romans 12,4-5; Ephesians 4,4-7) to play respecting the roles of each and everyone in the community.

In this Vol. 3 of *Utume Theological e-Journal* you will find various articles from students and lecturers of our college who have made an effort to reflect seriously on this topic which is very relevant for all of us living in the life and mission of the Church today. I congratulate Dr. Fr. Kidangan Ouseph Seby, the Principal of Don Bosco Utume and the Editor of *Utume Theological e-Journal* and all those who have contributed articles to this e-Journal for their effort to reflect on the theme “Synodality in the life and mission of the Church” and to share their study and reflection for the benefit of those who are searching for a deeper understanding of the

theme as all of us are in the process of actively participating in our own capacities in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023.

**Rev. Fr. Kalathipullatt Michael SDB**

**Rector – Don Bosco Utume**

## Editorial

### Synodality – Moving with the Times

The theme chosen for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission”.<sup>1</sup> Synodality can be considered as one of the favourite themes of Pope Francis’ Pontificate. In October 2015, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops by Pope Paul VI, Pope Francis said that the path of synodality is the true path which God expects of the Church in the third millennium.<sup>2</sup> “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” was also the theme taken up for the 2018 International Theological Commission.<sup>3</sup>

Synodality can be summarized as the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church (cf. *ITC* 7). Cardinal Mario Grech, the Secretary of the Synod of Bishops in an interview said that “Synodality is the form that realizes the participation of all the people of God in mission”.<sup>4</sup> One of the students asked me the difference between “Collegiality” and “Synodality” and I could say that the “collegiality” is the specific form in which the ecclesial synodality is expressed and lived. I would like to make a few statements to clarify synodality:

#### 01. Synodality energizes and inspires the evangelizing mission of the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/synod-of-bishops-to-take-up-theme-of-synodality-in-2022.html> (accessed on 29 July 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Francis, *Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015, in *AAS* 107 (2015): 1139.

<sup>3</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, March 2018, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html) (accessed on 27 July 2021).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.synod.va/content/synod/en/news/cardinal-grech--the-church-is-synodal-because-it-is-a-communion.html> (accessed on 29 July 2021).



02. Synodality calls for pastoral and missionary conversion. The conversion on one side involves involvement of every sector of the People of God and on the other side the current pitfall, which clericalises the lay people and turns the clergy into lay people has to be avoided (cf. *ITC* 104). This also necessitates turning down “an excessive clericalism which keeps them [lay people] away from decision-making” (cf. *ITC* 104).
03. Synodality demands a renewed understanding of the ecclesiology of communion.
04. Synodality implies the exercise of discernment in a spirit of communion. This communal discernment demands attentive listening to the promptings of the Spirit.
05. Synodality obliges walking together.

The theme chosen for this third volume of the *Utume Theological e-journal* is “*Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church.*” The Theological Forum Committee of our college proposed for us this theme for our study and reflection during the last academic year. This volume addresses the nuances of Synodality. Certainly, these well-written articles draw up some action plans and generate a few recommendations for the synodal church.

Don Bosco Utume, the Salesian Theological College recently organized a Writing Competition on the above theme for the students of the college. The articles thus collected were edited along with other scholarly works thereby giving the shape to this edition of our theological e-journal. The present volume consists of nine articles that investigate the Church’s synodality.

In his well-researched article, ***Towards a more Decentralized Church: An Ecclesiological Contribution to the Synodal Process***, Rev. Dr. Vitalis Mshanga AJ presents the ecclesial understanding of synodality. He asserts that the a deeply “fostered communion” and a well-structured “participation” will necessarily open up to a “missionary conversion.” Therefore, the notions of communion, participation and mission are inseparably linked together.

Nkandu Paul SDB in his foresighted article, *Synodality: A New Way of Walking Together* draws attention of the readers to the new way of journeying together. As the author underlines, it is important to understand synodality with an ecclesial language not a political one. It is a journey of the people of God as a community.

The insightful article entitled *Towards a Synodal Church through Collaborative Ministry among the Agents of Evangelization: A Pastoral Perspective* by Rev. Sr. Mary Wambua Nzilani SMMG attempts to outline the collaborative approach for a Synodal Church. According to her, this collaborative relationship promotes mutual openness, understanding and collaboration. This will also enable to journey together as agents of evangelization for a new socio-economic and religious order.

The article by Rev. Fr. Lazar Arasu SDB, *Synodality Synod Envisions a Different Church*, explores with a sense of confidence and gratitude Pope Francis' invitation to Synodality. The author views that there must be honest listening, participation and implementation of the Synodal recommendations. The three invitations of the Synod – Communion, Participation and Mission are geared to make the Church mature.

Kambale Jean-Louis Malyabwana CRM in his article *Synodality: Expression of the Ecclesiology of Communion* examines spirituality of discernment which is very crucial for the synodal Church. According to the author synodality is at the heart of the ecumenical commitment of Christians and inter-religious dialogue.

In her far-sighted article *Synodal Church: Vocation, Communion, Participation and Mission* Corino Daniel Bartolomeu SDB discusses synodality as fundamental to the Church's mission. He also presents the challenges and forms of implementation of synodality as well as a viable proposal for the fruitful mission of a synodal Church in today's world.

The theological reflection of Otieno Isaiah Mwango SDB in his article *Synodality in the History of the Church* holistically describes synodality in the life and mission of the Church from the time immemorial by tracing it from Old Testament, New Testament, the apostolic age, councils and magisterial teachings with special emphasis on the role of Pope Francis who inaugurated the path towards the synod on synodality.

The article written by Nabaasa Venansio on the *Synodal Contributions to the Church's Mission* underlines the fact that the synods contribute immensely in the promotion of evangelization. The open theological question in this article is whether the synods are pastorally

beneficial to Christ's faithful. The article brings out vividly the contributions of various synods in the history of the Church.

The final article ***Roots, Expressions and Future of Synodality in the Church Today*** by Oballa Solomon K.I. clarifies the models of synodality in the Church today. He explains that it is the dialogue which is essential aspect of Church's life.

Dear esteemed readers, this e-journal is a humble attempt of Don Bosco Utume, Salesian Theological College, at nurturing the writing skills and capacity for deep theological reflection of its students. Therefore, I invite you, dear readers, to applaud and appreciate the efforts made by the authors. It is my wish that we walk together to grow and to glow. Let us walk together on this Synodal path traced out by the Church that Christ invites and calls us to!

**Rev. Dr. Seby Kidangan Ouseph SDB**  
**Editor**

## **Towards a more Decentralized Church: An Ecclesiological Contribution to the Synodal Process**

*Rev. Dr. Vitalis Mshanga AJ*

### **1.0 Introduction**

Synod of Bishops is an indispensable structure within the Roman Catholic Church. I would like to reflect on the theme of Synodality under the title: *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*. This reflection is motivated by the vision of the Holy Father, Pope Francis of building a Synodal Church. As the theme of this study suggests, the Synod makes the local Church universal and vice versa. In this study, we intend to address the question of whether the Church universal and the local Churches have convincingly and sufficiently demonstrated communion, participation in their mission. As our working hypothesis holds that the two Churches have not sufficiently collaborated in some aspects of the Church's life and mission. Therefore, more energy needs to be directed towards some aspects of communion and participation in life and mission.

Before addressing this theme, allow me to clarify the term Synod. The word Synod comes from the Greek word *synodos*, which in turn is an elision of two Greek words *syn* which means 'together' and *hodos*, a 'road' or a 'way'. Hence, the term Synod conveys the idea of moving together on a common journey. This is what the Church does when it convokes a Synod of Bishops.<sup>5</sup> The objective of the synod is to provide an occasion for the bishops to interact with each other and share information and experiences, in the common pursuit of pastoral solutions which can be applied at local, regional, or universal levels. However, the Synod is open to and accepts the contribution of the other members of the Church, both from the clergy and laity.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, a synod is an invitation for the bishops and the faithful under them to move together

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<sup>5</sup> Cecil McGarry, *et al. What Happened at the African Synod?* Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995, 13.

<sup>6</sup> According to LG 12, the lay faithful participates in the threefold functions of Christ, Priest, King, and Prophet (*tria munera Christi*).

on a journey of faith. This is often called when there is or are common problems or challenges to be overcome together.

There are three types of Synods of Bishops:

- i. Ordinary General Assemblies: these are normal convocations of the Bishops from all over the Church. Since the resumption of the Synod structure in the Church, we have had already 14 Ordinary Assemblies.
- ii. Extraordinary Synod: Greater urgency, shorter preparations, and fewer participants. (The participants are often the heads of Eastern Catholic Churches, the presidents (only) of Episcopal Conferences, three members (not ten) of religious institutes, and the cardinals who head dicasteries of the *Roman Curia*). Two extraordinary synods were held in September/October 1969 (On collegiality of bishops) and November/December 1985 (commemorating the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Vatican Council).
- iii. Special Assemblies of Bishops for particular Regions. Customarily, these are limited to a certain geographical area. Its participants, chosen in line with the rules for extraordinary general assemblies, are limited to those directly involved in that area. Special assemblies have been held for the continents of Africa (twice), America, Asia, Europe (twice), Oceania, for the Middle East, for Lebanon, and for the Netherlands.

Returning to the main theme, it is now public that Pope Francis has announced the intention to hold an Ordinary Synod of Bishops. He has chosen the theme for the next Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops that is due to take place in 2023 in Rome. This assembly will be celebrated around the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.”<sup>7</sup> The Synod will be celebrated in three phases 2021 (Diocesan level), 2022 (continental level), and 2023 (at a universal level).

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<sup>7</sup> Nicolas Senèze, Available from: “A Synod on Synodality,” *International La Croix*, March 9, 2020, available from, <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/a-synod-on-synodality/11955>. Accessed on 14 July 2021.

Based on the proposed theme itself, one can argue that the Pope is keen to lead the Church into a dialogue about Synodality. The Holy Father is convinced that the future of the Church consists in being a Synodal Church. This means that the Synodal mode of discernment and decision-making is vital for the ecclesial communion and its evangelizing mission. The forum is now open for the bishops, clergy, theologians, religious as well as the laity to contribute towards the discussion.

The desire of the Holy Father, Pope Francis for a more inclusive Synod was announced on March 25, 2019. In the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christ is Alive: Christus Vivit*, the Holy Father expressed his new vision of Synodality (CV 201). During the Synod on the Youth, quoting a young auditor from the Samoan Islands, he compared “the Church to a canoe, in which the elderly help to keep on course by judging the position of the stars, while the young keep rowing, imagining what waits for their head. Let us steer clear of young people who think that adults represent a meaningless past and those adults who always think they know how young people should act. Instead, let us all climb aboard the same canoe and together seek a better world, with the constantly renewed momentum of the Holy Spirit” (CV 201). This is what the Synodal Church should be striving towards.

In this study, I intend to reflect on the theme of the Synod and thereby give my contribution regarding what should be a priority during the Synod deliberations.

## **2.0 Presentation and Contribution to the Agenda**

Pope Francis intends that the forthcoming Synod be celebrated in a three-year synodal journey with three phases as follows: (Diocesan, Continental, and Universal) of consultations and discernment, culminating in the General Assembly in October 2023 in Rome. There is no doubt that the hermeneutical methodology that Pope Francis is employing in articulating his vision of a Synodal Church is inductive. This hermeneutical methodology is informed by the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council that conceives the Church as communion (LG 14).

In what follows now, I wish to stress the three aspects that form the theme of the 2023 Synod, namely, communion, participation, and mission.

## 2.1 Synod as a Privileged Moment of Expressing Communion

I would like to begin the discussion on communion by reiterating the teaching of the Second Vatican Council Art. 23 to the effect that the universal Church is born in and out of the local Church and the local Church is born in and out of the Universal Church. This means that the particular churches under their bishops are fashioned after the model of the universal Church. For this reason, “the individual bishops represent each his church, but all of them together and with the Pope represent the entire Church in the bond of peace, love, and unity.”<sup>8</sup> The leaders of the local Church ought to listen to both to the local Church as they do to the universal Church, symbolized by the Bishop of Rome. Therefore, the Church is a communion of faith, hope, and love.

The recent pronouncements from the Magisterium have made an effort to embrace and prioritize the hermeneutical key called *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful) also called *sensus fidei* (sense of the faith). *Sensus Fidelium* was first used by Henry Cardinal Newman and it means that the People of God, both as individuals and as a communion, have a sense (almost an instinct) of the faith. The laity are able, thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit, to discern what is genuine, authentic, and in keeping with the true faith. More precisely, *sensus fidei* is “the supernatural appreciation of faith on the part of the whole people, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals.”<sup>9</sup>

The Second Vatican Council recognized the place of the laity in the communion of the Church when it teaches that: “[...] the appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority... receives... the faith,

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<sup>8</sup> Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* in Giuseppe Alberigo and Others, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press), 1990, no. 23. Hereafter: *LG*.

<sup>9</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 2019. Paragraph 92. Hereafter: *CCC*.

once for all delivered to the saints. ... The People unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.”<sup>10</sup> This implies that the People of God have not been denied the gift of revelation. Enlightened by this wisdom, the Holy Father has done well to recognize that the Church is not simply an institution but also, and most especially a communion of the faithful.

Concerning communion, there are two formidable challenges. The first challenge is that the local Church, under and with its bishop has not been given sufficient space to exercise their jurisdiction. Even if Canon Law has granted the local Church some executive powers in the person of the Bishop, they are still by far and large too dependent on Rome in matters that pertain to the local Church. Still, some significant decisions cannot be made at the level of the local Church.

For example, while we understand the demands of the Code of Canon Law Can. 1078 gives authority to the local ordinary to dispense or prohibit a particular impediment to marriage in case there are valid reasons to do so. However, one would have thought that the local Bishop could be granted a similar privilege to declare null and void a marriage that was contracted irregularly. The Code of Canon Law grants this power or privilege to the universal Church in Rome alone.<sup>11</sup> In such matters as these, one would suggest that the chair of the Bishops conference or at least, the metropolitan Bishop could deal with the nullification of marriage and this would do away with a backlog of marital cases that are brought before local tribunals. It is in such matters, and spirit of trust that the communion of the Church is truly manifested.

This practice constrains the legitimate freedom of the local Church. In this way, how can we foster communion in a more profound way when most decisions are made in Rome and not at the level of the Episcopal Conference? Therefore, it will help to revisit the question of the

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<sup>10</sup> *LG* 12.

<sup>11</sup> The Code of Canon Law (*Codex Iurici Canonici*), (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana), Can. 1075.



relationship between the universal Church and the local churches during the forthcoming Synod.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, in keeping with the theme, the Synod might need to undertake a deeper discussion on the role of Bishop's Conferences in responding to the daily challenges experienced by their distinctive regions. Besides, the Ordinary Assembly of bishops might need to discern how to improve the reception of the notion of the sense of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*) in synodal processes at every level, their deliberation could help the Church respond to Pope Francis' call to missionary conversion?

The second daunting challenge is that the lay faithful are not fully aware of the concept of *communion*. In article 6, the Theological Commission on Synod of Bishops, argues that the "ecclesiology of the People of God stresses the common dignity and mission of all the baptized, in exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations, and their ministries." In our estimation, even if the *International Theological Commission on the Synod of Bishops* has succinctly expressed the ideal of *communion*, this is far from being fully achieved. The lay faithful are not yet fully *conscioutized* and practically initiated fully into this concept. It is, therefore, imperative that rather than relegating this concept to bishops and scholars alone; we will do well to reintroduce the laity into this concept through seminars, workshops, and study days. In this regard, scholars will give a commendable contribution in fulfilling this task.

### **2.3 Participation as an Essential Part of the Celebrating a Synod**

Following *Dei Verbum* no. 8, and paragraph 77 of the *International Theological Commission on the Synod of Bishops* which informed the proposed *modus operandi* of the forthcoming Synod states that the local Church is:

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<sup>12</sup> In the recent past, there has emerged a heated debate regarding the problem of the relationship between the local Church and the Universal Church. We would like to take up this debate in the context of the main theme of the 2023 proposed Synod of Bishops, namely, communion, participation, and mission.

[t]he first level on which synodality is exercised is the local Church. Here ‘the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation of all God’s holy People in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which the Bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers.’<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, we hope that participants will not be limited to liturgical celebrations (dancing and clapping), but that it will mean that the lay faithful will in a visible, active and immediate manner contribute to answering the questionnaire and interview (*participatio actuosa*).<sup>14</sup> As the Commission rightly notes, the “historical, linguistic and cultural links that mold interpersonal communication in the local Church and describe its particular features” can, and in our opinion, must facilitate the adoption of a synodal style in its daily life and become the basis for effective missionary conversion.<sup>15</sup> As an instance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Synod can be and must be a celebration that stimulates the sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) to discern in the light of the signs of our times what the Spirit is saying to the (*local*) Churches (Rev 2:29).

Furthermore, the need for a participatory process of the Synod of Bishops is also sounded in the document of the *International Theological Commission*, particularly in numbers 7, 10, 35, 38, 43, 46, and 66. It is noted that the Tridentine understanding of the Church as hierarchy necessarily led to the centralization of the Church processes of decision-making. This hampered the ecclesial participation, and at the same time, led to the disappearance of the Synod of Bishops. At a critical point, in article 35, the Commission states that:

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<sup>13</sup> The International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* available from: [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html#\\_ednref79](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html#_ednref79), par. 77, accessed on July 21, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> International Commission, *Synodality*, no. 83. See also *Sactosantum Concilium* no. 10.

<sup>15</sup> International Commission, *Synodality*, no. 77.

In keeping with the culture of the time, the diocesan and provincial Synods celebrated following the Council of Trent were not meant to involve the active participation of the whole People of God - the *congregatio fidelium* - but to pass on and enact the Council's norms and dispositions. The apologetic reaction to the Protestant Reformation's criticism of ecclesiastical authority and similar responses in several modern schools of thought has accentuated the hierarchical vision of the Church as *societas perfecta et inaequalium*, to the point of seeing Bishops, and above them the Pope, as the *Ecclesia docens*, with the rest of the People of God as the *Ecclesia discens*.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, the general call of the *International Theological Commission* is "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."<sup>17</sup> This proposed participation can take various forms but must include: praying, listening, analyzing, dialoguing, discerning, and offering advice on taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will.

More concretely stated, at a Diocesan level, "it is necessary to distinguish between the process of *decision-making* through a joint exercise of discernment, consultation and co-operation, and *decision-making*, which is within the competence of the Bishop, the guarantor of apostolicity and Catholicity."<sup>18</sup> This means that the laity and the clergy can participate in all the discernment, consultation, and co-operation and live the final decision to the local ordinary.<sup>19</sup> The proposed participation is already anticipated in paragraph 25 of the document of the

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<sup>16</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, 35. See also article 66, which states that "n the Catholic and apostolic vision of synodality there is a reciprocal relationship between the *communio fidelium*, the *communio episcoporum*, and the *communio ecclesiarum*. The concept of synodality is broader than that of collegiality because it includes the participation of all in the Church and that of all the Churches. Collegiality in the strict sense denotes the assertion and expression of the communion of the People of God in the ranks of Bishops, in other words in the college of Bishops *cum Petro et sub-Petro*, and - through that - communion between all Churches."

<sup>17</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, 67.

<sup>18</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, 69.

<sup>19</sup> The International Theological Commission observes that "In this perspective, the participation of the lay faithful becomes essential. They are the immense majority of the People of God and there is much to be learned from their participation in the various forms of the life and mission of ecclesial communities, from popular piety and generic pastoral care, as well as their specific competency in various sectors of cultural and social life." International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, 73.

*International Theological Commission.* The members of the *Theological Commission* emphatically state that:

while nothing should be done in the local Church without the Bishop - *nihil sine episcopo* - it is equally true that nothing should be done without your council (the Presbyters & Deacons) - *nihil sine consilio vestro* - or without the consensus of the people - *et sine consensu plebis* - always holding firm to the rule according to which *episcopatus unus est cuius a singulis in solidum pars tenetur* (the episcopate is one, of which each member has an undivided share in it).<sup>20</sup>

This tripartite nature of the participation, Bishop – Presbyters – and the laity, has as its focal point the Local Bishop. Steps are already taken within the Church towards participation processes. However, more effort needs to be put in place to ensure broader participation. For example, when the Synod of Bishops is convoked, the questionnaire and other related communications end up on the desks of Bishops, experts, and scholars. In our opinion, this time in point, it is necessary to broaden, streamline and simplify the consultation process to the level of Small/Basic Christian Communities. Therefore, the preparations of the 2023 Synod of Bishops present an opportune time, indeed, a *kairos* for involving more and more the lay faithful. They need to receive every bit of such communications and be encouraged to positively contribute to the Synodal process. Only then can a Synod become a Synod.

More importantly, the mode of life and activity (*modus vivendi et operandi*) of the Synodal participation ought to take place through the People of God listening to the Word of God and partaking in the Eucharist, the brotherhood of communion, and the co-responsibility in the mission at all levels according to various ministries and role given them.

Participation includes also listening to the word of God and “understanding faith in sapiential, scientific and prophetic ways, discerning the signs of the times in the light of the

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<sup>20</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, 25.

Gospel and being in dialogue with society and cultures.” In my opinion, there is a **need to redefine** the term participation. Participation should not only consist in listening, reading (the Word of God) and discerning, but needs to involve all in the decision-making process as well. The current tendency “we discern” and other organs “make the decisions” does not go far enough. While we are conscious that the Church is not a democracy, she needs to bring everyone closer to the decision-making table. In this manner, her life will be enriched and her mission bears more abundant fruit.

The dialogue between Christ and his close associates during the miracle of the breaking of the bread cannot elaborate this participation better. Christ tells his apostles to “give them something to eat” (Mk 6:37; Mt 14:13-21). By this statement, Christ wants to bring his Apostles closer to the decision-making process. He was capable of acting without their help; however, he challenges the Apostles to act by making a decision.

This participation is and must be structured participation at the local, regional and universal levels. The local Bishops in collegial communion with the Bishop of Rome are called upon to discern together with the clergy and the lay faithful the way forward and directions regarding particular questions aiming at fulfilling its evangelizing mission.

Finally, the forthcoming Synod of Bishops will do well to involve more than ever before lay, both experts and non-experts. This will demonstrate that the Church is a communion. A true spirit of communion must open up to a deeper and broader consultation and participation in the synodal process of discernment and deliberation.

## **2.4 Mission and Missionary Conversion as the Goal of any Synod**

The success of a well-celebrated Synod of Bishops is measured, not by the soundness and logic of its argumentations and deliberations, but rather it is gauged by the extent to which it addresses the thorny issues and challenges that affect the mission of the Church at one point in time. In other words, the success of a synod is its focus on the mission of the Church. The goal or

*terminus ad quo* of any Synod is mission. A successful Synod must lead to what the International Commission has termed as an “effective missionary conversion.”<sup>21</sup>

Synodality is established to energize the life and evangelizing mission of the Church. The revitalization of the mission of the Church is always initiated and directed by our Lord Jesus Christ who promised: “where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them” (*Matthew* 18, 20); “look I am with you always; yes, to the end of the world” (*Matthew* 28, 20).<sup>22</sup> In carrying out her mission, the Church is called to constant conversion, which is a “pastoral and missionary conversion,” too; this involves renewing mentalities, attitudes, practices, and structures, to be ever more faithful to her vocation. The Synodal process ought to lead the Church to “joyfully welcomes and promotes the grace in virtue of which all the baptized are qualified and called to be missionary disciples.”<sup>23</sup>

Given the “pastoral missionary conversion,” some paradigms/models of carrying out the mission that has become dysfunctional have to be renewed or even replaced. For example, the concentration of responsibility for mission in the ministry of the clergy; insufficient appreciation of the consecrated life and charismatic gifts; poor involvement of the qualified lay faithful, including women, in their areas of expertise.

Basically, at the core of the Synodal process, there should be provision for more participation and co-responsibility of laypeople. There is also a need for inculturation whereby elements proper to each culture could be harnessed and be used as an expression of communion between local Churches themselves and, at a broader level with the universal Church.

Moreover, as we approach the XVI Ordinary Assembly of Bishops there is also a need to harness the import of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium* 14 and 23. In our estimation, the aforementioned paragraphs represent an effort to balance between the

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<sup>21</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, 103.

<sup>22</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, 103.

<sup>23</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, 104.

authority of the local Bishop(s) and those of the Holy Father. This means that “the exercise of the Petrine ministry of unity and leadership of the universal Church by the Bishop of Rome,” must be harness the wisdom of the local bishops.<sup>24</sup> The Synodal participation of the laity and the collegial contribution of the Bishops ought to constitute a dialogue that will eventually enrich the wisdom of the Holy Father.

Another area that must undergo “pastoral missionary conversion” is the irreversible commitment to ecumenism. The difficult journey of the Roman Catholic Church and other churches and ecclesial communities in building “unity diversity” must be emphasized. Although the journey has already begun here in Africa, there is little to show. The forthcoming Synod will do well to take stock of the ecumenical effort in Africa.

Insufficient attention to the preferential option for the poor is an aspect that must undergo “pastoral conversion.” Whereas the universal Church has done a commendable apostolate towards alleviating the pain of the poor, more needs to be done. The Synod must go beyond addressing the symptoms of the illness (poverty) and tackle the main cause of poverty. A more aggressive approach needs to be taken at the level of each Episcopal Conference to address the root cause of poverty, especially in Africa. Lack of sufficient attention to poverty wounds communion within the Church and renders her missionary mandate sterile and irrelevant.

Climate change ought to be further addressed and evaluation be done to see how the universal Church, and in particular the local Church has made an effort to reverse the phenomenon of climate change. A question must be asked, what are we supposed to be doing and what we are not doing in Africa that contributes to global warming? What must be the contribution of the Church in Africa towards efforts at reversing climate change?

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<sup>24</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 14 and 23. See also International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, 106.

### **3. Conclusion**

The Synod of Bishops is an essential constitutive element of being a Church. Synods express the true nature of the Church as the People of God journeying together and summoned and gathered by God the father himself through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. The choice of the theme by Holy Father Pope Francis I, namely, communion, participation, and mission could not be timelier than it is now.

The Church is called upon to be a communion, a sign, and an instrument of unity between God and humanity and of closely knew the bond of unity among human beings. Communion is further reinforced by well-structured participation that goes beyond the process of listening, reading, and discerning. Participation becomes complete when decisions are made in a consensual manner and brother/sisterly spirit.

In turn, a deeply "fostered communion" and a well-structured "participation" will necessarily open up to a "missionary conversion." This means that the notions of communion, participation, and mission are inseparably linked together. They are indeed intertwined and that there is mutual interiority between them. They all open up to the glorification of God and sanctification of souls. These three notions, namely, communion, participation, and mission that make up the theme of the forthcoming Fifteenth Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops must however be further be reflected upon, scrutinized, critiqued for a fruitful celebration of the Synod.

Let the theological reflections serve as a catalyst that will motivate and generate further insights towards a better celebration of the Synodality: Communion, Participation, and Mission.



# Synodality: A New Way of Walking Together

*Nkandu Paul SDB*

## Introduction

Synodality is a new concept in the Church and in her mission. The Synod on synodality is a new way of being a Church. The synod is founded on the concept of collegiality. This involves the exercise of the office of the Bishops in communion with the Pope. In this forthcoming synod, the entire Church is involved, from the local churches to the universal Church. It has been called to discuss about the future of the entire Church. The notion of synodality originates in the Second Vatican Council. It is important to understand the history and the terms in this synod of bishops. Scripture and Church history will help us understand the place of synodality in God's plan of salvation.

## 1. Synod and Synodality

### 1.1 'Synod' and 'Council'

From the early centuries, the word synod has referred to ecclesial assemblies in which the Church has undertaken discernment. Latin '*synodus*' or '*concilium*' as translated from Greek word *συνδος*, "refers to an assembly convoked by some legitimate authority."<sup>25</sup> The Commission on Synodality explained the roots of *συνδος* (Latin; 'synod' /or 'council'). Its Hebrew reference (*קהל* - *qahal*) denotes the assembly the Lord summons, and Greek *ἐκκλησία*, refers to "the eschatological convocation of the people of God in Christ Jesus."<sup>26</sup> Keeping in mind the teachings of Vatican II, canon law defines various councils and synods.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," (2018): 4, accessed December 15, 2021, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html), (sited as ITC from hereafter).

<sup>26</sup> ITC, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *The Code of Canon Law: New Revised English Translation* (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 2015), c. 1983, c. 439, c. 440, c. 337, c. 342, c. 460.

## 1.2 The Idea of Synodality and Collegiality

From the word “synod” are derived the words “synodality” and “synodal”. According to the International Theological Commission, there is a need for careful theological clarification. This concept has been maturing “in the ecclesial consciousness starting from the magisterium of Vatican II and from the lived experience of the local churches and the universal Church since the last Council until today.”<sup>28</sup>

The idea of synodality refers to the collaboration and participation of the entire community of the faithful in the life and undertakings in the Church. The idea of collegiality describes the exercise of the office of the bishops within local Churches entrusted to their care. Another form is the communion among these different Churches as part of the universal Church of Christ. Collegiality is the way wherein ecclesial synodality is manifested and made actual via the pastoral care of Bishops of the local Churches in a region and to the extent of the unity of all the Churches within the universal Church.<sup>29</sup>

## 2. Biblical Foundation of Synodality

### 2.1 Hints of Synodality in the Old Testament

Men and women are created in the likeness and image of God (*Imago Dei*). The communion of human beings is visible in their call to take care of other creatures (Cf. Gen 1, 26 – 28). Human beings are called to live in union with each other and with all creation. The creation story clearly shows what being human means. Men and women are composed of body, soul, and spirit. Human beings are meant to live in a delightful environment. They are called to work and to follow the commandments and live peacefully together. Men and women have dominion over other beings. Their dominion should lead them to be caretakers of other created things (Cf. Gen 2).

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<sup>28</sup> ITC, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. ITC, 7.

In the Old Testament, we find the first assemblies of the chosen People of God. In these assemblies, each person has a role to play (Cf. Josh 8, 35; Neh 8, 1-18). Various figures have specific ministries, for example, Moses himself, the Judges, the Elders, the Levites, and the assembly of the people (Cf. Ex 18, 25–26; Num 1, 50–51; 11, 16–17, 24–30; Josh 8, 33–35)<sup>30</sup>

## **2.2 Synodality in the New Testament**

Synod comes from the Greek word *σύνδοτος*. The word is composed of two words, a preposition *σύν*, and a noun *ὁδός*. *Σύν*, is translated as ‘with’ and a noun *ὁδός* translated as ‘path’. So the word synod “indicates the path along which the people of God walk together.”<sup>31</sup> Synod finds its meaning in the early understanding of the followers of Christ. Christians were called the people who “belonged to the way” (Acts 9, 2). This is based on the teaching of Christ, who described himself as “the way” (Jn 14, 6). The early Christians gathered together to pray and for the breaking of the bread and to discuss matters of faith (Cf. Acts 15; Gal 2).

In the New Testament, Christ whom himself is one with God (the Father) and the Holy Spirit brought all people together in unity in his work of salvation. In the end of his ministry on earth, Christ prayed for unity among his disciples, “that they may be one” (Jn 17, 21). The Gospel of John clearly shows Jesus as the way (Cf. Jn 14, 6) that leads to the Father in the Spirit. Since all the baptized belong to one body, in which Christ is the head (Cf. Col 1, 18), every person has a special role to play. Every baptized has special individual gifts by which he or she is to contribute to the life and mission of the pilgrim Church. The key figure in the journey together as Christians is the Holy Spirit. Listening to the Holy Spirit makes it possible to move in the right direction.

A New Testament example of an event that had a synodal dimension was the ‘Council of Jerusalem’ (Cf. Acts 15; Gal 2, 1–10). In this council, we note a structure which includes discernment and decision making. During this gathering, the participation of different individuals

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. ITC, 12 -14.

<sup>31</sup> ITC, 3.

according to their ministry is obvious. We are told that the council made decisions and then the Christian community adopted them.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. Synodal Structure in History of the Church

#### 3.1 Patristic Period

##### 3.1.1 First two Century

Ignatius of Antioch understood the local Churches in their togetherness as a Church. The letter to the Christian community Ephesus reveals Ignatius' synodal understanding of the Church. The people of Ephesus' friendly relationship with Christ and between themselves and their bishop is an example of the Church on a journey. Each person who belongs to the Church has the faculty within varied roles. The bishop and the people play their roles according to their particular ministry. The community of believers is formed in the Eucharistic assembly which the bishop presides over as the successor of the Apostles. In his letter written to the Ephesians, Ignatius expresses his happiness in the way the Christians show their unity through their bishop.<sup>33</sup>

Like Ignatius of Antioch, Cyprian of Carthage formulated principles for both the local church and the universal Church concerning their life and mission. These principles helped create unity in the Church. According to Cyprian, "while nothing should be done in the local Church without the Bishop - *nihil sine episcopo* - it is equally true that nothing should be done without your council (the Presbyters & Deacons) - *nihil sine consilio vestro* - or without the consensus of the people - *et sine consensu plebis*."<sup>34</sup>

##### 3.1.2 Ecumenical Councils

During the Council of Nicaea, around 325 AD, the synodal structure of the Church became more visible. Already the various churches from the East and the West were in

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. ITC, 20-22.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 41.

<sup>34</sup> ITC, 25.

communion with each other through the bishops who headed them. The early Councils exercised synodality by moving together as a Church in doctrinal matters and governance. Different synods and assemblies were held in different dioceses and provinces led by the local ordinary and their collaborators. The decisions taken by these synods and assemblies without any doubt “were an expression of communion with all the churches.”<sup>35</sup>

### 3.2 Middle Ages

The maturing of synodal procedures in the Church occurred gradually. According to the International Theological Commission, in the Eastern Churches, the synodal approach persisted as they continued to observe the tradition of the Church Fathers, through their participation in patriarchal and metropolitan Synods. In Constantinople, the everlasting Synod (Σύνοδος ἐνδημούσα) had become strongly established. In Alexandria and Antioch by the fourth century, ordinary assemblies to study liturgical, canonical and related questions had been established with a distinctiveness that continued during the Ottoman period of power. Synods remain a feature of the Orthodox Churches.<sup>36</sup>

The Latin Church (Catholic Church) experienced certain periods of reform, such as the Gregorian reform when the primacy of the Pope’s authority was affirmed (*Libertas Ecclesiae*).<sup>37</sup> Various councils were held to promote the unification of the Church and her mission. Sometimes synodal procedures were followed, and in other instances they were not. In most synods, both ecclesial the Church authorities and the civil authorities were involved. One important way through which the synodal procedures in the Church were rejuvenated was the adoption of the synodal procedures found among the religious communities of monks. However, the application of the principles of Conciliarism was judged not to be according to Tradition of the Church.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> ITC, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. ITC, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Council of Trent, *Doctrine and Canons on the Sacrament of Orders* (July 15, 1563) §1764 - 1778 In *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals* ed. Peter Hunermann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 422 – 424.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. ITC, 34.

### 3.3 Council of Trent and its Doctrine

After the Reformation, the Protestants adopted a different approach to the role of synods to that established in Catholic Tradition.<sup>39</sup> The main reformers who adopted a synodal approach to ecclesiological and sacramental matters were Martin Luther and John Calvin in their doctrine concerning the ministries of pastors, teachers, presbyters, and deacons. The Anglicans held synods at “local, national and international levels”<sup>40</sup>. In his *Confessions*, Luther encouraged the involvement of every Christian in choosing their ministers. For him, the power to exercise any ministerial office is drawn from the community. Everyone is to be involved in the matters and decisions of the church.<sup>41</sup> For John Calvin, there is no distinction among the baptized. By his baptism, every Christian has the right to preach and preside over the sacraments. There were no distinctions in the Christian community apart from the office and functions which had to do with responsibilities over the community and the procedures for the assemblies involving teachers and those with other ministries.<sup>42</sup>

The Council of Trent (1545–1563) brought together bishops, religious superiors from different religious orders, and congregations of monastic life. The Council “established the norm that diocesan synods should take place annually, provincial synods every three years.”<sup>43</sup> What the Council did not agree to was the participation of all the Christian faithful in these synods. The Council of Trent reaffirmed that the hierarchical ecclesial structure is important in Church governance (Cf. c. 7).<sup>44</sup> No civil authority or the people have the power to install the ministerial office (Cf. c. 8)<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Steinmetz, David Bagchi and David C., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 128.

<sup>40</sup> ITC, 36.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Roberts, Brandford LittleJohn and Jonathan, ed. *Reformation Theology: A Reader of Primary Sources with Introduction* (The Davenant Institute, 2017), 144 – 48.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Steinmetz, David Bagchi and David C., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, 128.

<sup>43</sup> ITC, 35.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Denzinger, *Council of Trent*, 1768 –1769.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Denzinger, 1769.

### 3.4 The First Vatican Council and Reforms of Vatican II

Vatican Council I (1869 – 1870) is known for its dogmatic decisions. The primacy of the seat of St. Peter the Apostle was one of the key issues the Council addressed. This was to ensure the unity among the Bishops as successors of the Apostles and that of the whole Christian faithful (Cf. c. 8)<sup>46</sup> It recognized that the Pope has a responsibility to unite the Church of God as the shepherd of the flock. The Council recognized the infallibility of the *ex cathedra* statements of the Roman Pontiff.<sup>47</sup>

By the nineteenth century, the *sensui fidei* (the instinctive sensitivity and discrimination which the members of the Church possess in matters of faith) was getting stronger and helping to foster closer relationships among the churches and other ecclesial communities. Mostly, this was lined to the ministerial priesthood of the Bishops and the Pope. According to the International Theological Commission, the existence and work of the various episcopal conferences after the mid-nineteenth century even without any canonical representation “were a sign of a rediscovery of a collegial interpretation of the exercise of the episcopal ministry in a specific territory and in view of changing geographical circumstances.”<sup>48</sup>

The ecclesiology of Vatican II stressed the common human dignity of every person and the mission of every Christian. In the Church’s mission, communion is a fundamental concept. This concept involves communion founded in the Trinity. The Eucharist remains the “source and summit of the Christian life”<sup>49</sup> and the Church’s mission. The Eucharist remains the source because of the redemptive nature in Christ’s sacrifice starting from the passion.<sup>50</sup>

Vatican II, developing the vision of Vatican Council I, worked to strengthen communion in the Church through its emphasis on the involvement of the local churches. The local churches

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Denzinger, 3051.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Denzinger, 3071.

<sup>48</sup> ITC, 39.

<sup>49</sup> CCC, 1324.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. CCC, 1362 –1368; 1341.

have responsibilities together with the Holy See with regard to the Church's mission and vision.<sup>51</sup> When the bishops gathered together for the Council, they were strengthening the “communion with God and unity among men.”<sup>52</sup> This was a sharing in the salvific Will of God, a participation in the universal plan of salvation. The participation is carried out through the Son's salvific mission. It is a journey to the Father guided by the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work and His gifts.<sup>53</sup>

There has to be a link among the people of God (bishop and the whole people of God) through their faith and love. They are all sharers in the prophetic office of Christ. They express unity in their faith.<sup>54</sup> The bishops as individuals are a symbol of unity in their local churches that are “moulded to the likeness of the universal Church; in them and of them, consists the one, sole Catholic Church. For this reason, individual bishops represent their own church; all, together with the Pope, represent the whole Church linked by peace, love and unity.”<sup>55</sup>

According to the fathers of Vatican II participation of the faithful is fundamental. Pope Paul VI strengthened the Church's synodal practice by instituting the Synod of Bishops. This is a council at the level of the universal Church involving Bishops subject to the Pope, offering their advice and information for the good of God's people. The sense of communion has continued to develop in view of Vatican II as synodality has grown at various levels in the life and mission of the Church.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Ecumenical Collaboration of the Regional, National and Local Levels, representatives of Ecumenical Commissions meeting in Rome, February 22, 1975, In Vatican II: More Post Conciliar Documents. Edited by A. Flannery (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2014) 176–181.

<sup>52</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, In Vatican II: More Post Conciliar Documents. Edited by A. Flannery (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2014), 320. (sited as LG from hereafter)

<sup>53</sup> Cf. LG, 1-3:

<sup>54</sup> Cf. LG, 12.

<sup>55</sup> LG, 23.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. ITC, 41.



## **4. Basis and Theological Content of Synodality**

### **4.1 Theological Foundation of Synodality**

The theology of synodality is rooted in the Trinity. The entire Church participates in the life and work of the Trinity. The Trinity is the source of communion, the foundation and example of unity. The visibility of communion is the oneness of God's people. Synods in the Church are a symbol of that communion with the Trinity and the unity with God chosen people. The Church is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. This unity is a gift from Christ who sent the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles when they gathered together at Pentecost(Cf. Acts 2, 11). It is through the gift of the Holy Spirit that the mission and communion of the infant Church were created and were shaped (Cf. Jn 2, 21; 1 Cor 2, 1–11).

The Church's holiness is drawn from its participation in the work of the Trinity. Her Catholicity ensures the preservation of the "integrity and totality of faith."<sup>57</sup> The International Theological Commission identifies three points in which communion is rooted in the apostolic tradition. First, the Church is apostolic and it is founded on the Apostles. Second, this is done with the assistance of the Holy Spirit who ensures the integrity of the faith and that it is handed on faithfully. Finally, the faith which is based on the teaching by the Apostles is handed on through the college of bishops in fellowship with the Pope as pastors in the Church.<sup>58</sup> The Church that walks together finds her nourishment in the Eucharist. The Eucharistic celebration is the centre of the Christian life. Source and summit of synodality is found in the liturgical celebration, "in a unique way – in our full, conscious and active participation in the Eucharistic synaxis."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> ITC, 45.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. ITC, 62.

<sup>59</sup> ITC, 47.

## 4.2 Missionary Journey of God's People

Synodality makes evident that the Church is on the move. From the time of the early Christians, people of all nations have gathered together to receive the Holy Spirit (Cf. Acts 2, 1 – 9). It is through Christ who is the Way that the Church moves together towards the Father. This is the movement of the pilgrim People of God towards the kingdom and its ultimate goal (*telos*). In this way the Church recognizes the eschatological aspect in the journey together of the People of God.

Synodality is a living communion and unity manifested in working and walking together for the kingdom of God. All the Christian faithful are agents of evangelization. Hence, all baptized are agents of the mission of God according to one's gifts and responsibilities.

## 4.3 Ecclesiology of Communion

### 4.3.1 Community of the baptized

To understand Synodality correctly, one must study the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. In its first three chapters it shows that the Church is here to serve. All her hierarchical structure is meant to reflect the mission rooted in the plan of salvation. The spirit of synodality means that the entire Church and all her members accompany each other on their pilgrim journey. By baptism, all the Christian faithful have to be witnesses of the word of God.<sup>60</sup> Pope Francis has stressed that the Church as a whole is poor and at the service of the poor. In herself she is merciful and missionary in nature.<sup>61</sup>

### 4.3.2 Synodal Church: An inverted Pyramid

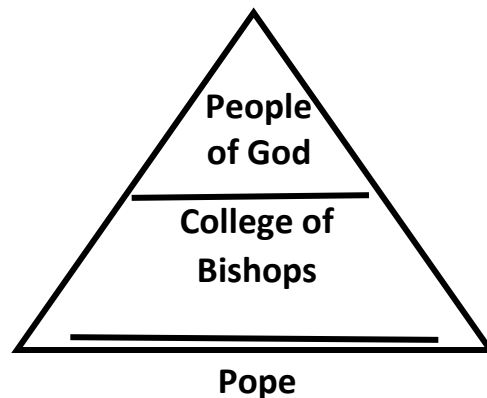
Pope Francis, mindful of the Second Vatican Council has sketched the image of a Synodal Church as 'an inverted pyramid' which comprises the People of God and the College of Bishops, one of whose members, the Successor of Peter, has a specific ministry of unity. Here

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. ITC, 54.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Ormond Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid: The Sensus Fidelium in a Synodal Church." Theological Studies (Australian Catholic University) 78(2) (2017): 303.

the summit is below the base.”<sup>62</sup> In this pyramid, “the top is located beneath the base.”<sup>63</sup> The bishops and all those entrusted with the care of the faithful are called to be servants. All the bishops are at the service of the People of God. In this way synodality shows the importance of everyone in the Church of God.



**Fig. 1. "Inverted Pyramid"**

#### **4.4 Synodality in Catholic communion**

Ecclesial communion is well expressed in the concept of synodality. The particular Churches and the universal Church are in communion with each other. This Church communion is drawn from the Trinitarian communion. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that the Church is always in communion with Jesus Christ, the head. The Church “lives from him, in him and for him; he lives with her and in her.”<sup>64</sup> According to its teaching, unity in the Church, that has been bestowed by Christ will continue increasing. To foster unity, the following are important: transformation of the heart of every Christian, praying together, fraternal care, the formation of the Catholic faithful, and talks amongst theologians, and conferences amongst Christians belonging to different churches and communities. Working together as Christians in

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<sup>62</sup> ITC, 57.

<sup>63</sup> Ormond Rush, 302.

<sup>64</sup> CCC, 807.

diverse regions at the service of mankind is an essential part of Christian communion.<sup>65</sup> A journey towards unity and communion is a concern of the universal Church and all the faithful<sup>66</sup> at both the local and universal levels must take part.

## 5. Synodality in the Entire Church

### 5.1 Ecclesial Life of Synodality

Both the universal Church and the local Churches contribute to the work of salvation. These Churches (universal and local) are both part of the Church of Christ. They bond together in mutual relationship and reliance. When the Churches are in communion with each other, they create what is called “the collegial ‘we’ of the episcopate gathered in unity, “*cum Petro et sub Petro*.”<sup>67</sup> Their existence and their contribution in the various contexts of every culture strengthen the bond in unity. The concept of synodality helps the Church to discern the path it must take as both local Churches and as a universal Church. The ministry of the Pope stands at the centre of unity. The whole synodal experience of the Church is to be understood in the office of the Bishops in collegiality with each other and communion with the Pope.<sup>68</sup>

The Commission on Synodality has stated that the vision of synodality requests us to express synodal communion in the phrases of ‘all’, ‘some’ and ‘one’. Synodality entails the exercising of the *sensus fidei* of ‘all’ the faithful; the ministry of the college of Bishops, the ‘some’, and the ministry of uniting the faithful by the Roman Pontiff, the ‘one’. For this reason the dynamic of synodality unites the communitarian factor which incorporates the complete People of God, the collegial dimension which entails the exercising of episcopal ministry, and the petrine dimension, that of the Pope.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. CCC, 821.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, November 21, 1964, In Vatican II: More Post Conciliar Documents. Edited by A. Flannery (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2014), 5 (sited as UR from hereafter).

<sup>67</sup> ITC, 60

<sup>68</sup> Cf. 62.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. ITC, 64.

## 5.2 New Way of Journeying Together

Synodal processes and events should conform with the “*depositum fidei*”. They should also involve openness to the Holy Spirit, and listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying. All this make the involvement of the laity essential.<sup>70</sup> Each member of the Church has a vocation that is synodal. Each has something to contribute to the life and mission of the Church . In the Church, we learn from each other. To express synodality there should be a structure and a process to lead through different stages.

Pope Francis has identified three levels in the synodal exercise. Synodality starts at the local level. The local church first exercises synodality. It is the work of the bishops to take care of the pastoral needs of the faithful. The bishops are entrusted with the responsibility to take care of the flock. They pay attention to the necessities of the faithful in their dioceses. The people of God show their unit with the bishop as they actively participate in the Eucharist. Listening to the cries of the people is the first step to a synodal Church. The local churches have their structures of communion. The diocese has various organs for the administration of the local church which is synodal in nature.<sup>71</sup> These assemblies can be synods or assemblies for the pastoral ministry in the diocese. This level includes the structures and organizations in the parishes.<sup>72</sup>

From the local churches, the next level is done at a provincial or regional level. The college of bishops meet to listen to what the local churches need. The regional level involves the particular councils,<sup>73</sup> the various conference of bishops,<sup>74</sup> and patriarchates for the Eastern Churches. The last level of synodality is the universal level. Here the bishops meet in collegiality for the mission and life of the whole Church. The universal level involves the ecumenical councils, bishops synods, and other structures of service of the people of God.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. ITC, 72-73.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Ormond Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium* in a Synodal Church.", 323.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. ITC, 80

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *CIC* 1983, c. 439-446.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *CIC* 1983, c. 447-459.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Ormond Rush, 323.

## **Conclusion**

All in all, the Synod on Synodality is taking the Church in a different direction. The whole process stresses life in communion. It is a journey of the people of God as a community. For the Church to move together is possible only through the Holy Spirit. This requires the whole people of God to open their hearts and listen to the Spirit. In order to involve everyone, it is necessary that the People of God know their role in the life and mission of the Church. The Church has been on a journey from the beginning. The hierarchy in the Church is meant to serve in humility. Humility is an essential attitude in synodal dialogue.

The ecclesial understanding of synodality can either be positive or negative. For this reason, as the Commission in its first draft on synodality stressed the importance of understanding synodality in an ecclesial context not a political one. Understanding synodality as centralization rather than decentralization will help the entire Church on the journey that has begun. Synodality should not be understood in the line of democracy but as a journey together as a Church.

# **Towards a Synodal Church through Collaborative Ministry among the Agents of Evangelization: A Pastoral Perspective**

*Rev. Sr. Mary Wambua Nzilani SMMG*

## **Introduction**

We live in a world of *merger, collaborative partnership and collaborative ministry*, where cooperation at all levels have become very vital to make institutions, business people and nations unite together to solve problems and challenges in common. The Church is established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth; and also used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all; and as light of the world and salt of the earth. Collaborative ministry in the body of Christ is therefore a communion of life, love, truth and goodness for the salvation of souls. The Second Vatican Council challenged all Christians with the threefold call to holiness, to ministry and to community. The same council also introduced an integrative context for responding to that triple call, the concept of the people of God. The focus is upon the holiness and ministry of “the people” a mutual, shared, collaborative approach for a Synodal Church. Therefore, the purpose of this collaborative relationship and partnership is to promote mutual openness, understanding and collaboration and foster a spirit of joint effort towards common goals for the common good, and journey together as agents of evangelization for a new socio-economic and religious order, where human dignity and human life matters more than material possessions.

## **1.0 Understanding Collaborative ministry for a Synodal Church**

We will first look at the meaning of different terminologies that will help us as we continue with our work in line with collaborative ministry. They are as follows:

## 1.1 Minister

A minister is a “Servant”. The term is used of those who serve in liturgical and pastoral engagement of the Church. In Christianity, a minister is a person authorized by a church or other religious organization to perform functions such as teaching of beliefs; leading services or providing spiritual guidance to the community.<sup>76</sup> In the Catholic Church, the term minister enjoys a variety of usages. It most commonly refers to the person, whether lay or ordained, who is commissioned to perform some acts on behalf of the Church. Anyone who does “ministry” is a minister. This includes priests, deacons, women religious, brothers and lay professionals. For example, we may talk of a youth ministers.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it is through this ministry, ministers collaborate in building the Kingdom of God.

## 1.2 Ministry

Ministry derives from a Greek word, *diakonia*, which connotes offering a service to others or attending to their needs. Ministry literally means ‘servanthood’. The call to ministry acts as a means of refining us and leading us to maturity because it is a call to service. One of its aspects as loving servanthood is collaboration.<sup>78</sup> Until recently, ‘ministry’ was mostly associated with the work of the Protestant communities and it came into popular Catholic usage in recent decades when more and more men and women decided to offer their services to the Church, complementing the work of those in the priesthood and religious life.

The essence of ministry is service and that is the motivating factor for anyone attracted to one of a great variety of ministries. Every ministry is rooted in a charism and each Christian derives from baptism some charisms, which lead to ministry; each ministry performs some public service for the community to further the kingdom of God. St Paul helps us to understand that, “there are

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<sup>76</sup> Joseph Quinn, “Minister” in Michael Glazier and Monika Hellwig, (eds), *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* Ireland: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1994, 572.

<sup>77</sup>Mike Hayes, “What does it mean to be a minister in the Catholic Church?” <https://bustedhalo.com/questionbox/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-minister-in-the-catholic-church>, Accessed on 2/4/2022.

<sup>78</sup> “Ministry” in <http://www.davidheywood.org/articles/Why%20Collaborative%20Ministry.pdf>, 25/9/2017.



varieties of gifts but the same spirit, and there are varieties of service (ministries) but the same Lord, and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one” (1 Cor 12:4-6). Today, ministry could also be considered in a more informal, interpersonal way, as when we offer support to others by our daily words and acts of mutual kindness and encouragement. Jesus interpreted his life and work as a service. We read: “the son of man has not come to be served but to serve to give his life as a ransom for the many” (Mark 10:45).<sup>79</sup>

Ministry is seen as a responsibility flowing from baptism. The whole Church is called to assume responsibility for mission and ministry. Collaborative forms of ministry flow from the relationship between the common and ordained priesthood. Ministry “is not given only to a few, but to each; “ministry” is not confined to a particular set of clearly defined functions but describes every word or act of grace to the believing community”.<sup>80</sup> The Church in its nature is communion and as such needs participation and co-responsibility at all of its levels. This provides a foundation for collaboration in ministry. Each person has equal dignity, is capable of self-transcendence and experiences Christ’s presence when gathered in his name (Mt. 18:20).<sup>81</sup> What we need to understand is that, the basis for all ministries is giftedness. A person’s call to ministry is a direct response to the gifts God has bestowed on that person, and ministry should flow from those gifts. Collaborative ministry brings together various gifts to accomplish the mission of Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal of collaboration is always to involve in ministry 100% (percent) of the baptized, gifted people of God. As observed, movement toward this ideal is accomplished by challenging specific populations and situations within the Church as:

- Men and women especially priests and women religious are to minister together more in a harmonious manner,

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<sup>79</sup> Michael Glazier, “Ministry” in Michael Glazier and Monika Hellwig, (eds.), *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* (Ireland: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1994), 573.

<sup>80</sup> Stephen Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and*

*Empirical Theology*, (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 37.

<sup>81</sup> Norman Cooper, *Collaborative Ministry: Communion, Contention, Commitment*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 2.

- Parish staff are to develop greater collaborative skills and to be models for parishioners of what collaboration is all about in all what they do,
- Chancery and Parish staffs to relate to each other as allies rather than adversaries;
- Those living in religious communities and rectories are to bear witness to the ways Christians can use live and work together,
- Neighbouring Parishes to combine efforts so that, they may be able to meet the needs of suffering people,
- Organizations within the same Parish are to discover the ways they can use to enable them to work together,
- Diocesan agencies to function in a cooperative way rather than in a competitive way which has no collaborative spirit in ministry.<sup>82</sup>

All the above help us to understand that ministry is rooted in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and expressed in various occasional, spontaneous and passing services. For example, parents catechizing their children, a married couple giving advice to others who might be having difficulties in marriage, individuals visiting the sick and those imprisoned among others.<sup>83</sup> Again, it is doing something in public, on behalf of a Christian community as a gift received in faith, baptism and ordination and as an activity with its own limits and identity within a diversity of ministerial actions, which helps the people of God towards embracing the values of the Kingdom of God.<sup>84</sup> It is any special, general service rendered to another person or group of people who happen to be in need of that service.<sup>85</sup> Ministry is not isolated.<sup>86</sup> This is the spirit of the Synod. Walking together.

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<sup>82</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1987), 18.

<sup>83</sup> Richard McBrien, *Ministry: A Theological Pastoral Handbook*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987), 8.

<sup>84</sup> Patricia Lanigan, "Collaborative Ministry in the Parish" in Francesco Pierli and Maria Teresa Ratti, eds., *Collaborative Ministry: A New Paradigm for the Third Millennium, Tangaza Occasional Papers/No 12*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 45. See also Richard McBrien, *Ministry: A Theological Pastoral Handbook*, 9.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

### 1.3 Mission

In its general sense, mission refers to the sending of someone to do something on behalf of another. The mission of the Church is thus not the business of the clergy alone. It is a co-operative venture requiring collaboration between clergy, religious and the laity. In Catholic usage, the word has three particular applications: Firstly, it is the use for the redemptive chore of Jesus as well as of the Church in the world. Secondly, it refers to the official designation of individuals or congregations to carry the Good News and saving presence of Christ in his Church beyond the boundaries of present membership. And thirdly, it applies (use) to the word “mission” to a compounded period of preaching and pastoral activity among those already church members as in “Parish Mission”.<sup>87</sup>

It is here we understand that, the common definition of mission encompasses the following elements in that, mission: One, begins in the life of God where the Church continues Christ’s mission; Two, it is carried out under the guidance of the spirit for the Church is missionary by her very nature; Three, it expresses God’s relationship with the world, and lastly, it includes evangelization and brings the Gospel to those who have never heard it.<sup>88</sup>

### 1.4 A Synodal Church

Journeying together as it is in the spirit of synodality, and as it was in the first millennium, was the ordinary way the Church, which was understood as People united in the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, discharged Her duties or rather, was able to act. To those who were creating divisions in the ecclesial body, the Church Fathers opposed the communion of the Churches scattered throughout the world, described by St. Augustine as “*Concordissima Fidei Conspiratio*,” which means, the agreement in faith of all the

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<sup>86</sup> Henri Nouwen and others, *Growing Together: Conference on Shared Ministry*, (Washington: Boystown Center, Catholic University, 1980), 27.

<sup>87</sup> Monika Hellwig, “Mission” in Michael Glazier and Monika Hellwig, (eds.), *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* Ireland: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1994, 575.

<sup>88</sup> L. Nemer, “Mission and Missions” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia Second Edition*, (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 2002), 684.

Baptized.<sup>89</sup> This leads us to look at the meaning of a synodal Church, which is a Church of participation and co-responsibility. It is “a Church “going forth,” a missionary Church “whose doors are open”.<sup>90</sup> Thus, “in exercising synodality she is called to give expression to the participation of all, according to each one’s calling”. Participation here is based on the fact that, “all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit’. It is a call to journey together, where “the whole Church is called to deal with the weight of a culture imbued with clericalism that she inherits from her history, and with those forms of exercising authority on which the different types of abuse (power, economic, conscience, sexual) are grafted”.<sup>91</sup> This is because, “It is impossible to think of ‘a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God’s People’”.<sup>92</sup> Thus, a call for a collaborative ministry among all agents of evangelization for a synodal Church is able to participate and serve in communion in mission.

### **1.5 Collaboration**

Collaboration, as we define it, is the identification, release and union of the gifts of baptized persons. The belief that every baptized person is gifted and called to ministry is the basis for collaboration. A new image of the Church is portrayed through collaboration in which the baptized work with others, empower each other and utilize everyone’s expertise. Collaboration requires patience in sharing this vision and in working together in building up God’s kingdom. In such a manner, you realize that, wisdom is necessary to discern what the Lord asks of each person, and courage is essential to challenge each other honestly. Full participation in decision-making is one fruit of collaboration that gives expression to our equal status through baptism.

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<sup>89</sup> Synod of Bishops, *Preparatory Document: For a Synodal Church - Communion/Participation/Mission*, 2021 – 2023, no. 11.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 15.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 6

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

Collaboration demands trust, maturity, and commitment from those involved. In collaborative ministry, leadership is exercised as service, yet the person in authority need not be the leader. Collaborative forms of ministry flow from the relationship between the common and ministerial priesthood. This reminds us that, the Church in its nature is communion and as such needs participation and co-responsibility at all of its levels. It is this participation and co-responsibility, which, provides a foundation for collaboration in ministry. It also reminds us that, each person has equal dignity, is capable of self-transcendence and experiences Christ's presence when gathered in his name (Mt. 18:20). Therefore, when organizing an event, he/she has to involve the other members.<sup>93</sup> The question remains: "Do we collaborate in our community/parish ministry?" All agents of evangelization may need to know that, collaboration reveals deep Christian and human values present in the person who cooperate. It is a value to be appreciated by all regardless of faith and tradition.<sup>94</sup> Collaboration therefore "will be possible whenever the ministers are capable of reaching out to one another from the fullness of the self and with the desire to contribute and receive".<sup>95</sup>

## 1.6 What is collaborative ministry?

Collaborative ministry is a way of relating and working together in the life of the Church, which expresses the communion, which the Church is given and to which it is called. It means that ministers work together in harmony and unity to provide for needs. This working together requires the ministers to determine needs, to discern for those members of the community who are with the necessary gifts, and to call forth those gifts for the common good. Collaborative ministry is rooted in the understanding of the Church as communion, in which all the people of

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<sup>93</sup> Norman Cooper, *Collaborative Ministry*, 8.

<sup>94</sup> Francesco Pierli and Maria Teresa Ratti, "Preface: The Urgency of Collaborative Ministry" in Francesco Pierli and Maria Teresa Ratti, eds., *Collaborative Ministry: A New Paradigm for the Third Millennium, Tangaza Occasional Papers/No 12*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 5.

<sup>95</sup> Francesco Pierli and Maria Teresa Ratti, "From Clericalism to Collaborative Ministry for a Millennium of Communion" in Francesco Pierli and Maria Teresa Ratti, eds., *Collaborative Ministry: A New Paradigm for the Third Millennium, Tangaza Occasional Papers/No 12*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 28. .

God participate in the universal call to holiness, mission and ministry.<sup>96</sup> Collaboration invites all the people of God to work together in ministry to be able to build a shared vision of the Church. This means that, no one person or group monopolizes the tasks, the initiatives, or the policy-making in the Church. This brings to our attention that, the concept of giftedness is central to an understanding and implementation of collaborative ministry.<sup>97</sup>

Thus, collaboration in ministry is a response to the call received in baptism and confirmation to recognize the charisms in all. It is a way of acting more effectively, efficiently and relevantly. We may also say that, it is a communal expression of all the baptized to participate in the priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Christ, to utilize their gifts in building up the ecclesial community to mutual respect and to participate in dialogue. It is a sign of equality in faith and calls all the baptized to seek the truth and serve the common good. At the same time, it implies availability to others, readiness to dialogue and fidelity to build the ecclesial community together.<sup>98</sup> This is what Pope Francis is calling ‘Synodality’ – walking together. It is walking together on the same way, same road, and same path. It is Church herself for the Church is a pilgrim people. This reminds us that, Synodality:

Represents the main road for the Church, called to renew herself under the action of the Spirit and by listening to the Word. 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. At the same time, the decision to “journey together” is a prophetic sign

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<sup>96</sup>Norman Cooper, *Collaborative Ministry*, 1; 6.

<sup>97</sup>Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 11.

<sup>98</sup>Norman Cooper, *Collaborative Ministry*, 7.

for the human family, which needs a shared project capable of pursuing the good of all.<sup>99</sup>

One of ways to achieve this is to collaborate in our ministry for Synodality is “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* (mode of living and operation) of the Church, the People of God. This reveals and gives substance to the Church being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission”.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the Church is to be a Church of Love, a Church that listens for she is for the life and the light of the world. She is here for the salvation of the world where she is to listen to the sorrows, joys, difficulties ... of the people of God, thus, becoming a Church that is called to live in unity.<sup>101</sup>

The above calls us to journey together in discovering the face and form of a Synodal Church, in which everyone has something to learn.<sup>102</sup> It is a call for us all to listen to each other, listening to the Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17). Once this is realized, it may help us to enter with confidence and courage into the path of Synodality.<sup>103</sup> For us to succeed, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us discover how communion can help us to build a Synodal Church, which is missionary oriented and whose doors are open for all.<sup>104</sup> It is a task that includes the call to deepen relationships with other Churches and Christian communities, with which we are united by the one Baptism. Journeying together may in a broader way help us to embrace all humankind, whose “joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties” we share<sup>105</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup>Synod of Bishops, *Preparatory Document: For a Synodal Church - Communion/Participation/Mission*, 2021 – 2023, no. 9.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 10.

<sup>101</sup> Vatican II Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) (7<sup>th</sup> December 1965) nos. 1; 4, : AAS 58 (1966), 1025-1115.

<sup>102</sup> Synod of Bishops, *Preparatory Document: For a Synodal Church* no. 15.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* See also Francis I, Apostolic Exhortation the Joy of the Gospel, (*Evangelii Gaudium*) (24 November, 2013) no. 46 : AAS 105 (2013), 1019-1137.

<sup>105</sup> *Preparatory Document: For a Synodal Church*, no.15. Also Vatican II Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1.

## **1.7 The Importance of Collaborative Ministry**

Our experience of the world in which we live tells us that, while some relationships are massively promoting or enhancing well-being and help us to prosper as people, others can be devastating. The relationships, which enable us to flourish, are those through which love is expressed. We are created in relationships and made both to love and be loved. God the Holy Trinity, who is the source of our personhood, is the model of what it means to love. The Bible even goes so far as to say that God is love (1 John 4:16). In other words, love is not an attribute or quality of God. Instead, the relationships of Father, Son and Spirit, which constitute God's being are the definition of love.<sup>106</sup> There are many reasons why the idea of collaborative ministry has become so popular recently and has proposed itself to the consideration of the Church. Few of them are as follows:

### *1.7.1 The New Model of Church Proposed By Vatican II*

Vatican II contains a variety of models of Church. The one which has all the characteristics of newness and which immediately captured the attention of many Catholics is the Church as people of God, who are on the journey. During this journey, the people of God are called to live as communities of faith, love and service to celebrate the Lord's death and resurrection in rites meaningful to the people and to be committed to the building of God's kingdom together with other people on the same journey, which is the spirit of Synodality. They are guided by the spirit through the signs of God's times and the members support one another with their examples, concern and love, and are aided by ministers who act according to the charisms received. This help in form of service and not domination of leadership and not to power, of assistance and not oppression, of shepherding and not lording it over others. Here ministers ought to set an example of how Christian communities live, operate and serve. In this

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<sup>106</sup> "Why Collaborative Ministry" <http://www.davidheywood.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Why-Collaborative-Ministry.pdf>, Accessed on 1/4/2022.



model, the functions in the Church are directed toward helping to build the larger community of believers and with them and through them, building the kingdom of God.<sup>107</sup>

### *1.7.2 Needs of People*

Today we talk different needs of the people of God, which are so many, so varied, so difficult to serve, that only a variety of ministers working together can hope to respond to them in an adequate way. We talk of: Emotional serious problems/issues for counseling; professional needs for example, people abandoning their faith because of their knowledge or their academic background; cultural needs where people desire their cultural values; ecumenical and interreligious needs where we have divisions among Christians and healing needs due to those who are hurt, sick, crying for help among others. This is what the preparatory documents on the synod is challenging us to do. It asserts: “We are continually challenged “as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit”.<sup>108</sup> If all are able to take the challenge, a spirit of Synodality may be experience.

### *1.7.3 The Emergence of the Laity in the Church*

The Church from the beginning of the Dark Ages to the Reformation is a millennium of complex history, of growth and decline, of change and stagnation, of contrasts of all sorts. With reference to the laity’s place in the Church, we realize that, the rhetorical device between laity and clergy was sharpened, thus, the laity were the ignorant of the Church and almost all of knowledge of the laity in this period comes through the exclusive eyes of the clergy. Laity became more and more isolated not only by language, for Latin was no longer the common language, but also by intellectual discipline. As one historiographer puts it: “The view of the Church as the community of the faithful was not completely lost sight of by the theologians, but in the government of the Church and in everyday speech, the Church was equivalent to the

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<sup>107</sup>Vatican II Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) (21 November 1964) no.32: AAS 57 (1965), 5-67.

<sup>108</sup>*Preparatory Document: For a Synodal Church*, no .6.

clerical order. The clergy were the shepherds, the laity sheep”.<sup>109</sup> We may say that, the laity were excluded from greater participation in the life of the Church not because they were heretics and barbarians, not because there was a conspiracy on the part of the clergy, not because the official Church was corrupt and worldly, as it sometimes was, but, because, the Church failed to find “a way to develop, encourage and educate the enthusiasm it could inspire ... The Church also failed to instruct the laity, and took away from the layman all initiative and almost every opportunity to use his head in the Church’s service”.<sup>110</sup>

With the Second Vatican Council, the Church in a very impressive manner, changed her own ecclesial self-awareness. She gave up the image of herself as a monolithic institution of salvation and, in the light of her eschatological destiny, redefined her nature as the biblical-historical People of God and sacrament of the world’s salvation.<sup>111</sup> The Church was once again a deep, rich and abundant mystery, both the life of grace and faith among people and the structure, which mediates that saving grace in human history. In the context of the Church as the People of God, a more particular and proper theological understanding of the laity would be not only desirable, but also essential. Thus, the conciliar teaching must be the starting point for any interpretation of the laity’s role today. The Council did not shrink from its responsibilities. Describing its mission as sublimely human, the Church stated that “it will be increasingly clear that the People of God and the human race in whose midst it lives render service to each other.” A new relationship to the world was affirmed: "... the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.”<sup>112</sup>

We must therefore recognize the world in which we live, its expectations and its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics”.<sup>113</sup> Today we talk of many lay people who have

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<sup>109</sup> C. Brooke, "The Church of the Middle Ages" in S. Neill and R. Weber, eds., *The Layman Christian History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 113.

<sup>110</sup> C. Brooke, "The Church of the Middle Ages", 117.

<sup>111</sup> R. McBrien, *Church: The Continuing Quest* (New York: Newman, 1970), 31-35.

<sup>112</sup> Vatican II Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 4.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

shown the trust for biblical knowledge – theological awareness. Thus, a need to be incorporated in the Church ministries team to welcome them and their charism and serve their needs for example, different groups in the Church like women, men, PMC, youth among others. The great achievement of *Lumen Gentium* precisely affirms this unity, which is the wonderful diversity of the Church, the hierarchy, clergy, laity, religious, each with their own place and responsibility, all called to holiness as the People of God made one in mystery with the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>114</sup> Such a unity is rooted in the Church's foundation in the act of God in Christ. All were called to the Kingdom and consecrated a royal priesthood, a chosen people (see 1 Pet 2:9-14).

### **1.8 Benefits of Building a Collaborative Relationship in the Ministry**

God is a God of relationship. He constantly invites us into a relationship that is authentic, true and real (ATR). We must make efforts not to leave God out of our relationships by merely looking and seeking for human solutions even in the midst of our painful situations for healing as we walk in the centre of His will. *It is good for us to respect, cherish and care about the way we relate with ourselves, with our neighbors, with nature, God and the society.* Therefore, *collaborative human relationships* at all levels with the self, others, Church, society and God are naturally most essential to life and the building of God's kingdom on earth. Its accompanying benefits are as follows: It supplies love and affection and builds faith and confidence, which may help the Agents of evangelization to value collaborative ministry. Provides emotional support, encouragement and loyalty to those who may be challenged in mission so to be effective and relevant in their mission. Guarantees stability, security, supplies positive companionship and friendship. As well, it satisfies material, spiritual, psychological needs and fulfillment which may help in detachment from the worldly materials for a better collaboration in ministry.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Vatican II Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

<sup>115</sup> Michael Adefemi, "Clergy and Laity Relationship: Collaborative Ministry" in <http://michael-adebola.blogspot.co.ke/2011/06/clergy-and-laity-relationship.html>, 23/9/2021.

All the above can lead someone to be in an elevating and enriching experience if pursued positively, but also can be as difficult and most horrifying as we make it if lived negatively, causing discomfort, division, heartache and frustration. The power lies within us to make our choice and we have to look in the right direction for us to succeed.<sup>116</sup> What is our choice today? We now look at the obstacles to collaboration.

## 2.0 Obstacles to Collaborative Ministry

As it was identified by the Bishops, Clergy, Men and Women Religious, during the Mutual Relations Workshop in Kenya on 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> October 1995, within the Church communities, there are divisions among the agents of evangelization in different levels. Thus, there can be no prophetic voice in a division and disunity environment.<sup>117</sup> The agents of evangelization may need to remember that, the purpose of ministry remains the same - the mission of Christ - the method for accomplishing this task today calls forth attitudes, behaviors and skills different from those needed in the past. Even when the concept of collaborative ministry is attractive and desirable, ministers may experience difficulty in developing a more collaborative style. The following represents some general obstacles in different categories; attitudes, behaviors and other challenges, though based on our experience, we may identify many.<sup>118</sup>

### 2.1 Attitudes

Psychologists define attitudes as a learned tendency to evaluate things in a certain way. This can include evaluations of people, issues, objects, or events. Such evaluations are often positive or negative, but they can also be uncertain at times. For example, you might have mixed feelings about a particular person or issue. Researchers also suggest that there are several

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<sup>116</sup>Michael Adefemi, "Clergy and Laity Relationship: Collaborative Ministry" in <http://michael-adebola.blogspot.co.ke/2011/06/clergy-and-laity-relationship.html>, 23/9/2021.

<sup>117</sup> Cecil McGarry, "Prophetic Mission of the Church, Especially in Kenya" in *Mutual Relations Workshop for Bishops, Clergy, Men and Women of Kenya*, Nakuru Pastoral Centre, October 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> 1995, 29. 27- 39.

<sup>118</sup> Anthony Kanu, Ikechukwu, *Collaborative Ministry in Mission: A Socio-Pastoral Approach*, (Yola: Alto grade Nigeria Limited 2000), 2. See also Loughlan Sofield, and Carroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry*, 26

different components that make up attitudes and these may affect the process of collaborative ministry in mission.<sup>119</sup> Attitudes in our work is the first category of the general obstacles to collaborative ministry, which comprises of competitiveness, parochialism, arrogance and burnout.

### *2.1.1 Competitiveness*

Competition among teams, for example, illustrates the necessity for working together with others, for combining talents and gifts most effectively and reaching a goal. However, some people develop a destructive competitiveness that blinds them to the gifts of others or interferes with their freedom to unite their gifts with others in ministry.<sup>120</sup> For example in religious congregations, the unique spirit and charism, which characterizes the congregation, can subtly become the basis for comparison and rivalry with other congregations. Teaching communities can begin comparing themselves with other teaching communities and can convince themselves that they are the best educators in the parish. This can result in an arrogant attitude toward the other congregations.

We have observed communities, which boast about how superior they are to other communities because they not only work with the poor, but also live among them. While at times competitiveness is insidious, it sometimes becomes quite blazing. This can also happen in organizations/institutions like schools “our school is better than any other”. Wherever an overly competitive attitude dominates whether at the individual, parish, congregation or diocesan level, attempts at collaboration will be virtually impossible.

### *2.1.2 Parochialism*

This attitude is characterized by narrowness of thinking. It often leads to an attitude of exclusive concern for one group with a corresponding apathy toward anyone not of that group.

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<sup>119</sup>Kendra Cherry “Attitudes and Behavior in Psychology” <https://www.verywellmind.com/attitudes-how-they-form-change-shape-behavior-2795897>, Accessed on 1/4/2022.

<sup>120</sup>Loughlan Sofield, and Carroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry. Skills and Guidelines*, 27.

Unfortunately, in many ministerial situations vision can become limited to “my parish” our school or hospital or my diocese or my youth group, women, men among others. Since the trust of Christianity is evangelization, not maintenance, parochial vision is contrary to the goal of Christianity.<sup>121</sup> The gift and talents of individuals or groups are given by God for the building of the kingdom, both in their immediate sphere and in the wider Church. So if one is gifted on e.g. youth – is to work hard to see that all youths are taken care in the Parish. This applies to the other groups as well.

A destructive element that can co-exist with parochialism is the development of a closed system. A closed system is one in which all the energy within the system is directed toward maintaining the system. The focus of the system becomes progressively more narrow and narcissistic. In addition, an unwillingness to admit new members who will bring new life and creativity begins to develop. Any situation ministerial, community, Parish, institutional – that has developed into a closed system ceases to be life-giving for its members.<sup>122</sup>

### *2.1.3 Arrogance*

Collaboration is unlikely to occur if individuals approach one another from a stance of superiority. Arrogance blinds people to the gifts of others as it attempts to protect their own images and self-esteem. It is one of the most difficult obstacles for collaboration to overcome because it is often deeply ingrained and hidden. It results from an attitude of superiority and affects all behaviour and relationships. It may develop from the need to protect self-esteem. It is destructive to collaboration and is usually difficult to perceive thus needs the feedback of others to assist us in coming to fuller self-knowledge.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>123</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 30.

#### **2.1.4 Burnout**

James Gill a Jesuit psychiatrist identifies potential candidates for burnout as those who:

Work exclusively with distressed persons, work intensively with demanding people who feel entitled to assistance in solving their personal problems, are charged with the responsibility for too many individuals, feel strongly motivated to work with people but who are prevented from doing so by too many paper work tasks are perfectionist and thereby invite failure, cannot tolerate variety, novelty or diversion in their work life, lack criteria for measuring the success of their understanding but who experience an intense need to know they are doing a good job.<sup>124</sup>

Burnout is a gradual, developmental process and it has four stages toward it as:

##### **2.1.4.1 The Initial Stage**

This is a stage, which is marked by an almost excessive, exclusive commitment to work or ministry. The actual amount of work is not as much a factor as the attitudes and beliefs that drive the person. This brings to our attention that, a good minister is one who has no needs, one who is always busy yet always available and capable of being all things to all people at all times. He is the one who knows that idle hands are the devils workshop and he has no time for or interest in developing any relationships. Thus, ministry alone is enough to sustain a good minister.<sup>125</sup>

##### **2.1.4.1 The Second stage**

People in this, appear to be constantly tired and speak in an enthusiastic manner about how tired they feel. For them, effectiveness in ministry is measured by how tired they fee. In this stage, individuals begin to question many of the values that have maintained them

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

throughout life and ministry. Some questions can be of great help like, what am I doing with my life? What difference am I making? Is it really worth all the effort? The answer is within each one of us. This stage leads to the next stage that is:

#### **2.1.4.2 The Third stage**

People who are in this stage withdraws from others and exhibits disappointment in itself and ministry, avoid others and they are no longer visible at community, parish or where other people are. They may project their self-disappointment unto others, a behaviour that creates further isolation and also a sign of depression.

#### **2.1.4.3 The Fourth stage**

The fourth stage is qualified by terminal cynicism. In it, one experiences an erosion of self-esteem.

Briefly, we may say that, the people in the last two stages are the most affected for they are not able to accept support and encouragement from friends. This may call for an assistance of a professional therapist. The reason behind this is that, the terminally cynical and those who are depressed are incapable of collaborating with anyone. This leads us to say that, the primary remedy for burnout is to delve into those beliefs that affect behaviour and seek help in changing those benefits that are self-destructive.<sup>126</sup>

### **2.2 Behaviours**

Behaviour is the way in which one acts or conducts him/herself, especially towards others.<sup>127</sup> behavior can be defined as the actions or reactions of a person in response to external or internal stimulus situation.<sup>128</sup> We take behaviours in this work as the second category of the general obstacles towards collaborative ministry. It comprises of behaviours like hostility,

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<sup>126</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 34.

<sup>127</sup> "Behaviour" <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/behavior>, Accessed on 1/4/2022.

<sup>128</sup> Maheen Fatima, "Types of Human Behavior in Psychology" <https://www.bioscience.com.pk/topics/psychology/item/1311-types-of-human-behavior-in-psychology>, Accessed on 1/4/2022.



unwillingness to deal with conflict, failure to share faith, lack of commitment or training and failure to integrate sexuality. We elaborate them as follows:

### *2.2.1 Hostility*

Is different from anger, but when anger is left unrecognized or denied, can be converted into hostility. One specific area where we have observed hostility interfering with collaboration has been interactions between male clergy and women religious. Anyone in ministry will at time experience frustration, blows to self-esteem and injustices. Feelings of anger are inevitable. The challenge is to discover avenues of expressing the anger constructively rather than converting it into hostility, which ultimately destroys any collaborative efforts.<sup>129</sup>

### *2.2.2 Being Unwilling to Deal with Conflict*

Acts 4:32 describes the Early Church as being of one mind and heart and sharing all things in common. This gives us only one dimension of the Early Church. In other sections of the scriptures other dimension emerges. Numerous incidents of disagreement are recounted: for example, in the Gospel of Mk. 9:3-34, the disciples argue over who is more important. In Acts of the Apostles chapter 15, Paul and certain members of the Church of Jerusalem come into conflict over the gentile question. In the same chapter, Paul and Barnabas fight over whether to take mark with them on their journey (Acts 15:36-39). Moreover, in Galatians 2:11-14, Paul opposes Peter in public. With these, we see a divinely founded Church whose members are very human and where conflict is inevitable. Conflict in any group results in apathy and tension, which preclude collaboration. If collaboration is to occur, conflict must be confronted and dealt with.<sup>130</sup>

### *2.2.3 Being Unwilling to Deal with Loss*

Loss and separation are as inevitable in the Christian community as conflict. The pain and hurt if unrecognized, can also have detrimental effects on ministry, experience of loss are one of the greatest causes of stress in life and too much stress interferes with people's freedom to

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<sup>129</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 36.

<sup>130</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 37.

be with and for others – practice of hatred. When feelings of loss are denied or not dealt with, they interfere with the ability to minister collaboratively. Learning to deal with loss can assist in developing more ways towards collaborative relationships and ministries.<sup>131</sup> James Gill gives us these general suggestions as helpful: That, one has to allow his/herself to get in touch with his/her feelings. At the same time, he/she has to speak with others about his/her feelings. But one has to be careful for not all are there to encourage. Some may project their unfinished business to others and lastly; one is to find a way to meaningfully ritualize the loss which may lead to healing.<sup>132</sup>

#### *2.2.4 Lack of Sharing Faith*

One of the best ways one can share faith is to demonstrate the very things he/she believes by staying positive and having a good attitude even in the middle of a crisis in own life. Some times, we may fear to do so, but we have to remember that, God does not call the equipped. He equips those who are called and as Christians, we are all called to share what Christ has done. Some of Christ's last words on earth were, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The one thing that differentiates a ministry group from any other group is its common mission, the building of the kingdom. If the group is to work collaboratively to accomplish that mission, then the members need to pray together and share faith in order to discover how God is calling them communally.<sup>133</sup>

#### *2.2.4 No Commitment of Training*

A church culture of commitment encourages members to continually and habitually gather for corporate worship, teaching, communion, and prayer. The letter to the Hebrews affirms this as it says "Let us be concerned for each other, to stir a response in love and good works. Do not stay away from the meetings of the community, as some do, but encourage each

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<sup>131</sup> 39.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

other to go; the more so as you see the Day drawing near (Hebrews 10:24-25). This culture also maintains accountability and healthy interdependence, while still creating space for flexibility and transience. It also encourages members to make a habit and practice of worship, prayer, learning, devotional time, service, and more. And anticipates that church members who commit to a community will build long-term relationships and engage in regular activities and services.<sup>134</sup> Agents of evangelization may need to know that, commitment to collaboration demands time. In addition, all ministers need training, formation programs, whether for laity, seminarians or members of religious communities. It will be good if those in the formation program evaluate how well they are preparing their candidates for collaborative ministry. This may help towards collaborative ministry.

#### *2.2.5 Unsuccessful Integrate Sexuality*

Sexuality is a gift; it should be acknowledged, appreciated and accepted as part of the total person. However, past attitudes toward sexuality led by people in ministry to repress and suppress this aspect of their being. Today fear of working with anyone who you might have a sexual attraction is not a problem – denial of the reality is the problem. People working together should not be surprised to feel strong emotional attraction at times. If these feelings are not acknowledged and accepted and, when appropriate, even discussed together and within third party, difficulties in ministry will ensue. We recommend: those involved to attend sexuality workshops for a collaborative ministry. This is to aid in the greater integration of this profound aspect of life.<sup>135</sup>

#### *2.2.6 Leaning Impuissance*

This is an attitude towards life and it results in a feeling of being victimized. For example a victim of physical abuse. This may lead to a conviction that, no matter what they do, cannot

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<sup>134</sup> Kelsey Yarnell, “How to Build a Culture of Commitment & Consistency at Your Church” <https://get.tithe.ly/blog/how-to-build-a-culture-of-commitment-consistency-at-your-church>, Accessed on 2/4/2022.

<sup>135</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 43 - 45.

effect change, thus, passivity and hopelessness in life. Those in this state of life may enter adulthood with low – self - image and minimum self – confidence. This may lead them to have difficulties in appreciating and recognizing their giftedness, thus, not easy to collaborate.<sup>136</sup>

### **2.3 One Man's Show Style of Leadership**

In the Church today many ordained ministers are not involving religious/laity in the work of evangelization. For example, he celebrates the rites, holds all the powers and gives all the orders. We have examples of priests who use statements like “As long as I am the parish priest, then no one will do anything here without my permission and if they will, over my dead body.”<sup>137</sup> They may need to remember that, the goal for any Parish is that no individual is a passive recipient of pastoral care. (See Canons 519, 528, 529, 759, 781). It is a ministry, which makes the Church to be emptier and it offers no future to its members. Edward Schillebeeckx comments on this ministry stating, “The model of the pastor who is capable of doing everything is clearly out of date”.<sup>138</sup> It is next to impossible for that one person to respond to religious experience alone.<sup>139</sup> Need for solidarity,<sup>140</sup> for we all share one baptism, one vocation and one hope. There is a need for an active involvement of all in Church activities. This will help in building a Synodal Church.

### **2.4 Ministries as Professionals**

In this challenge, we have an example of the Small Christian Communities where some find it hard to be in a group of those who are uneducated. Another example is of the laity who have different professionals. They seem to be a challenge to the priests when elected to take a certain responsibility in the Church such as finances. Some of the priests, don't want to be advised in matters of liturgy by the laity. This is a kind of a challenge that needs humility of all

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>137</sup> Anthony Bellagamba, “ Team Ministry in the Church” in *African Christian Studies Part II*, CHIEA, (Nairobi, Vol. 2, no. 2, 1986), 32.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Anthony Bellagamba, *Mission and ministry in the Global Church*, (New York: Orbis Books Publishers, 1992), 4.

<sup>140</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4.

and a realization that, their professionalism / Charisms/gifts are to complement each another for we are all equal in the eyes of God. They should use it for the common good of all members in the Church. This may lead them to the spirit of service, of collaboration, of synodality, which calls for communion, participation and mission.

Briefly, we may say that, all agents of evangelization may need to remember the prophetic call of Christ of receiving the inner freedom to overcome the divisions among themselves and commit themselves together in communion and fellowship. Therefore, there is a need to first, conversion that may lead to overcome the divisions, thus, raise a credible voice calling for unity and harmony among themselves. This will help in building a more just Church and society,<sup>141</sup> a Church that is able to walk together.

### **3.0 An Ecclesiological Foundation for Collaborative Ministry**

We here now look at a theological foundations of a collaborative approach to Christian ministry. The agents of evangelization need to know that, the ministries they exercise can only be ministries of the Gospel of Christ as they function in relation to others. The ministries give life to each other. Furthermore, the ministry each exercises has life as it belongs to others. Thus, a truly shared visions of ministry for the common good is what is worthy of for a collaborative ministry. The following will help us to understand the foundation of collaborative ministry.

#### **3.1 Collaborative Ministry and the Word of God**

We begin by saying that, the Trinity is the origin of all collaborative ministries. God's mission to the world involves Father, Son and Holy Spirit in full and loving co-operation. When we look at Jesus' earthly ministry, we are struck first of all by his obedience to the Father. "The Son can do ... only what he sees the Father doing", he says (John 5:19), and, "I glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). Secondly, we are struck by his empowering by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who descends upon him at his baptism (Luke 3:22),

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<sup>141</sup>McGarry, "Prophetic Mission of the Church, Especially in Kenya", 29.

leads him into the wilderness (Luke 4:1) until he returns in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14) to announce, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Luke 4:18). Later Jesus says of the Spirit, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:15). In the mission of Jesus we see Father, Son and Holy Spirit working together in perfect love and perfect harmony.

The loving, serving relationships which Jesus himself modeled are at the heart of Christian mission. To work on the quality of our relationships is to work on mission. God is displayed in relationships, which reflect those of the Trinity. As Paul frequently reminded his churches (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; Ephesians 4:1-16), the Body of Christ consists of unity in diversity. No one person has all the gifts necessary to build the Church. All display different facets of the call of Jesus to the Church, and all are called to love the others into the full realization of that call until, “All of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

### **3.2 The Church as Communion**

Among those who support the Church as Communion is St. Basil, A Church Father who emphasizes on the idea that the mutual interactions with other believers are needed in order to obtain Christian virtues so to relate well as a call for transformation of oneself.<sup>142</sup> St. Basil believes that one of the advantages of life in communion is the opportunity to love each other because an isolated man/woman may not even realize his shortcomings readily, not having anyone to reprove him/her and to set him right with kindness and compassion.<sup>143</sup> Basil also says, “we are responsible for one another”.<sup>144</sup> St. Clement also taught that order and peace is essential

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<sup>142</sup>Olga Druzhinina, *The Ecclesiology of St. Basil the Great: A Trinitarian Approach to the Life of the Church*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 168.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Clement Majawa, *Patristic Education*, Nairobi: Scroll Technologies, 2014, 195.

in the Church and every Christian has a particular function in the Body of Christ.<sup>145</sup> This is a call to work together in our ministry.

The agents of evangelization may need to know that, God grants us His gifts of redemption, and by sharing the same gifts we become a communion or fellowship. Thus, we are bound together as a single people because each one of us is in communion with the Father, Son and Spirit (1 Jn. 1, 3).<sup>146</sup> Again and as Baum puts it, “the Church is not divided into two sections, the clergy and the laity, but prior to the distinction introduced by the sacrament of orders, baptism and confirmation, constitute the faithful as a brotherhood, a single people of brothers.”<sup>147</sup> *Lumen Gentium* continues to enlighten the agents of evangelization in working together. It states: “God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather it pleased Him to bring men and women together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness.”<sup>148</sup>

In imitation of Jesus who was anointed for His prophetic mission by the Holy Spirit in the river Jordan, so His community too, is anointed for the same prophetic mission through baptism. Thus, all agents of evangelization are called to call people to receive the gift of communion towards building the human community in justice and peace.<sup>149</sup> It is here communion is used to describe the way individual subjects relate to one another: we communicate by gesture, sign, and language. One image of the Church that was developed at Vatican II and that promotes collaborative ministry is that of communion. Great collaboration between clergy, religious and laity, working from a common vision of what the Church is, is needed for the smooth running of

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<sup>145</sup> Clement Majawa, *Patristic Education*, 178.

<sup>146</sup> Gregory Baum, “The Constitution of the Church” in Edward Peters, ed., *The Constitution of the Church of Vatican Council II Proclaimed by Pope Paul VI November 21, 1964*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1995), 19.

<sup>147</sup> Gregory Baum, “The Constitution of the Church”, 27.

<sup>148</sup> Vatican II Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9.

<sup>149</sup> McGarry, “Prophetic Mission of the Church, Especially in Kenya”, 28.

the community and for its development. Lay leaders are able to exercise a mediating function between pastors and the community. This is evident in the laity's participation in diverse ministries within the community. In leading back those who have been alienated, in proclaiming the word of God, particularly through catechetical instruction, and offering their professional skills in pastoral care and Parish administration.<sup>150</sup> To promote the vision of collaboration both ordained and lay ministers, there may be a need of ongoing formation that furthers collaboration among all and the sharing of ecclesial responsibility.<sup>151</sup> The following questions may be of great help.

**Q.1: Is ongoing formation done today in our different communities/Parishes/Institutions?**

This reminds us that, without collaboration, the Church/our communities/institutions encounter serious difficulties in bringing Christ's call to modern men and women. Thus, effectiveness in ministry may only flow from a living experience of communion that manifests itself through collaboration. Thus, a need for all to participate.

**Q.2: How do we foster communion in our ministry?**

All agents of evangelization may need to note that, with communion and a collaboration with harmony, is where we find the richness that comes with variety. Through this varied of experiences that are brought together, the agents of evangelization are able to enhance ways of responding to their daily challenges. This is because everyone is gifted and as a Church, we have one mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This fostering of communion if it is considered may help in building a Church that is communion and a Church that encourages participation in mission.

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<sup>150</sup> Vatican Council II, Decree on the Apostolate of lay people (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*), 18 November, 1965, no.10.

<sup>151</sup> Norman Cooper, *Collaborative Ministry*, 11-14.



### 3.3 Spirituality of Collaborative Ministry

Agents of evangelization need to have a spirituality that may guide them in the way towards collaboration in ministry for ministry is the embodiment and expression of spirituality. This reminds us that, by baptism, we are all call as Cristian to holiness and to ministry. This guides us to say that, we are called to a spirituality, which needs a deepened relationship with God and an expression of that relationship in action.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, collaborative ministers needs a spirituality that is among many elements:

#### 3.3.1 *Integrates the total human person*

Spirituality here is understood as one of the dimensions of the total person where one needs to grow. A continuous growth in this area of spirituality requires consistency with the changes that may occur and realities of other aspects of life as one grows. For example, our cultures, sexuality, physical health, age, our personality, psychological development stages among others, are factors that influence our spiritual development. Agents of evangelization need to realize that, Jesus is the model for all spirituality.<sup>153</sup> Though He could fall, He reminds us that, failure is a reality of life. Once we bear with it, it creates a freedom that allows ministers to share with others in their ministry.<sup>154</sup>

#### 3.3.2 *A Spirituality that Contains a Shred or Communal Dimension*

Agents of evangelization may come to a richer and fuller spirituality by being able to acknowledge their own gifts and those of others which requires humility of all. This is because, collaboration in ministry demands collaboration in spirituality. Thus a willing heart of being able to listen and to learn from others, which is one of the purposes of the Synod.

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<sup>152</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 57.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>154</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 60.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

### 3.3.3 A Spirituality integrated with the ecclesiology presented in Vatican II

Today there is a need of a spirituality that is integrated with the ecclesiology presented in Vatican II. An ecclesiology that focuses on elements like: The dignity of every person; the discovery of Christ's presence in the community and the individual; the shared responsibility for the mission of the Church; the work of God's spirit that generates communion; the communion created by living the word of God (Jn. 17:21); and lastly, the realization of communion through the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>155</sup>

The Lord's presence among his people empowers all the baptized in their mission to sanctify the world, which requires us to die to ourselves and rise a new Christ. Living out and sharing God's word with Christ present among us created communion and celebrating the Eucharist deepens communion. This spiritual foundation produces greater cooperation, co-responsibility, and communion among the whole people of God. What will help to accomplish these aspects of Spirituality?

#### 3.3.3.1 Prayer

This is the expression of Christian commitment evident in all forms of ministry and the source of all forms of collaboration. By prayer, God's presence is realized in the midst of his people and communion, grows among the assembly. Collaboration is an essential element of spirituality since people have many charisms to share with one another in building up the kingdom of God. We are all co-responsible for the mission of the Church and complement one another in our ministry. Mbiti says, "I am because you/we are and because you/we are, therefore I am".<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Vatican II Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4.

<sup>156</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1969),

### 3.3.3.2 Living the Word

Vatican II helps us to understand that, the treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer share of God's word may be provided for the faithful; it also reinforces the equal importance of the table of the word and the table of the Eucharist.<sup>157</sup> Living in the response to God's word fosters harmony within the community and makes the Eucharist celebration the summit and source of all forms of collaboration in ministry.<sup>158</sup>

### 3.3.3.3 Living our Baptismal Promises

Our baptism requires co-responsibility and conversion to collaborative forms of administration. We are all called to trust others enough so that we can communicate honestly and freely, work together caringly, serve each other, be demanding of each other, tap each other's talents and pray with each other. It is clear that collaboration in ministry is demanding and requires conversion, but the baptized cannot ignore the call they have been given. It is about forming an attitude of mind within the whole Church to promote deeper communion among all the baptized. Such an attitude should be seen in the practical organization and life of the Church. Today the operational state used by many pastoral teams is fashioned on a business model in which the pastor is the chief executive office and each professional lay minister is a head of a particular department. Staff meeting remains for deciding the overall direction of the parish development, setting goals and objectives for the respective ministries, and giving progress reports. This cannot promote co-responsibility among the respective ministries for the mission of the Church.

Therefore, a better organizational model is needed that respects the vision of the Church and increases cooperation and shared responsibility among all for the mission of the Church. The Church needs to provide its own model that respects its tradition and gospel values, while

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<sup>157</sup> Vatican II Council, *Lumen Gaudium*, no. 26.

<sup>158</sup> Norman Cooper, *Collaborative Ministry: Communion, Contention, Commitment*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 40.

engaged in a dialogue society. Such a model can enrich one's personal appreciation and understanding of what collaboration means and can promote effective sharing of responsibility in building up the kingdom of God.<sup>159</sup>

#### **4.0 Collaborative Ministry in Practice - Way Forward**

Collaborative ministry is rooted in the understanding of the Church as communion, in which all the people of God participate in the universal call to holiness, mission and ministry.<sup>160</sup> To become a Church of collaborative ministry, it has to begin with all agents of evangelization. There is a need to have a Church, which has a truly collaborative ministry and has a shared responsibility. This is because, God is one, and the signs of His presence among His people are always their unity and communion.<sup>161</sup> This reminds us that, the Church's mission is to bring about communion among its own members and with all others for communion is both the nature and the mission of the Church.<sup>162</sup> Thus, a need to foster a new spirit of relations and collaboration.<sup>163</sup> To achieve this, the following can be of great help:

#### **4.1 Mission and Vision**

Mission and vision are essential in helping the agents of evangelization in their ministry for together, they guide strategic development, help communicate the ministry's purpose to all, and inform the goals and objectives set to determine whether the strategy is on the right path with their plans.<sup>164</sup> The agents of evangelization need to have a mission and vision to guide them in all they do for this will help them to be focused and be able to work together.

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<sup>159</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 6.

<sup>161</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Revised Edition, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), no. 1373.

<sup>162</sup> McGarry, "Prophetic Mission of the Church, Especially in Kenya", 31.

<sup>163</sup> McGarry, "Prophetic Mission of the Church, Especially in Kenya", 32.

<sup>164</sup> "The Roles of Mission, Vision, and Values" in [open.lib.umn.edu/principlesmanagement/.../4-3-the-roles-of-mission-vision-and-values/](https://open.lib.umn.edu/principlesmanagement/.../4-3-the-roles-of-mission-vision-and-values/), 5/3/2018.

## **4.2 A Model of Church – as – Family**

Church as family model will help all the agents of evangelization to be able to live in communion for a successful collaborative ministry. This is because; all need to have a sense of belonging. This will help in not looking at each other as objects, but as partners in mission. It is in line with the teachings of Vatican Council II, that, all the baptized persons share in the Church's sacramental priesthood because of sharing in the priesthood as well as in the prophetic and serving mission of Christ.<sup>165</sup> It is through baptism, they are all made full and active participants in the Church's mission for the Church is the people of God, that is, the family of God. They are a people brought into the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>166</sup> Thus, we can say that, a Church that is communion, collaborative, lives together as God's family, is able to speak prophetically of God and for God who Himself is communion as well as family - Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>167</sup> This reminds us that, where there is communion, God is there and His reign are present, thus, sin is banished for disunity and lack of communion are the results of sin.<sup>168</sup>

## **4.3 Planning and Collaboration**

Planning is the process of turning vision into reality, where one makes things happen the way he/she and his/her ministry team desire. It's a partnership between someone and God in which supernatural power can be channeled through the human efforts of a committed ministry team. Planning is both proactive, that is making things happen and reactive, that is waiting for them to happen. Here, the key challenge becomes to maintain the right balance between acting and reacting, between the human efforts and divine intervention. Therefore, it should concentrate more on ministry effectiveness, that is doing the right things that, efficiency, that is doing things

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<sup>165</sup>McGarry, "Prophetic Mission of the Church, Especially in Kenya", 31.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

in the 'right' way. This means that, planning process begins by focusing on the ministry's basic mission as the ultimate purpose and the foundation of effectiveness.<sup>169</sup>

We value planning for it facilitates communication, vision –sharing and team member interaction which fuels ministry progress and effectiveness. Thus, planning becomes the catalyst for team accomplishments.<sup>170</sup> Therese Gacambi observed that, only few Dioceses have collaboration and planning among the agents of evangelization. Thus, a needed for training and formation especially for Sisters/Brothers in theological, professional, spiritual and human fields. This will help in appreciating the various ministries in the Church, which is helped by respect and reverence for each other.<sup>171</sup> Planning helps the Church to be comprehensive in her approach, which is the self-actualization or action of the Church in its totality as in evangelization, caring, administering sacraments, catechesis and preaching.<sup>172</sup> Planning together provides a foundation for coordinating, directing and controlling the activities of the Church as a family and it entails involvement of all members.<sup>173</sup> This will lead to chances of praying and thinking together on the actions of the Body of Christ, in a particular time and place.

#### 4.4 General principles to foster collaboration

The following can help us as general principles, which can help in fostering collaboration among the agents of evangelization. This we learn from Sofield and Juliano<sup>174</sup> and we recommend them as:

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<sup>169</sup> Philip Von Auken, *The Well- Managed Ministry: Discovering and Developing the Strengths of Your Team*, (Canada: Victor Books, 1989), 55.

<sup>170</sup> Philip Von Auken, *The Well- Managed Ministry*, 56.

<sup>171</sup> Therese Gacambi, "Mutual Relations in the Diocese Among Priests, Religious and with the Bishop" in *Mutual Relations Workshop for Bishops, Clergy, Men and Women of Kenya*, Nakuru Pastoral Centre, October 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> 1995, 47.

<sup>172</sup> Nicholas Segeja, "Strategic Pastoral Planning for deeper Evangelization: A sign of Vigilance of Church in Africa" in *African Christian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (June 2010), 70.

<sup>173</sup> Randel Carlock and John Ward, *Strategic Planning for the family Business: Parallel Planning to Unify the Family and Business*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 24.

<sup>174</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 128.

#### 4.4.1 Dialogue

Dialogue is of great help. It is essential for collaboration. Is a prerequisite; without it collaboration is virtually impossible for dialogue is the fundamental principle of mission and of the building up of God's Kingdom.<sup>175</sup> It implies availability to others, openness, readiness to dialogue and fidelity to build the ecclesial community together.<sup>176</sup> This was an emphasis by the African Synod in *Ecclesia in Africa*. In this document, John Paul II emphasizes on care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.<sup>177</sup> In order for ministers to work effectively together there must be willingness as well as opportunities for honest, open and frequent dialogue.<sup>178</sup> Ndingi Mwana'a Nzeki calls dialogue "a medium of caring about each other and sharing with one another in life and work".<sup>179</sup> He continues and says: "Dialogue requires a listening attitude and disposition to see the other person's point even if it is not acceptable to us. Man {Woman} as he/she is here and now, and as he/she would like to be, is both the object and subject of every form of dialogue."<sup>180</sup> Thus, a need for all to know and relate well with each other.

#### 4.4.2 Giftedness

Collaboration is most effective when it is based on giftedness. Thus, there should be a direct correlation between a person's gifts and his or her ministry. Collaborative ministry consists of discovering ways of uniting various gifts to accomplish the mission of the Lord. For this to occur, those who wish to minister collaboratively must have the opportunity to engage in

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<sup>175</sup>Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 126. Also Aylward Shorter, "The Curse of Ethnocentrism and the African Church", in Albert De Jong, ed., *Tangaza Occasional Papers*, Nos. 5-8, *Ethnicity: Blessing or Curse*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997), 30.

<sup>176</sup>Norman Cooper, *Collaborative Ministry: Communion, Contention, Commitment*, 7. See also, Edward Schillebeeck, *Ministry: A Case for Change*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1981), 31.

<sup>177</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 63: AAS 88 (1996), 39. See also, Mercy Oduyoye, "Family: An African Perspective" in William Farmer, ed., *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty First Century*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press Book, 1998), 289-292.

<sup>178</sup> Therese Gacambi, "Mutual Relations in the Diocese Among Priests, Religious and with the Bishop", 47.

<sup>179</sup> Raphael Ndingi Mwa'a Nzeki, "Relationship Between Bishops and Priests and Religious" in *Mutual Relations Workshop for Bishops, Clergy, Men and Women of Kenya*, Nakuru Pastoral Centre, October 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> 1995, 51.

<sup>180</sup> Raphael Ndingi Mwa'a Nzeki, "Relationship Between Bishops and Priests and Religious", 51.

mutual discernment of gifts. Those who do so tend to work together in a complementary rather than competitive fashion.<sup>181</sup>

#### 4.4.3 Duplication

Unnecessary duplication should be avoided. This is because, when Institutions, Dioceses or Congregations think parochially, there is a tendency toward costly duplication in terms of service, programs and utilization of outside resources.<sup>182</sup> Thus, it will not help in collaboration in their ministry together.

### 4.5 Basic decisions for collaboration

The following three decisions serves as essential elements that are helpful in a final decision toward collaborative ministry in a Synodal Church, which we recommend as:

#### i) We should – commitment

Our believe that collaboration in ministry is essential may lie in two basic reasons as a conviction that is rooted in our theology and the statistics of declining numbers of full – time ministers. This convinces peoples of the absolute necessity for collaboration. But, the ultimate reason is that, the Church is the People of God and all who are baptized are called and gifted for ministry. Thus, ministry becomes a privilege and an obligation. Therefore, the essence of collaboration is to lead developing a Church, where people are able to continue discovering new and better ways of working together in ministry towards a spirit of common ministry.<sup>183</sup> This calls for a total commitment in saying “We Should”<sup>184</sup> collaborate in ministry to build a communal Church that participates fully in mission.

#### ii) We want to

We want to is determined by the factors that we have in our commitment to collaboration. This commitment reminds us that, collaboration in ministry requires honest scrutiny of our

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<sup>181</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 127.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 - 21

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.



behaviour or our experience in the ministry.<sup>185</sup> This will help all agents of evangelization to value collaboration for once they are able to do so, they will desire to walk together in building the Church of Christ who is the Head. Thus, ‘we want to collaborate’ will remain their chorus in their daily endeavours.

iii) **We can**

All agents of evangelization may be convinced that, they should and they want to collaborate, nothing will happen, unless all who are involved are able to have the capacity and possess the ability to collaborate. Thus, each had a task to ask him/herself – am I able to say that, I have the capacity and at the same time, as a group, do we have the spirituality and skills to be able to collaborate?<sup>186</sup> The answer is within each and every agent of evangelization.

iv) **We will**

We will come as the final decision towards collaborative ministry. It calls for “reassessment, adaptation and re-education”.<sup>187</sup>

✚ Our Vision Proverbs 29: 18 - Where there is no vision the people get out of hand/ perish.

✚ To be focused on Four C’s of Collaboration: Clarification, Conviction, Commitment, and Capacity/Capability.

**Conclusion**

We must admit that organizing *community/Parish life and mission* is never an easy business. So, for our communities/Parishes to become vibrant, dynamic, welcoming and inclusive, especially in liturgy, mission and prayer, there is the need for the recognition that we all share responsibility for the faith and life of our communities/Parishes. This means more collaboration, cooperation and communion. The Clergy, religious and lay faithful today, more than ever before need to acquire strong Christian Convictions, in the face of current trend of

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<sup>185</sup> Loughlan Sofield and Corroll Juliano, *Collaborative Ministry: Skills and Guidelines*, 22.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

secularization, religious indifference and religious pluralism where so many believers cross one another. As Christ's Faithful full of faith and vitality, we should be intensely committed to Christianizing and transforming the modern world. Hence, we are challenged to take up responsible and effective witness to Christ in the world. We must remember that people do not want to know how much we know, until they know how much we and Jesus care for them in the world. So, all of us have the opportunity to enrich relationships, develop our gifts of service to the community, and assist the growth of others in their following of Christ. The leadership style chosen should promote communion and collaboration within our communities and Parishes. This can be manifested through the pastor's vision of the Church through communication, which fosters communion. Thus, a need for encouragement, support and appreciation among all and especially from all levels of authority towards the promotion of the values of the kingdom of God in a Synodal way. As agents of evangelization, we have a duty, a responsibility, a task.

## **Synodality Synod Envisions a Different Church**

*Rev. Fr. Lazar Arasu SDB*

The Synod on Synodality through its entire three years' process and celebration aims to ensure more diversity within the internal life of the Church and to ensure that the views of those on the "periphery" are truly listened to and are able to participate in the governance and the life of the Church. Principally this has been the mode of operation of Pope Francis' papacy – EVERYONE matters, because God communicates through ANYONE and ALL OF US are responsible for the God given mission.

In the 1960s, at the height of the modern period, Pope St. John XXIII envisioned a Church that was renewed which would embrace the people of the modern world with fresh ideas and which would be able answer the difficult questions of modernity that apparently seem to oppose many evangelical values. He called the Second Vatican Council that would be ecumenical council including for the first-time bishops from the new emerging world. Now after more than fifty five years we are still trying to understand and implement the spirit of the great Council. In order to implement and discuss further the spirit of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI, his successor, put in place the Synod of Bishops, which are often regional in composition and outlook to look into the matters of the local churches, but with the universal outlook of the Church.

The Council Decree *Christus Dominus* (28<sup>th</sup> October, 1965) describes the newly established body as follows:

Bishops chosen from various parts of the world, in ways and manners established or to be established by the Roman pontiff, render more effective assistance to the supreme pastor of the Church in a deliberative body which will be called by the proper name of Synod of Bishops. Since it shall be acting in the name of the entire

Catholic episcopate, it will at the same time show that all the bishops in hierarchical communion partake of the solicitude for the universal Church” (*Christus Dominus*, # 5).

For this purpose, Pope Paul VI created a permanent structure for a Synod of Bishops, with a secretariat in Rome and a General Assembly gathered regularly by the pope. This is also in accordance with the Canon Law, can. 342 of CIC/1983: “The synod of bishops is a group of bishops who have been chosen from different regions of the world and meet together at fixed times to foster closer unity between the Roman Pontiff and bishops, to assist the Roman Pontiff with their counsel in the preservation and growth of faith and morals and in the observance and strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline, and to consider questions pertaining to the activity of the Church in the world.”

Since the beginning of his papacy in 2013, Pope Francis has shown a special interest in the Synod of Bishops. It is certainly in line with the spirit of the early Church when apostles called for the entire body to discuss the challenges that arose in their time and later the Church had numerous synods to solve various problems of their time both asentire Church and as regional churches.

Now in our time, for Pope Francis, “A synodal Church is a Church which listens,” pointing out that mutual listening has been the goal of much of the Church’s renewal since Vatican II. “For the disciples of Jesus, yesterday, today and always, the only authority is the authority of service, the only power is the power of the cross,” he always insists.

Therefore, the current “Synod on Synodality” is the culmination of all these efforts to bring a greater degree of openness, collaboration and mutual listening to the Church. Unlike previous synods, this one officially begins in dioceses all over the world, with opportunities for mutual consultation at every level and among many different church organizations. The proposed

dialogue is also expected to bring a closer communion between pastors and the faithful in every walk of life and ultimately united to the Church's hierarchy, the Pope himself.

The collaborative and inclusive approach of synodality is precisely “the path that God expects of the Church in our time.” These thoughts are beautifully summarized in the title of the Synod of Bishops 2021-2023 – “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.” It is clear that through this synod Pope Francis is lighting a fire of revolution with his wisdom, tenderness and courage.

The Synod of Bishops with the thought-provoking title ‘Journeying together with communion, participation and mission’ is a path of revolution at a timer when the Church needs an air of freshness, warmth and newness. Through this synod Pope Francis wants to embrace not only the Catholic flock he leads, but also the Christians of other denominations, people of other faiths and thought, as well as agnostics and even the non-believers in God. As a mature pastor he wishes to listen to them with sincerity and with a willingness to act on what they have to say, with a belief that these thoughts will bring good for the Church and the world at large. We can confidently say that the Holy Father is doing so with great courage and willingness which is the hallmark of his papacy. This is certainly something unprecedented not only in the history of the Church, but in the history of the world. From the time he assumed his Papacy Pope Francis has been a shepherd who is willing to reach out to the unreached, those in periphery and those no one cares to listen. He is not afraid to hear any unpleasant criticism that is sure to come, the deep-rooted anxiety and thoughts of those who dissent not only among the Church's hierarchy, but among those who are somehow excluded due to their dissensions in doctrines, thoughts, and behaviour.

Pope Francis has been a stern opponent of clericalism that suppresses the voices of the downtrodden and contenders; it is a way of thinking and acting that finds comfort in a cozy life and unwillingness to take courageous action against traditions that are opposing the evangelical

spirit of poverty, humility and service. Pope Francis looks at clericalism as an ill-motivated policy that wants to maintain or increase the power of a religious hierarchy for its own benefit and to maintain the status quo. He seems to say, “listen to the voices that are raised from the edges of the church and society, listen to them with patience and great diligence; record them with utmost sincerity. There are voices and experiences that are silently and sternly rising against the actions and attitudes of the Church that need to be condemned and corrected. This needs to be done in every parishes, dioceses, episcopal conferences, nations and continents. They ought to be meticulously recorded and sent to Synod.”

By this the Holy Father believes that voices of the downtrodden will echo in the corridors of Vatican and through it the Holy Spirit will lead us to the right path of reformation and renewal. This call of the Holy Father has surprised several bishops of the world and some are still trying to grasp the importance of the call.

Given the call of the Pope and his insistence in listening to the voices from the periphery it has even suggested that this synod be called a ‘Synod of the Faithful’ rather than the Synod of Bishops. It is certain that Pope Francis is establishing a new mode of organizing the Synod from the grassroots up. This is certainly a revolutionary synod with a radical process. The path to a Church that listens and walks together starts with you and me. Let’s walk forward together!

Studying the planned process and the targeted objectives of the synod we can conclude that Pope Francis wants the Church to be a ‘Listening Church’ and a ‘Mature Church’. We can also be sure that by honest listening, participation, and the implementation of the Synod outcomes, the Church will be on the path of dialogue and maturity.

### **1. Becoming a Listening Church**

On October 9, 2021 Pope Francis tweeted in his @Pontifex, “The Synod offers us the opportunity to become a listening Church, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen.” The purpose of the Synod on Synodality is to make

the Church a listening Church, a Church which truly becomes a home for all. This large gathering which has already begun its preparation will be held in Rome in October 2023.

Listening is the secret of success for individuals as well as for organizations. Failure to listen is a recipe for downfall and becoming obsolete. We have all heard the following benefits of listening: listening contributes to case analysis and helps to make right strategy for growth and progress; it helps to avoid imminent and problems that could be nasty; it is a way of resource gathering for more synergy; it helps to set and then reset priorities and to build team spirit. It will help the Church to find new energies to continue with new vigor. In practical ways, listening helps in the learning process, encourages friendship and mutual understanding, and helps to resolve conflicts and reach consensus and workable resolutions.

For listening to be fruitful and enriching it calls for training and discipline. The listener should give due respect to the speaker/communicator by giving time, full attention, respect and respecting the need for the privacy and confidentiality that might be required . Listening should be truly listening.

Given these principles, the members of the Church are called to listen to each other. She is called to set aside her different levels of hierarchy, her status and truly listen. The shepherds are called to stoop down to the flock and listen to their cries, needs, and even woes. Pope Francis' call at the beginning of his papacy - "Shepherds should know the smell of the sheep" - now gains a new meaning. By listening to them, shepherds get close to them and acquire their smell. This is truly building a Synodal Church—a Church that walks together, listening to each other.

At the Commemorative Ceremony for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops on 17 October 2015 Pope Francis said, "a Synodal church is a listening church, knowing that listening is more than feeling". It is in listening that we feel the presence of the other and show

willingness to learn and willingness to share. Allusions to these principles are seen in the annals of the early Church right from the time of the Apostles.

We cannot deny the fact that the Church of the West has been very hierarchical, just like the pyramid. The laity were instructed to listen—listen with total submission and adherence to a small group, the hierarchy made up of bishops and priests, and to be passive followers of the instructions. Thanks to the Second Vatican Council a significant milestone was passed. It gave a sense of the Synodal Church, but there is still a lot more to be done. This is more important and necessary in the rapidly changing society. Only by walking together, listening to each other and participating as a community in the common task of building and rebuilding the Church can we bear fruit or even exist.

This takes us to the theme of the forthcoming Synod on Synodality; we are already into its process and preparation. When we listen to each other, sharing each other's anxieties and concerns we are already on the verge of finding solutions. Listening is a process of diagnosing the problems and finding the symptoms associated with the overriding pain.

We are all aware of the problems that the Church has been facing in the past two decades or so. Clerical sexual abuse and various forms of corruption at different levels of the Church have called for quicker and comprehensive attention. We are also aware of many pressing controversies for which no easy solution is possible. The Church, especially in the West, is struggling with issues related to LGBTQIA – problems related to gender issues, and also with a serious vocations' crisis.

Problems such as abuse of minors and misappropriation of funds meant for charity can easily be connected to the Church's negligence of listening to each other. Often failure and unwillingness to listen arises from the fact that the small minority of the "elite" members of the Church - the hierarchy - has failed to listen or failed to put in place various platforms meant for



listening or they have sabotaged the channels of listening and communication. Failure to listen down plays the role of the shepherds and co-disciples.

The Synod on Synodality calls us to clear the channels of communication and make the communication process. We cannot say that as Catholic Church, which is truly universal, does not have communication channels. Perhaps as an organization we have the best channels in disseminating information and pronouncements. Now with the improved means of communication we are able to receive communication from the Holy Father or Vatican in a matter of minutes. And our Catholic faithful are willing to listen and most practicing faithful are trained to listen and to respond. But it is true that voices from the grassroots are not heard and not listened to.

The Synodality Church is calling the shepherds to be disciples as well. A disciple is one who listens and one who walks together with others. It is in listening we are able to discern the movement of the Spirit. In listening we are able to understand; this is very essential in exercising leadership. So, listening makes our leadership into service. Listening is the right medicine for the various life-threatening diseases that Church undergoes. An authentic listening call for humility which is the fruit of openness.

## **2. Becoming a Mature Church**

Maturity of an individual or an organization is measured by commitment to a cause, sense of belonging, receiving and giving good mentorship or coaching to members and dependents, good teamwork or team spirit, committed to a common plan, objective or goal, lots of hard work and good practice and good performance. These aspects make the individual or the organization to succeed and achieve the targeted goal. A mature person or an organization is an asset to themselves and those around.

Maturity is a process and something that is to be worked for on a daily basis; it is a continuous process of renewal and growth. It depends on setting realizable goals and pursuing

them, working hard with determination, discipline, self-control, willing to make sacrifices, and being able to cope with many trials and temptations. Maturity also depends on listening to others, valuing others' opinions, being optimistic, and being patient with oneself, others and different situations that might arise while pursuing a worthy cause.

In the same way we desire our Church to be mature and be an asset to itself and to the world. Now the Church is mature, its members should be mature—mature in faith and practice. Church is over 2000 years old; positively it has matured in time and history. It has surely contributed to the integral formation of its people and the world. But due to the challenges arising from modernity and changing times it needs to mature with time and respond to the situations in a suitable manner. This calls for a continuous process of study, reflection and renewal. The desired maturity should express itself at a given time and history. The Church's faith, practices and its services should be of mature value. The aim of the Synod on Synodality is to see the Church as a mature organization serving the needs of our times; guiding people the way it did so down through the ages.

From the beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis envisions a Church that is mature – guiding, dependable, reliable and encompassing the spirit of those who feel part of it. Through the Synod on Synodality – thinking and acting in one heart and soul which itself is an act of maturity - the Pope wants the Church to mature in dialogue and action. That is exactly what the synod's three major components underline: Communion, Participation and Mission. The Pope wants the members of the Church as individuals and as one body to keep communicating, dialoguing, and be in intimate relationship with each other. Through it the evangelizing activities of the Church will be done to the best of its ability fulfilling the mandate of Christ to reach to the ends of the world with God's own Good News.

Right at the beginning of the Church, St. Paul the founder of many Churches dreamt of a mature Church and he emphasized on many human qualities which are certainly God's own gift.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16 NRSV)

### **3. Characteristics of a Mature Church**

Our sense of ownership and sense of belonging emerge from Christ to whom we all belong—the Primacy of God. We belong to him and our belonging makes us become what he wants us to become. We strive to fit into his plan that he gives us and we recognize the power and grace he gives to us to achieve what we ought to achieve, which is the salvation of our souls and of the world.

Recognizing the primacy of Christ, our maturity depends on our cooperation with the Lord to fulfill the plan he has for us. We need to be working with him and with one another that he has given as our co-workers and fellow travelers on our journey. Our maturity depends on understanding each one's role and contributing according to our gifts and roles. Church can only mature when everyone is working together toward the same goal.

Maturity also depends on holding firmly to the truth, as there are many deceptive doctrines and practices that lead to falsehood which corrupts and weakens the body of Christ. We need to stand by the truth and act according to the truth. This will make the body of Christ

mature. In the post-modern times there are numerous challenges rising through varied understanding of Christian doctrines and long-held Church's traditions. It is only through communion, dialogue and sincere wish to understand each other we can solve many of them, if not all of them.

The Synodal process, the discussions, participation and consolidation of the responses of the various stakeholders can be of great help in the maturation of the Church in Eastern Africa. The themes for discussion - Communion, Participation and Mission - are ideal for discernment and personal evaluation of our life of faith and life. By and large the individual churches in the East African countries have been relying on the work of missionaries and the funds they brought to the churches. In the last few decades with the slow weaning of activities by expatriate missionaries many missions have been inactive and find it difficult to manage various activities. This is certainly an expression of immaturity of the Churches.

The synod process can easily expose this challenge. It should make the laity more responsible to the growth of the Church. The Synod on Synodality can make the laity realize that the Church belongs to them and they are the protagonists of the Church.

One way of making the Church mature is to find more and more local resources that are available within the local Churches. "Resources" does not just mean financial means, but also vocations, and the contribution of the laity through their expertise and involvement at various levels of the Church. This could be very good for the rural dioceses of East African countries that often lag behind in various aspects of growth. Let the Synodal process make everyone realize that all the Baptized matter in the Church and all can make a contribution to the Church for the integral growth of the Church, which is the true maturity of the Church.

As in any organization, it is important that each member should be given the right roles according to one's ability and grace. The failure of one member to contribute or deviation according to his or her own whims and fancies is sure to lead both the individual or the whole

organization to fail or become weak. In the same way, members of the Church need to understand that the common goal of the mission is beyond any individual's own desires and yearnings. This calls for sincere discernment of the spirit and humility in submitting oneself with the thought of common goal in mind.

Communion helps us to set our goals beyond our self-interest, it helps us to listen more and talk less—that is giving importance to others rather than yourself, Communion helps us to have self-control which keeps in check our thoughts, emotions and temper. Communion helps us to avoid destructive criticisms and thoughts of envy and dissention.

Participation helps us to be persistent, that is, keeping temperance and perseverance. It also helps us to keep our focus on our goal which is Christ and his Church. Good participation helps us to cooperate and respect the opinions and roles of other fellow travelers on our journey. Mature participation helps us to make sacrifices for common good and rejoices in the success of others as our own success and share in the joys and sorrows of every individual.

Mission is given to the community and the body of believers. Each one of us is given the call to be responsible for the mission, but it is fulfilled as a body of believers.

Hence, the three invitations of the Synod – Communion, Participation and Mission - are geared to making the Church mature, which is a Synodal Church. The invitation is made to us as individuals and as a community. The synodal process of dialogue, discussing together and contributing as one body as small Christian communities, parishes, institutions, dioceses, episcopal confreres, nations and as continents will certainly help our Church to mature. When the body of the Church matures, the individual members, the faithful will surely mature as good Christians and good citizens of the world.

## Synodality: Expression of the Ecclesiology of Communion

*Kambale Jean-Louis Malyabwana*

### Introduction

The engagement with synodality in the Roman Catholic Church considers how the Church must grow in synodality, by journeying together as the people of God. The claim by Pope Francis that synodality is a constitutive element of the Church, means that this shared pilgrimage is the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. This gift calls on the Church to fulfill its mission through discernment of the *Sensus fidelium* by developing synodal methodologies, and receiving ecumenical gifts.<sup>1</sup> The *sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between an *Ecclesia docens* and an *Ecclesia discens*, since the flock likewise has an instinctive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church.<sup>2</sup>

His holiness Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme decisive for its life and mission: “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”<sup>3</sup> This journey which follows in the wake of the Church’s renewal proposed by the Second Vatican Council is both a gift received and a task to be achieved by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made. The Church will be able to learn through her experience and this will help her to live in communion, to achieve greater participation, and open herself to mission.

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<sup>1</sup> Amanda C. Osheim, “Stepping toward a Synodal Church”. *Theological Studies* 2019, Vol. 80, No.2, 370.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*”: to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s world, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2013), no.119.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Preparatory Document on the Synod, no.1.

## **Section One:**

### **The Understanding the Concept of Synodality**

#### **1.1 The Background of the Synod**

It is precisely this path of Synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium. In his address at the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops by St Paul VI, Pope Francis stressed that synodality is an essential dimension of the Church in the sense that what the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word “synod.”<sup>4</sup>

The introduction indicates the etymological and conceptual data required for a preliminary clarification of the content and use of the word “synodality”. It puts into context what a momentous and new teaching the Magisterium has offered us on this subject in the wake of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>5</sup> The establishment of the synod of bishops by Pope Paul VI, the experience of collegiality and collaboration of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the wake of the Second Vatican Council II led many council fathers to call for more regular means of episcopal participation in the universal governance of the Church. The synod of bishops was a response by the Pope to create a permanent ecclesial structure to institutionalize the need for and importance of making ever greater use of the bishops to assist in providing for the good of the universal Church.<sup>6</sup>

#### **1.2 The Aims of the Synod**

An objective of great importance for the quality of ecclesial life and for accomplishing the mission of evangelization, is to ensure that all the Christians participate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation in the life of the Church. The mention of this objective which manifests synodality as the form, the style, and the structure of the Church underlines that the

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<sup>4</sup> ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no.1.

<sup>5</sup> ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no.2

<sup>6</sup> Amanda C. Osheim, *Stepping toward a Synodal Church*, Theological Studies Vol. 80. N.2. 2019. 371.

first objective is to recall how the Spirit has guided the Church's journey through history. Today, the same Spirit calls Christians to be witnesses of God's love. The second is to live a participative and inclusive ecclesial process that offers everyone especially those who for various reasons find themselves on the margins of the Church the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard in order to contribute to the edification of the People of God. And the third is to recognize and appreciate the wealth and the variety of the gifts and charisms that the Spirit liberally bestows for the good of the community and the benefit of the entire human family.<sup>7</sup>

Pope Francis' vision of synodality find its roots theologically speaking in the presence of the Holy Spirit within the Church. Rather than making divisions in the Church, divisions between those empowered to teach and those rendered obedient to teaching, the truth is that through the Spirit all the Church members are both learners and teachers.<sup>8</sup>

### **1.3 The process of the Synod**

The Synod of Bishops is the point of convergence of this listening process conducted at every level of the Church's life. The Synod process begins by listening to the people of God, who "shares also in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly office", according to a principle well known to the Church of the first millennium: "*Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet*" which translates, "What touches all must be approved by all".

The synodal process continues by listening to the pastors. Through the Synod Fathers, the bishops act as authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church, which they need to discern carefully in the changing currents of public opinion. On the eve of last year's Synod, Pope Francis stated that we ask for the Synod Fathers from the Holy Spirit first of all the gift of listening: to listen to God, so that with him they may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until they are in harmony with the will of God.

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<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, Preparatory Document on the Synod, no.2.

<sup>8</sup> Amanda C. Osheim, Stepping toward A Synodal Church. Theol. Studies. Vol. 80. No.2. 2019. 372.



The synod process culminates in listening to the Bishop of Rome, who is called to speak as “pastor and teacher of all Christians”, not on the basis of his personal convictions but as the supreme witness to the *fides totius Ecclesiae*, “the guarantor of the obedience and the conformity of the Church to the will of God, to the Gospel of Christ, and to the Tradition of the Church”.

*Synodality*, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself. If we understand, as Saint John Chrysostom says, that Church and Synod are synonymous, inasmuch as the Church is nothing other than the “journeying together” of God’s flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord, then we understand that, within the Church, no one can be raised up higher than others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person lowers himself or herself, so as to serve his brothers and sisters along the way.<sup>9</sup>

## Section Two:

### The Synodality in the Church: Communion – Participation - Mission

#### 2.1 The Synod, the way of the Church

The Pastoral Constitution “*Gaudium et Spes*” in its first article on the Church in the modern world puts it clearly:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.<sup>10</sup>

*Gaudium et Spes* articulates the spirit of the Second Vatican, namely, that of reform and renewal. The Second Vatican Council awakened the Church by urging it to come out of the

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=11053>, accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021.

<sup>10</sup> The Documents of the Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution “*Gaudium et Spes*”, on the Church in the Modern World, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2013), no.1.

sacristy and go to meet the world. The Second Vatican Council's ecclesiology of communion and inclusion finds its fulfilment in the will of God, the salvation of all (1Tim 2:4).

This inclusive pastoral approach has been promoted by his holiness Pope Francis and the spirit of the Synod is to journey together toward the same goal. For Pope Francis all the human persons have the right to be listened to. For example, he has given a special attention to those living with the sexual deviations (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender).

In his pastoral approach, Pope Francis calls for Catholics to contemplate Jesus Christ who was sent to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to recover the sight of the blind, and to announce the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18). The second suggestion is to meditate on the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). By meditating upon these scripture texts, the Church will really incarnate the servanthood model of Christ who in his humility set an example for his disciples by washing their feet (Jn 13:1-17) and urging them to do the same to their fellow (Jn 13:15).

The method favoured by the Synod is the culture of listening to everyone, an open minded listening. This method was highlighted by Pope Francis at his meeting with the peoples of the Amazon Basin in Puerto Maldonado when he said: "I wanted to come to visit you and listen to you, so that we can stand together, in the heart of the Church, and share your challenges and reaffirm with you a heartfelt option for the defense of life, the defense of the earth, and the defense of cultures."<sup>11</sup> In this reciprocal listening, the *sensus fidei* of the people is nourished and strengthened, and its ecclesial essence flourishes. This encounter-dialogue echoes the statement in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: "We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing."<sup>12</sup>

The synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening is more than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening from which everyone has something to learn. The

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<sup>11</sup> Pan Amazon, no.11.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, "*Evangelium Gaudium*", no.171.

Christian faithful, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome, listen to each other, and all listen to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth (*Jn 14:17*), in order to know what he says to the Churches (*Rev 2:7*).<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2 The Participation in the Synod

The link between the particular churches and the Universal Church is vitally important, and for an adequate lay participation in the ecclesial life, the lay faithful absolutely need a clear and precise vision of the particular Church with its primordial bond of unity to the universal Church.

The particular church does not originate from a kind of fragmentation of the universal Church, nor does the universal Church result from a simple amalgamation of the particular local churches. This means that an individual Church is not just an administrative district of the whole Church, rather it has a unique relationship to the universal Church, one based on the nature of the Church and her essential difference from natural societies. In the local Church the whole Church becomes tangible.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2.1 The Participation of the Faithful in the Life of the Church

Despite the distinction in essence and not only in degree, between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood, they are nonetheless interrelated; both of them in their own special way are a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people.

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<sup>13</sup> Amanda C. Osheim, *Stepping toward a Synodal Church*, Theological Studies, Vol. 80, no.2, p.371.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Eme. Benedict XVI), *The Primacy and the Episcopate*, (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1962), 23.

The faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.2.2 *The Mission of the Christian Faithful in the Church*

The Decree on the missionary activity of the Church “*Ad Gentes*” asserts that the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.<sup>16</sup>

The laity participate in the very mission of the Church by their daily commitment as they strive for the perfection of charity in the world. Since the mission of the Church continues in the course of history the mission of Christ himself, who was sent to preach the Gospel to the poor, the Church, encouraged by the Holy Spirit, must walk along the same path on which Christ walked, a path of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice to the death, because from death he came forth as a victor as a result of his resurrection. For this purpose, all Christians are to walk with hope amidst their many trials and sufferings as they fill up the sufferings of Christ for his body which is the Church (Col. 1:24), for the blood of Christians is like a seed.<sup>17</sup>

The laity fulfill the mission of the Church in the world especially by conforming their lives to their faith so that they become the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Mt 5:13-14). By practicing honesty in all their dealings, they attract all to the love of the true and the good and finally to the Church and to Christ. They fulfill their mission also by fraternal charity which presses them to share in the lives, the labors, the sorrows, and aspirations of their brothers and sisters with the result that the hearts of all those around them are quietly prepared for the workings of saving grace. Another requisite for the accomplishment of their task is a full consciousness of their role in building up society whereby they strive to perform their domestic,

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<sup>15</sup> *LG*, no.10.

<sup>16</sup> *AG*, no.2.

<sup>17</sup> *AG*, no.5.

social, and professional duties with such Christian generosity that their manner of acting should gradually penetrate the whole world of life and labor.<sup>18</sup>

### 2.2.1 The Local Level

The local church fosters the indispensable participation of the lay faithful in the life of the Church not only by encouraging them to exercise their tasks and charisms, but also in many other ways. Such participation finds its first and necessary expression in the life and mission of the particular church, that is, the diocese in which the Church of Christ, faithful to the qualifications of the Nicene-Constantinople creed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, is truly present and at work.<sup>19</sup>

The clear distinction between the universal Church and the particular church reveals a real and essential and constant bond that unites both of them and this is why the universal Church exists and is manifest in the particular churches. It is for this reason that the Council declares that the particular churches are constituted after the model of the universal Church. It is in and from these particular churches that the One and Unique Catholic Church comes into being<sup>20</sup>

### 2.2.2 The Universal Level

The Church is very aware and mindful of its catholicity that must bring together all the nations for that king to whom they were given as an inheritance and to whose city they bring gifts and offerings. This characteristic of universality that adorns the people of God is a gift from the Lord Himself. And it is for this reason the Catholic Church strives constantly and with much effort to bring all humanity and all its possessions back to the source that is Christ, with Him as its head and united in His Spirit. It is by the virtue of this catholicity that each individual member contributes through his/her special gifts to the good of the other and of the whole

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<sup>18</sup> AA, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no.13.

<sup>19</sup> Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “*Christifideles Laici*”: on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2011), no.25.

<sup>20</sup> John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no.25.

Church. Through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.2.3 Communion, synodality, collegiality

Although synodality is not explicitly found as a term in the teaching of Vatican II, it is fair to say that synodality was at the heart of the work of renewal the Council encouraged. Collegiality is one of the principal pillars of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. The debate on collegiality was not a quarrel about the division of power in the Church between the pope and the bishops, rather it was ordered to the real service of the Church, in the first place, the worship.<sup>22</sup>

In this ecclesiological context, synodality is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being in communion when all her members journey together, and gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission.<sup>23</sup> Collegiality is the specific form in which ecclesial synodality is manifested and made real through the ministry of Bishops on the level of communion of the local Churches in a region, and on the level of communion of all the Churches in the universal Church. An authentic manifestation of synodality naturally entails the exercise of the collegial ministry of the bishops.<sup>24</sup>

The argument of Ormond Rush is that Pope Francis has used synodality by extending its use in a broader way than the Second Vatican Council stated, but in a manner consistent with the Council's theological principles. He puts it: "Synodality is much more an element of its intention to balance papal primacy with episcopal collegiality by calling for more dialogical and

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<sup>21</sup> LG, no.13.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, Pope (emeritus) Benedict VI, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 21.

<sup>23</sup> ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no.6.

<sup>24</sup> ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no.7.

collaborative structures between the Pope and the episcopal college) than it is a promotion of an upward direction in the teaching, sanctifying, and governing aspects of the Catholic Church.”<sup>25</sup>

### Section Three:

#### The Reception of the Synod

#### 3.1 Synodality, Expression of the Ecclesiology of Communion

If Synodality is a new direction resulting from the Second Vatican Council, its fruit is the renewal promised by Second Vatican Council in its promotion of ecclesial communion, and episcopal collegiality. Thinking and acting synodally have become rich and precious experiences. There is still a long way to go in the direction mapped out by the Council. In fact, today there is an urgent need to find an appropriate form for a synodal Church. Although the concept is widely shared and has been put into practice in positive ways, there is still the need of clear theological principles and decisive pastoral orientations.<sup>26</sup>

Hence the new threshold that Pope Francis invites us to cross following the initiatives the Second Vatican Council and those of his predecessors. Pope Francis insists that synodality describes the shape of the Church that emerged from the Gospel of Jesus, which is called to become incarnate today, in creative fidelity to Tradition.<sup>27</sup>

Following the teaching of *Lumen Gentium*, Pope Francis remarks that synodality offers us the most appropriate framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself and that, based on the doctrine of the *sensus fidei fidelium*, all members of the Church are agents of evangelisation. Consequently, making a synodal Church a reality is an indispensable precondition for a new missionary energy that will involve the entire People of God.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Amanda C. Osheim, “Stepping toward a Synodal Church”. *Theological Studies* 80, 2 (2019): 370-392.

<sup>26</sup> ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no.8.

<sup>27</sup> ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no.9.

<sup>28</sup> ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no.9.

### 3.2 Synodality and Discernment

In the past the ministry of discernment was reserved to the bishops for discerning the faith of the local church, but discernment is also essential for a synodal Church. As Pope Francis puts it, far from being limited to the bishops, discernment is also the task of all the faithful (*sensus fidelium*). It is through discernment that the Church's Tradition expressed through the sense of the faithful is received and recognized. This discernment allows the Church to journey together as the people of God who live out their faith in diverse cultural, political, social, and historical contexts.<sup>29</sup> In the synodal Church discernment is a synodal practice for it is a practice of discipleship, a way of learning how Christ lives, and calls forth believers and their communities, thereby making them the faithful pilgrim people of God.

The spirituality of discernment is very crucial in the synodal Church for without it the synodal Church will lack an essential compass. Receiving and responding to the self-communication of God in Christ that is at the heart of discernment, is what a synodal Church must do in order to remain faithful to God as it moves through histories and cultures.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.3 Synodality and Ecumenism

Besides, the ecumenism understood as the way of the Church<sup>31</sup>, synodality is at the heart of the ecumenical commitment of Christians, because it represents an invitation to walk together on the path towards full communion and because when it is understood correctly, it offers a way of understanding and experiencing the Church where legitimate differences find room in the logic of a reciprocal exchange of gifts in the light of truth.<sup>32</sup>

The decree, “*Unitatis Redintegratio*”, on ecumenism and the unity of Christians emphasizes that the restoration of unity among all Christians was one of the principal concerns

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<sup>29</sup> Amanda C. Osheim. Stepping toward a Synodal Church. Theol. Studies. No.2. 2019. 374.

<sup>30</sup> Amanda C. Osheim. Stepping toward a Synodal Church. Theol. Studies. No.2. 2019. 375.

<sup>31</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*: on Commitment to Ecumenism, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), no.7.

<sup>32</sup> ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no.9.



of the Second Vatican Council. The will of our Lord Jesus Christ was to found one Church and only one Church, despite the many different Christian churches around today, as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ. The members of the various Christian denominations all profess to be followers of the Lord though they differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided.<sup>33</sup> The revelation of God's plan for us is that the Father has sent into the world His only-begotten Son, so that, being made man (Jn 1:14), he might by his death give new life to the entire human race and unify it. Before offering himself up as a spotless victim upon the altar of the cross, Christ prayed to His Father for all who believe in Him: "that they all may be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me"(Jn 17:21).<sup>34</sup>

The Church is described as God's flock; it is like a standard lifted high for the nations to see. The Church serves all mankind through the Gospel of peace as it makes its pilgrim way in hope toward the goal of the heavenly fatherland above. This is the sacred mystery of the unity of the Church, in Christ and through Christ, and the Holy Spirit energizes its various functions. It is a mystery that finds its highest fulfilment and source in the unity of the Persons of the Trinity; the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, one God.<sup>35</sup>

The Church's commitment to ecumenism asserts that every renewal in the Church is essentially grounded in an increase of fidelity to her own calling. This is the foundation of the movement toward unity. The Church's renewal has notable ecumenical importance; in fact, already in various spheres of the life of the Church this renewal is taking place.<sup>36</sup>

### **3.4 Ecclesial commitment to Inter-religious dialogue**

The ecclesial commitment to those who have not yet received the Gospel is linked in various ways to the vocation of the people of God. In the first place the Church must not forget

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<sup>33</sup> *UR*, no.1.

<sup>34</sup> *UR*, no.2.

<sup>35</sup> *UR*, no.3.

<sup>36</sup> *UR*, no.6.

the people to whom the former testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. Therefore, the plan of salvation must include those who acknowledge the Creator. First among these are the Muslims, who profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and along with us adore the one and merciful God. This is the God who on the last day will judge the whole of humankind including those who without fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God, and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.<sup>37</sup> The theologian Karl Rahner describes this group of believers as the “unknown Christians”.

## Conclusion

The essence of synodality dictates that in order to journey together the people of God must come together to identify and commit themselves to practices, structures and methodologies which allow for mutual listening, discernment, and decision making.

The solemn call to all the Catholics to learn to be a more synodal Church, the expectation is that this will take time, and there will be mistakes and real steps forward as well. The synodal Church requires time for the people of God to be with one another in prayer and dialogue, to attend to the Spirit’s prompting to speak and to listen, to seek the truth and reconciliation, to build mutuality and trust. The reason for convoking a synod is not simply because synod is an event, a certain methodology or structure, but it a way of being transformed together as Church.

The most essential element to underline is that synodality is a resource for the *sensus fidelium* through the attentiveness to each person who shares in the common Christian life and contributes to a living tradition and the Church’s story of salvation. The importance of synodality is based on the mutual care and strength of its members. The people of God do not journey for themselves alone, and neither does synodality bear fruit only within the Church. The synodality creates a church that turns outward. Through synodal practices and structures, the church that

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<sup>37</sup> LG, no.16

discerns how to live faithfully in the midst of particular contexts, a necessary part not only of the unity, catholicity, and holiness of the Church, but also of learning how to live out its apostolic call to encounter others and share the Gospel. The grace of journeying together as the people of God does not remove the difficulties of mission, rather it provides the hope which comes from being in harmony with the presence of the Holy Spirit who abides with the Church on its pilgrimage.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Amanda C. Osheim, “Stepping toward a Synodal Church” in *Theological Studies* 2 (2019): 392.

# **Synodal Church: Vocation, Communion, Participation and Mission**

*Corino Daniel Bartolomeu SDB*

## **1.0 Introduction**

We know that the mandate of Christ to his disciples in Matthew 28:19 signified the inclusion and universality of all the baptized. Saint Paul describes how the outpouring of Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1-20) gave the disciples different gifts which helped them to fulfil their mission. Each member of the Christian community is given gifts of the Spirit for the good for the body of Christ, the Church. These gifts of the Holy Spirit are gathered together in the Church, where members serve and listen to one another, share the same love, and are of one accord and of one mind. They do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility respect others, and without looking to own interests, look instead to the interests of others and have the same mind in Christ Jesus (Phil 2,2-7). This way of relating, of sharing and working together as one body is called synodality. The journey of the entire people of God, their ways of being Church together, is meant to create places of encounter and mutual listening that incorporate the gifts of all the baptized. The purpose of the Church is to fulfil its mission. But we may ask ourselves what are the new ways to do this? Is it through synodality, collegiality or individuality? Is it necessary for the Church today to be synodal?

Thus, our task in this short paper is to try to give answers to the above questions and present the concept of synodality as a fundamental part of, or, way forward for the Church to fulfil her mission today. Hence, the first section we shall clarify some terms used, such as synod, synodality, communion and mission. In the second section we shall explore the foundation of the word “synodality” in the Sacred Scriptures and in Sacred Tradition. The third section seeks to find the theological basis of synodality. The last section presents the challenges facing synodality

and the forms necessary for the implementation of synodality, as well as a viable proposal for the fruitful mission of a synodal Church in today's world.

## 2.0 Conceptual Clarity

In this section we shall clarify some terms such as synod, synodality, and mission which are important to our work.

### 2.1 Synod

Synod denotes the periodic gatherings or ecclesial assemblies convoked at various levels (diocesan, provincial, regional, patriarchal or universal) to discern, with the light of the Word of God and by listening to the Holy Spirit, the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical, pastoral questions, and administrative matters that arise as time goes by.<sup>226</sup> Thus, this is a term that signifies togetherness and the communal life of the Church. It is an integral part of her (the Church's) very nature. Today the term synod is related to the term council with the same meaning, in the sense that it is used to describe the process of fraternal collaboration and discernment that bodies like the synod were created to express.<sup>227</sup>

### 2.2 Synodality

Synodality denotes the ordinary ways or styles of action which qualify the live-working of the mission of the Church, and express her nature as the people of God journeying together and gathering as member summoned by the Lord Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. This involves ways of inclusivity, living communion, and a collective "we" in prayer, liturgy and discernment for the sake of the mission.

The concept of synodality as a fundamental feature of the Church is also related to the concept of *Sensus Fidei* ("All"), communion ("One") and collegiality("Some"). In the relation to

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<sup>226</sup> International Theological Commission, 'Synodality in the life and mission of the Church,'4, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html).

<sup>227</sup> International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission, "Walking Together: Learning to Be the Church, Local, Regional, Universal" (21 May 2018), available at: [ARCICIII-Agreed-Statement-Walking-Together-21-May-2018\\_3.pdf](#)

the *Sensus Fidei*, synodality denotes the understanding that all the faithful believers who are incorporated into the Mystical body of Christ through baptism participate in elaborating Christian truth. Thus, all the faithful through the gifts of the Spirit partake in the truth of the Church. In reference to ecclesiology, synodality denotes the concept of the people of God. It “stresses the common dignity and mission of all the baptized, in exercising the diversity and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries.”<sup>228</sup> As communion (One), synodality stresses the importance of being part of the one body of Christ, with the same mission. All the baptized participate in the *tria munera* of Christ, as priest, prophet and king. Finally, collegiality (Some) signifies that a few members of the people of God are called to a specific mission of leading the Church through the administration of the sacraments.

### 2.3 Mission

Mission refers to the Church’s witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. The synodal process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel especially to those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical and existential peripheries of our world.<sup>229</sup>

## 3.0 Synodality in Scripture and Tradition

In this section we are going to present images from the Sacred Scripture and from the Sacred Tradition which prefigure the synodal life of the Church

### 3.1 Synodality in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, we find some expressions from the history of the people of Israel which prefigure synodality. This is because Israel was seen as a noble olive tree onto which the Gentiles as wild shoots, would be grafted (Rom 11, 17-24, 1 Kgs 8, 41-43).<sup>230</sup> We can understand

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<sup>228</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion* 1 (28 May 1992).

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 120: AAS 105 (2013): 1070.

<sup>230</sup> Johan Auer, *The Church: The Universal Sacrament of Salvation*, ed. Hugh M. Riley, Trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 26.

Christians as Children of Abraham,<sup>231</sup> as Saint Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians (Gal 3,7). Two major concepts can be seen as types of synodality: “covenant” and “people of God”. The idea of the “covenant” is first found in the covenant of God with Noah (Gen 9, 1-17), and then with Abraham (Gen 15), Jacob (Gen 28) and Moses and the entire people of Israel (Exodus 24). While the term “people of God” is an expression that identifies the Israelites as the chosen nation in the Old Testament period.<sup>232</sup> Although these two concepts are inwardly united, the idea of covenant came first because it was through the covenant that the twelve tribes became a people, the people of God, and the covenant which the Lord made with Israel contained an element of mutuality like every human covenant”<sup>233</sup> such as the analogical marriage covenant of Hosea (Hos 1–3). This means that God wants to be the Lord of this people, their protector, a warrior and a helper, and the people have to be his own, as Yahweh’s people, if all the laws and promises are to be fulfilled.

One partner in the covenant is God and the other is the people. So, Israel understood herself as the fulfillment of a promise which had been given to Abraham, the forefather of the people<sup>234</sup>: “I will make of you a great people ... In you all the generations of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12, 1-4; 17, 1-8). Hence, the primordial history of Israel’s election, by the Lord, is and remains the foundation of the national history of Israel. Moses summarizes it well in Deuteronomy 6, 5; 7, 6-10. This election is the foundation of Israel’s creed (Deut 26,5-10).

In the Old Testament, therefore, the synodal life of the Church is prefigured by the “the covenantal life of the people of Israel, a context in which God is the Lord and the people are his own possession., and this same God led his people throughout the history in the person of “Kings, Judges, Prophets.”<sup>235</sup> Thus, the Israelites and their national history, with their

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<sup>231</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>232</sup> Cfr. Johan Auer, *The Church: The Universal Sacrament of Salvation*, ed. Hugh M. Riley, Trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 26.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibidem.* 26

<sup>234</sup> Cfr. Johan Auer, *The Church: The Universal Sacrament of Salvation.* 28

<sup>235</sup> *Ibidem.* 28.

eschatological self-understanding, gives us a very good preliminary sketch of the reality which we encounter *mutatis mutandis*, in the Church of the New Testament.”<sup>236</sup>

### 3.2 Synodality in the New Testament

The Old Testament twin concepts of synodality (Covenant and people of God) continue to appear in the New Testament but at a different level of understanding. The concept of “covenant” becomes the “new covenant”, which is no longer built on the law of circumcision, but the covenant established by Christ the Son of God crucified.<sup>237</sup>

The new covenant made the new people of God (cf. Rom 4,17; Gal 4, 26-28), the community of the true descendants of Abraham. It was built upon the twelve new patriarchs, the twelve apostles, who became the new forefathers of the people of God in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2, 1-14). The progenitor of this new people of God is Christ, who remains the head of his mystical body, and he is present in this world, until the end of time as the “exalted Lord”, the source of the life of each and every Christian (Matt 28,20). For this reason, Christ is the ever living “mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 9,15) and in Christ everything which belongs to him has become “a new creation” (Gal 6, 15; 2Cor 5, 17).<sup>238</sup> More than ever, in this new community the law of perfect freedom (Jas 1, 25) is expressed by of love of its members for one another (John 4,7-16).

The foundation of this new covenant is the “paschal sacrifice”, as Saint Paul writes in 1Cor 11, 25 that, “by the cup of the new covenant in the blood... which must be proclaimed in the death of the Lord until he comes, every time when we drink of it.”

However, the concept of people of God is replaced in Paul’s writings as the Church of God (*Ekklesia tou Theou*), above all the Christian community of Jerusalem (Acts 20, 28). Although the images of covenant and people of God express the nature of the Church in the New

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<sup>236</sup> *Ibidem*.28.

<sup>237</sup> Johan Auer, *The Church: The Universal Sacrament of Salvation*. 30-31.

<sup>238</sup> Cfr. Johan Auer, *The Church: The Universal Sacrament of Salvation*. 31.



Testament, there are other important images of the Church and her synodal life, such as those drawn from pastoral life, agriculture, buildings and construction, family and married life.<sup>239</sup>

From a pastoral perspective, we find the image of shepherd and flock, in which Jesus is the true shepherd who entrusts his mission to the apostles as the new shepherd of his flock which is the Church (Matt 10, 1-42; Luke 15, 47, John 10, 11-18). From an agricultural background we find parables about the “reign of God” described as the field into which the sower sows his seed (Matt 13, 1-23). The imagery of a building is found in the writings of Saint Paul who calls the Church “the building of God” (1Cor 3,9), “the house of God”, “the temple of God” (1 Tim 3,15) in which Christ is the cornerstone, the foundation that is based on the ground plan of construction (I Peter 2, 7). The apostles and the prophets are foundation stones too, because they are the ones who Christ chose to lead the people to God. Using the imagery of family and married life, Saint Paul calls the Church “the family of God” where God lives and is the dwelling place of God and his Spirit. (1Cor 3,16; Eph 2, 19-22).

The most important image of the Church used in the New Testament scriptures is the image of the Body of Christ which has many members and different charisms, and of which Christ is the head (1Cor 12, 12-31). This image expresses clearly the synodal life of the Church, as “one” body in which “some” are chosen to lead the Church through their ministerial or sacramental service, but “all” participate in the *tria munera* of Christ or in the mission of Christ, as prophets, kings and priests. In the pastoral epistles of Paul we find three important ecclesiological characteristics related to the elements described above: the Church born out of the sacrifice of Christ and is his property (Tt 2:14); The Church is like a family or a house (1 Tm 3:5) and it takes the place of Israel i.e., the salvific event of Israel is the event of the Church. And in the Pastoral Letters we find the new ecclesiological structure: *Presbiteroi* (Tt 1:5), *Episcopoi*

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<sup>239</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, 21 November, 1964,” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), 6.

(1 Tm 3:1-7, Tt 1:5.7), *Diakonoï* (1 Tm 3:8-13). It is very clear that through developments in the New Testament the foundations of the synodal life of the Church are laid, namely, the communion brought by Christ as the head of his Body, the Church. Every member of the Body of Christ plays an active part, even if with different roles. This means that all are equally responsible for the life and mission of the community and all are called to work in accordance with the law of freedom and mutual solidarity in respect of their specific ministries and charisms, Everyone is to find his or her energy in the one Lord (1 Cor 15,45).

### **3.3 Synodality in the Sacred Tradition**

Throughout the history, the Church passed through many challenges and transformation but without ever losing her identity which is that of a community of faith assembled in the name of Jesus the Lord and working for the salvation of all, by being a universal sacrament of salvation.

The synodal life of the Church is extensive matters, so for this reason we are going to present some periods which we think that can express in few words how the Church and its practice of collegiality were experienced from the Pentecost up to our own time, after Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

#### *3.3.1 From Pentecost to the Church Fathers*

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit saw the birth of the Church and she grew through her preaching and the witness of the life of the apostles who became the guides of the diverse communities of the believers.

In this era of the history of the Church, its synodal life was experienced as the “universal Church” and the “local Churches”, by the unity in diversity within the liturgical rites, and by communion that existed between the hierarchy and the lay faithful in the proclamation of the gospel and in the defense of faith. This is visible from the epistles of Ignatius of Antioch “one Church was first of all the local assembly of the faithful, grouped around the bishop united with

his presbyterium, organized by the service of the deacons, and it is especially the eucharistic assembly which manifest this.”<sup>240</sup> Thus, in this era the concept of synodality is understood as unity in diversity within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

### *3.3.2 From the Church Fathers to Middle Ages*

In this period the Church is marked by the challenges of persecutions and heresies, and a new vision of the Church emerged. Instead of a synodal Church marked by oneness, the Church divides into two Churches, East and West. The image of the Church as holy breaks in two, as it were: one is quite spiritual and interior, and stresses only the communion of grace in charity and escapes into the invisible, on the glorious pretext of being a pure object of faith; the other is firmly constructed on authority and strength.<sup>241</sup> Persecution brought the first big problem: the relationship between the Church and the world, together with many heresies, such as Gnosticism, Donatism, and also some schisms, which broke up the unity among of the leaders of the Church. In this era the concept of synodality was strongly evident through the work of the ecumenical councils, which brought an image of unity to the Church.

### *3.3.3 After Middle Ages to the Reformation*

In this era, the Church experienced the challenges of the secularization of its authority in the West and also the problems of practical anticlericalism and religious individualism. Moreover, the papacy and the episcopate were enslaved by the nobles and wealthy families, creating the Church of princes. This brought about a decline in the Church’s life and mission. This led to the Protestant Reformation. Thee struggles the Church faced are also evident in the number of popes and councils during this period. There were also much disagreement the collegial authority and power of the whole episcopate, as well as the central authority of the Church. However, despite these struggles, some of the local Churches maintained their unity and

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<sup>240</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Ephesios* IX, 2; F.X. Funk (ed.), *Patres apostolici* I, Tübingen, 1901, p. 220.

<sup>241</sup> Louis Bouyer, *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), 26.

their familiarity with the Roman Pontiff thereby keeping the synodal life of the Church alive in the western Church.

### 3.3.4 From Reformation to Vatican II

The reformation of Luther led to the creation of other Christian Churches in Europe. However, the synodal life of the western Church was kept alive with the Counter Reformation generated by Council of Trent, especially its defense against the Protestants.

The Second Vatican Council recovered the concept of communion and unity in diversity to strengthen the synodal life of the Church. This Council brought about the renewal of the Church which saw itself as the light of the modern world. The four dogmatic constitutions (*Lumen gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Dei verbum*, and *Sacrossatum Concilium*) helps us to understand the correct image of the Church as the body of Christ, the people of God on its pilgrim journey towards the heaven, as the bride of Christ and the mother of the faithful. The Council stressed the link between the local Churches and the Eucharistic celebration. It also recognized how the members of the Church make up the Body of Christ, with different charisms, but all participating in the same office of Christ as prophet, priest and king<sup>242</sup>.

## 4.0 Theological Basis of Synodality

The theological foundation of the synodal Church is the Trinitarian communion and the *tria munera* of Christ.<sup>243</sup> This means that the Church and her synodal life comes from the Trinity: The Father's universal saving plan, the Son's mission and the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work established the Church as a mystery, a divine work in human time, prepared from the very beginning of time.<sup>244</sup> Inasmuch as the Church is the icon of the Holy Trinity, she is also compared with the mystery of the Incarnate Word, in the dialectic of what is visible and invisible. At the same time the Church's communion, her oneness in a variety of local Churches

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<sup>242</sup> Cf. Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The battle for meaning* (Mahwah: NJ: Paulist Press, 2012), 38-112.

<sup>243</sup> Cf. Bruno Forte, *The Church Icon of the Trinity: A brief study*, 9.

<sup>244</sup> Bruno Forte, *The Church Icon of the Trinity: A brief study*, 10-11.

and charisms and ministries, reflects the Trinitarian communion and the three Christological offices.<sup>245</sup> Thus, the synodality of the Church is on the one hand, a journeying towards the Trinity meaning that the Church (as community, collegiality, a synod, a people of God, a body of Christ) is a Church of pilgrims always in need of reform (*Ecclesia semper reformanda*). in communion with the heavenly Church, the Church on earth is already being prepared.<sup>246</sup> On the other hand the Church is Christological in the sense that all the members of the Church participate in the three offices of Christ as king, prophet and priest, and also in the mission of the Church at their own level and status, either as the laity or clerics. Synodality is also rooted theologically in the activity of the Holy Spirit throughout the Church's history and also in Jesus' prayer to the God the Father that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. (John 17,21).

## **5.0 Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission**

In this section we present synodality as a fundamental aspect and an essential dimension of the Church.<sup>247</sup> This is what the Holy Spirit is asking of the holy Church today.<sup>248</sup> So we shall present ways of creating a synodal Church for today as well as some challenges of implementing Synodality today.

### **5.1 From Collegiality to Synodality**

Collegiality is the participation of bishops in the government of the Roman Catholic Church in union with the pope.<sup>249</sup> Collegiality expresses something of the synodality to be found in the hierarchical structures of the Church, According to Pope Francis, collegiality brings everyone together, not just the authorities, but everyone, (the laity, priests, bishops, and

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<sup>245</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>246</sup> Cfr. Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, 21 November, 1964," in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), Chapters VII and VIII.

<sup>247</sup> Francis, *Ceremony Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015, AAS 107 (2015) 1139.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>249</sup> *Ibidem*.

the pope) in sharing and learning from the gifts of the Spirit given to each member of the Body of Christ, in full communion.

The word synodality, comes from the word “synod” which is derived from the two Greek words, “*Syn*” which means ‘together, allied, together with, joined to’ and “*Hodos*”, which means ‘the road out’. The word “synod” therefore, ‘walking together’, being on the journey together.<sup>250</sup> Synodality calls for an encounter in faith among the same people of God, as a body in communion in order to relate, to interact with each other and to share information and experience. Thus, it is a search of unity in seeking for pastoral solutions to the needs of the Church.

Pope Francis described “Synodality” as “constitutive” of the Church, and also indicated that the hierarchical authority within the Church functions as an “inverted pyramid”, which means that the authority is a ministry exercised by those who stand beneath others as their servants.<sup>251</sup> Moreover, Pope Francis’ vision of synodality calls for a rethink from the hierarchy of the Church on the role of authority, listening and learning from others within the Church. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn: the faithful people, college of bishops, the pope, all listening to each other, and all listen to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (John 14, 17), in order to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2,7).<sup>252</sup>

Communion is one of the characteristics of synodality. This involves of bringing together all the members of the Church so that everyone is considered as important. The concept of communion in synodality brings together the reality of the *Sensus Fidelium*, and also the *congregatio Fidelium*. The term *Sensus Fidelium* literally means “the sense of the faithful”. This

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<sup>250</sup> Synod of bishops, *The Church in Africa: In the Service of the Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, (Rome: Urbanian University Press, 2012), 24.

<sup>251</sup> Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Ceremony commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops” (October 17, 2015), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html) (Accessed August 10, 2021).

<sup>252</sup> Francis, “Address commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary.” Francis is quoting *Evangeli Gaudium* 171.

concept of *sensus fidelium* expresses the Catholic Church's conviction that all believers (individually and as the entire Church) have a kind of sacred common sense, a shared spiritual instinct for the truth of the faith. However, the truth, refers to the personal capacity of the believer, within the communion of the Church, to discern the truth of faith.<sup>253</sup> The term *congregatio Fidelium* simply means the active participation of the whole People of God.<sup>254</sup> Thus, the combination of these two concepts *Sensus Fidelium* on one hand and *congregation Fidelium* on another hand, brings into full understanding, the new vision of a synodal Church expressed by Pope Francis. It brings together all the people of God in full communion: sharing, listening and walking together in participation in the kingly, priestly and prophetic mission of the Church. In the words of Ormond Rush," it is a new way of envisioning the Church *ad intra*, one which will increase the effectiveness of the Church's mission *ad extra*, or inverting the pyramid, from hierarchical structure to all embracing *communio* of *totus Christus* or full *koinonia* in the mission of Christ.<sup>255</sup>

## 5.2 Synodality, Discernment, Participation and Mission

Synodality has to do with the mission of the entire Church. It calls both the leadership of the Church and the lay faithful to a mutual responsibility for ecclesial discernment for the life and mission of the Church. In the words of Pope Francis, a synodal Church is a listening Church which begins by listening to the people of God, who also share in Christ's prophetic office.<sup>256</sup>

Two basic questions are: How does this "Journeying together" which takes place today on different levels, allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission

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<sup>253</sup> International Theological Commission, 'Sensus Fidei in the life of the Church,' 87-104, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20140610\\_sensus-fidei\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html).

<sup>254</sup> International Theological Commission, 'Synodality in the life and mission of the Church,' 35-36, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html).

<sup>255</sup> Cfr. Ormond Rush, 'Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium* in Synodal Church,' Theological Studies 78 (2017): 299-325, at 303.

<sup>256</sup> Massimo, Faggioli, "'Evangelii Gaudium' as an Act of Reception of Vatican II," in *Pope Francis and Future of Catholicism: Evangelii Gaudium and the Papal Agenda*, ed. Gerard Mannion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 38-54.

entrusted to her? And what steps does the Spirit invite the Church to take in order to grow as a Synodal Church?

Amanda Osheim has written about the importance of the spiritualities and structures of discernment in Church,<sup>257</sup> which concentrate on the task of the bishops in discerning the faith of the particular Church. She argues that discernment is fundamental for the synodal Church. This discernment is not limited to the bishops but is also the work of all the faithful, because it is through discernment that the Church's tradition is received and recognized. Moreover, this discernment is a way of journeying together for all the people of God who live out their faith in diverse cultural, political, social, and historical contexts.<sup>258</sup> Discernment, therefore, refers to ways of openness, learning, flexibility in receiving God's self-gift and consequently understanding and responding faithfully to God's revelation mediated in varied ways including the sense of the faithful. Such discernment for a synodal Church requires some practices such as the invocation of the Trinity, reconciliation, listening to the word of God, communion in humility, freedom and joy and seeking the edification of the Church which is her mission.<sup>259</sup> These practices help us learn to authentically receive God's revelation as part of the ecclesial community and include prayer, dialogue, and self-reflection.<sup>260</sup>

This kind of discernment means learning as disciples how Christ lives and calls forth believers and their communities, making them the faithful pilgrim people of God. This requires authentic consensus and honest sharing of the sense of the faith lived within diverse and intersecting contexts: geographical, historical, cultural, racial, political and economic in mutual

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<sup>257</sup> Amanda C. Osheim, *A Ministry of Discernment: The bishop and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2016).

<sup>258</sup> Cfr. Amanda C. Osheim, 'Stepping toward a Synodal Church,' *Theological Studies* 80 (2019): 370-392, at 374.

<sup>259</sup> International Theological Commission, 'Synodality in the life and mission of the Church,' 35-36, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html).

<sup>260</sup> Amanda C. Osheim, 'Stepping toward a Synodal Church,' *Theological Studies* 80 (2019): 370-392, at 374.



relationship.<sup>261</sup> Furthermore, for synodal deliberations or discernment to be fruitful, it is highly desirable that those engaged in them arrive at a position as close to consensus as possible.<sup>262</sup>

Participation calls for the involvement of all who belong to the Church – both Laity and clerics - to engage in the exercise of deep and respectful listening to one another. 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 making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will.<sup>263</sup>

Moreover, there are some attitudes required for the implementation and participation in the synodal process and the fulfilment of the mission of the disciples in the world of today. These include time for sharing, humility in listening, the courage to speak and dialogue, openness to conversion and change, discernment, the leaving behind of prejudices and stereotypes, the overcoming of the scourge of clericalism and negative ideologies. These attitudes will give rise to hope, lead to innovative open-mindedness, and encourage ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

Therefore, synodality in the life and mission of the Church of our time should include five elements: (1) The invocation of the Trinity, by a communion of prayer. (2) Reconciliation, (3) Listening to the word of God, (4) Communion achieved through active and glad participation of all the members, (5) Mission in which all are partakers in the royal, prophetic and priestly mission of Christ.<sup>264</sup>

## 6.0 Conclusion

Synodality might appear to be a new terminology in the Catholic Church, but it has always been around. Its roots are very evident in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council,

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<sup>261</sup>Cfr. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 51-60;81, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

<sup>262</sup> Peter John McGregor, 'Synodality and the Australian Plenary Council: Listening to and Looking at those who are Living in the Spirit,' *Irish Theological Quarterly* 86 (2020): 21-38, at 29

<sup>263</sup> Cfr. International Theological Commission, 'Synodality in the life and mission of the Church,' 68.

<sup>264</sup> Peter John McGregor, 'Synodality and the Australian Plenary Council, 34.

which called for the active participation of the whole people of God in the mission of Christ. This participation is theologically founded on the *tria munera* of Christ and the trinitarian communion. Thus, in the life and mission of the Church today, synodality has to find its place because it has been one of its characteristic since the post-Easter community as well as an essential element to the life of the entire people of God through the centuries.

Synodality encourages all the people of God, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, to take steps together, starting by mutual listening to each other. Synodality in the life and mission of the Church means always walking with others, taking equal strides, and promoting structures of communion and participation, in order to hear the Spirit who speaks and lives in all the faithful.<sup>265</sup>

Synodality calls for the culture of dialogue and listening, of proximity and of promoting a communion in the Church as well as to openness to the complementarity of differences, which brings closeness and a sense of being sent together. In addition, synodality calls for every Christian to train himself or herself in the art of relating with others, to be a witness, to open the doors and to build bridges with everyone, laity and clergy and to collaborate cordially in building together the kingdom of God in this world.

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<sup>265</sup> Simona Paolini, *The Responsibility of Leadership Between Autonomy and Obedience to The Constitutions*, UISG Bulletin, 162, 2017, 4.

## **Synodality in the History of the Church**

*Otieno Isaiah Mwango SDB*

### **Introduction**

Synodality enables the participation of all the people of God in the mission of the Church. It gives the Church its identity, namely, a Church whose mission is to serve rather than being served and this is the service that Christ commanded his apostles to give when He washed their feet in the upper room before the Passover meal and instructed each and every one of them to do the same. To be a servant is to work for the good of all. The mission of the Church is therefore not restricted just to the clergy, but requires both clergy and the laity working together. This is synodality. Pope Francis has continually reminded the Church that it is a process that involves the local churches in different ways while they make efforts that can create a style of communion and participation directed to the mission.

This article will describe the place of synodality in the life and mission of the Church from the time immemorial by tracing it from both Old and New Testament times, the apostolic age, the works of the Councils and the magisterial teachings of the Church, without forgetting the unique role Pope Francis has played from day one of his pontificate trying to make the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church realize that her mission requires a collaborative approach. Pope Francis has done by inaugurating the path towards the Synod on synodality.

### **1. Synodality in Scripture, in Tradition and in History**

The first question in the Catechism reads, “Why did God create me?” The answer is, “God created me to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him and to rejoice with Him in heaven forever and ever.” This question speaks volumes, it summarizes God’s divine purpose in creating man and woman. It is about the awareness of receiving a totally free and undeserved gift from God. It describes God’s relationship with humanity, the freedom of God’s gracious love given to

all human beings. This divine self-communication reveals the nature of God's plan of salvation for the whole human race. It is a call to union with God which is manifested in Jesus Christ, the light of the nations through whom God reconciled the whole world to himself.<sup>266</sup>

### **1.1 Old Testament Concept of Synodality**

The Old Testament reveals the relationship between God and man. In the book of Genesis God declares, "Let us make mankind, male and female in our own image and likeness and let them have dominion over all other creatures." Besides, men and women were called to live in a community where perfect harmony reigned between God and humankind, men and beasts. When God saw that it was not good for the man to live alone (Gen 2:18) he created for him a helpmate, to whom Adam gave the name Eve. The divine command: "You may eat indeed of all the trees in the garden. Nevertheless, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat, for on the day you eat of it you shall most surely die" (Gen 2:16-17). The original blessedness, was however violated when the first couple ate from the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:6). The woman succumbed to the temptation with which the serpent tested her. In turn, she tempted Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit. In this way, the first couple violated and transgressed the divine command and thus rejected the order of paradise. This was an act of self-assertion and rebellion against God. The consequences were that God cursed them, thereby establishing enmity between the offspring of the woman and that of the serpent (3:15). According to this admonition, the condemnation was to extend beyond the first two sinners to their descendants; the woman was punished by having to suffer pain when giving birth (Gen 3:16); the man was condemned to sweat when tilling the cursed soil for his daily bread (Gen 3:17-19). Due to this moral disorder, man and women were to return to the dust from which they were taken. This return is symbol for death (Gen 3:19). Humankind also suffered the pain of the loss of their intimacy with God, which was expressed both in the feeling of shame before him and their sense

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<sup>266</sup> Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 21 November 1964, 1.

of nakedness (Gen 3:10). However, God graciously granted the offspring of the woman an upper hand over the devil and the forces of evil. Yahweh solemnly foretells the victory through the son of another woman (Gen 3:15), who, through his death and resurrection, will reconcile the whole world to God.

After the fall, there are long series of 'deeds' through which Yahweh shows himself to be a gracious God. Yahweh reveals himself as a God of love and communion through the history of Israel.<sup>267</sup> Old Testament themes include election, salvation, the covenant, Israel's failure to respond to the covenant, and finally God's promise of a new covenant, which will operate as a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament economies of salvation. These above-mentioned themes are clearly perceived to be nothing but *the unfolding of a single history, or a single divine Plan, which is precisely a plan of grace and of love leading to eschatological communion with God*, to that extent we come into possession of a new hermeneutical key with which to unlock the ultimate meaning of the Old Testament as a whole.

#### *1.1.1 The Covenant as an Old Testament Prefiguration of Grace Synodality*

The study of comparative religions offers a picture of the nations around Israel that is basically polytheistic, and far more complex than normally assumed. In many cases at least, what we encounter are nature-gods or cosmic divinities. In Egypt, the sun-god Re and the vegetation goddess Osiris were connected with the cycle of seasons. They were subject to decay and death: as such they stood in need of a seasonal return to life. The Babylonian-Assyrian religion involved the worship of nature, and most of the gods were personified natural forces, especially the forces of fertility. Canaanite religion was much illuminated by the discovery of the mythological tablets of Ugarit. There were a number of Baals, but the high Baal was Hadad. As the storm-god who ruled the weather, Hadad was the giver of fertility. The myth of the death

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<sup>267</sup>Class notes compiled by Nicolas Foligacco IMC, *Theological Anthropology II: Grace and Original Sin*, (Nairobi: Classnote Tangaza College, 2011).

and resurrection of Baal coincided with the death of life (winter) and the return of fertility (springtime), which was ensured by the ritual enactment of the myth.

If these Middle-Eastern nations are compared with Israel, the essential differences between their religions comes to light. When we say that Yahweh is the God of history, we mean that while the surrounding divinities were gods of nature, Israel's God was a *God of people*. History is human history: a God of history is a God of men and women, a God of families and clans, a God of nations. Even though he is the creator of the whole world and cares for it, what is uppermost among his concerns is the human being, to the point of wanting to be named after it. By binding himself to one particular nation, his name becomes 'the God of Israel.' By binding himself to a few chosen individuals within this nation, his name becomes 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Ex 3:6). Even 'Yahweh,' the name he chose for himself, makes reference to history, the history of his chosen race.

If we consider the general direction of this history, we see it moving towards a greater and greater degree of communion with God: a communion that is utterly unmerited and free. The election is the first, and perhaps most striking, sign of God's generosity. At the beginning of Israel there is only one explanation: the initiative altogether gratuitous of a sovereignly free God. This initiative is justified by no merit in the people chosen, by no preliminary worth, either of number, or of good conduct, or "of the strength of its hand" (Dt 8:17), but only by God's love. In other words, it is pure grace.

Yahweh set his heart on you and chose you *not because you were the most numerous of all people -- for indeed you were the smallest of all -- but because he loved you* and meant to keep the oath which he swore to your ancestors: that was why Yahweh brought you out with his mighty hand and redeemed you from the place of slave-labor, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Dt 7:7-8).

The symbol of this grace is the land which God gives to his people, "a land of torrents and of springs" (Dt 8:9), "of mountains and valleys watered by rain from heaven" (Dt 11:11), "cities which you did not build... houses which you have not filled, wells which you have not dug" (Dt

6:10-11). The grace has as its foundation the covenant. God chose a people for himself, liberated them from bondage and leads them to a bountiful land so that they may live in communion with him -- an unparalleled communion that the prophets will interpret using the model of the two most intimate types of human relationship: husband and wife, father and son or daughter. The covenant is a two-way affair: God gives himself freely, gratuitously, and faithfully to Israel in the hope that Israel will respond. The grace of God looks for partners, an exchange, and a communion. The theology of the covenant, which is the high-water mark of the Old Testament, the point of arrival of the entire Pentateuchal history and the point of departure for the prophets' reflection, provides the most telling prefiguration of the New Testament theology of grace.

#### *1.1.2 New Testament prefiguration of Synodality*

God faithfully established the new covenant he had promised in Jesus whose life and person revealed that God is a communion of love who wishes to embrace and unify the whole of humanity. Jesus is the Son of God, destined from eternity to love the Father's heart. For that matter, he never acts alone, indeed the Father dwells in him and carries out his work through the Son he has sent into the world, hence the eternal Logos, pitched a tent and dwelled among God's people. The incarnation holistically identifies the purpose of Jesus' mission in the world i.e., the Word becoming 'flesh' reveals the salvific purpose of Jesus which he will faithfully carry out (cf. John 1:16-18). Jesus descended into the human realm and became man to face the forces of death and darkness and overcame them. In this way his mission is an expression of God's grace and it reveals God's intent to bring his people into existence and sustain them. Jesus will accomplish this by confronting the powers of darkness and ultimately by his self-sacrificial death, all of which implies pitching a 'tent', a concept which further reveals the revelatory purpose of Jesus' mission. He will carry it out by becoming the supreme revealer, the truth, who would manifest God to the world by his life and by his words. He is the Logos who "tented" in

the midst of humanity in order to disclose God and to be the mediator between God and humanity.<sup>268</sup>

This beautiful work which God the Father initiated in Jesus Christ is fulfilled eschatologically in the Paschal Mystery, when Jesus gives His life to take it up again in the resurrection (cf. John 10,17) and to share it with His disciples as sons and daughters, sisters and brothers in the selfless outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3,34). Hence the Paschal Mystery of Jesus is the new exodus, which gathers in unity all who by faith believe in him whom he conforms to himself by the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. The work of salvation is the unity for which Jesus implored the Father just before his Passion which Pope St John Paul II described as commitment to ecumenism. “May they all be one, Father, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.” (cf. John 17: 21).<sup>269</sup>

The New Testament uses a specific term to express the power Jesus received from the Father to grant salvation, which He exercises over all creatures in the power of the Holy Spirit. It consists in imparting the grace that makes us ‘children of God’ as indicated in *John* 1:12. The Apostles receive this power from the risen Lord, who sends them to teach the nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe all he has commanded (cf. *Matthew* 28:19-20). By virtue of baptism, every member of the People of God is given a share in this authority, having received the anointing of the Holy Spirit during the sacraments of Christian initiation

The end-point of the journey of the People of God is to rejoice with him in heaven for ever and ever. This is the New Jerusalem, enveloped by the radiant splendor of God’s glory, where the heavenly liturgy is celebrated. Alluding to this fact, the book of

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<sup>268</sup>Class notes compiled by Nicolas Isaiah Mwango STC, *Johanne Literature*, (Nairobi: Classnote Don Bosco Utume College, 2021).

<sup>269</sup>Encyclical Letter, *Ut Unum Sint* (25<sup>th</sup> May 1995) by Holy Father Pope John Paul II



*Apocalypse* contemplates a sacrificial Lamb who by his blood has ransomed for God, people of every race, language, people and nation and has made them a line of kings and priests for God, to rule the world (*cf. Apocalypse 5, 6.9.11.13*). Later this promise which holds the deepest meaning of God's saving plan will be fulfilled. "Here God lives among human beings. He will make His home among them; they will be His people, and He will be their God, 'God-with-them'" (*Apocalypse 21:3*).

## **2.0 The Synod**

The term synod indicates the path along which the people of God walk together. Jesus Christ presented himself in John 14:6 as the way, the truth and the life. In this threefold way, Jesus reveals that the path to eternal life leads through him as the way and whoever believes in him enters into union with God. This will be repeatedly stated in the Last Supper discourse. Thus, through Jesus the disciples join themselves to God (John 14:23). Jesus is the truth because he is the revelation of God, a true and genuine disclosure of who God is and how God acts in the world. Jesus is the life; this statement implies that Jesus is the life-giving agent. Those who believe in him have the life already in this world (realized eschatology) as well as being assured of the future resurrection (future eschatology). Given these three statements, it is not surprising that Jesus concluded by affirming that the way to eternity and to the eternal union with God leads entirely through Himself. (John 14:6). This is revealed in the fact that Christians, his followers, were originally called "followers of the Way" (*cf. Acts 24:14*)

In ecclesiastical Greek synod describes how the disciples of Jesus were called together as an assembly. Saint John Chrysostom, for example, writes that the Church is a "name standing for walking together." In this sense, synodality is a way of renewing the Church from her deepest roots, in order that its members be more united with one another and better carry out their mission in the world.<sup>270</sup> John the Evangelist further viewed the Church as the assembly convoked

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<sup>270</sup>John chrysostom on synodality - Bing

to give God thanks and glory like a choir, a harmonic reality which holds everything together. By their reciprocal and ordered relations, the members of the choir form a community.

The distinction between the use of the words ‘council’ and ‘synod’ is important. For instance, in Vatican II, both words refer to the Council sessions.<sup>271</sup> The further distinction is given in the Code of the Canon Law, *Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983), which distinguishes between a particular (plenary or provincial) Council (Can 440), an ecumenical Council (Can. 337), and between the Synod of Bishops (Can. 331) and a diocesan Synod (Can. 460).

## **2.1 The Historical Development of Synodality in the History of the Church**

After the breakdown of communion between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome (11th century) and ecclesiastical territories belonging to the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem came under the political control of Islam. In the western Catholic Church, the Gregorian reform, a movement to reform the Church, began half way through the 11<sup>th</sup> century in 1050 under Pope Leo IX assisted by a monk Hildebrand whom he ordained a sub-deacon and made him administrator of property of the church in Rome. Hildebrand would become Pope Gregory VII after whom this reform takes its name. The objective and aim of the Gregorian reform were spiritual renewal of the Church especially the clergy, freedom for the Church from lay domination, the re-imposition of clerical celibacy, and the fight against simony.. This, together with the struggle for the *Libertas Ecclesiae*, contributed to the affirmation of the Pope’s authority as primate. The reform also freed Bishops from subordination to the Emperor.

Since the fifth century, the Roman Synod had functioned as the Bishop of Rome’s Council. It was attended not only by the Bishops of the Roman province but also by Bishops present in Rome when it took place, as well as Presbyters and Deacons. It became the model for

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<sup>271</sup>Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum 1; Constitution on the Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium 1.

other councils in the Middle Ages, both also civil authorities (representatives of the Emperor or of Kings and high dignitaries), as well as theological and canonical experts.

Throughout the Middle Ages, there were examples of revitalization of synodal procedure in the widest sense of the term. The monks of Cluny are one case. Cathedral chapters helped to keep synodal procedure alive, as did the new communities of religious life, particularly the Mendicant Orders.

### **3.0 Vatican Council I (1869-1870)**

There is an element of synodality in teachings of Vatican 1 especially with the endorsement of the doctrine of the primacy and infallibility of the Pope, for whom in apostle Peter is established the Petrine Principle and who is the perpetual and visible foundation of the unity of faith and communion. The Council therefore presents the ministry set to guarantee the unity and indivisibility of the episcopate at the service of the faith of the People of God.<sup>272</sup> The Council further affirmed the exercise of authority which belongs to the Pope by virtue of his specific ministry. This is borne out by consultation carried out through the bishops among the whole People of God. This was very much in line with what Holy Father Pope Pius IX wanted in view of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and the approach taken by [Pius XII](#) in regard to the definition of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary.<sup>273</sup>

The need for a pertinent and consistent re-launch of synodal practice in the Catholic Church became clear as early as the nineteenth century, thanks to prophetic writers like Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838), Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855) and John Henry Newman (1801-1890), who returned to the normative sources of Scripture, the Magisterium and Tradition, heralding the providential renewal that came with the biblical, liturgical and patristic movements. They stressed that the primary and fundamental element in the life of the Church is the

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<sup>272</sup>Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution *De Ecclesia Christi Pastor Aeternus*, DH 3059; Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* 18.

<sup>273</sup>Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Deiparae Virginis Mariae*, AAS 42 (1950), 782-783.

dimension of communion, which implies an ordered synodal practice on every level, giving due importance to the *sensus fidei fidelium*, intrinsically related to the specific ministry of the Bishops and the Pope. The emergence of a new climate in ecumenical relationships with other Churches and ecclesial communities, and a more careful discernment of the advanced demands of modern consciousness concerning the participation of every citizen in running society, therefore called for a new and deeper experience and presentation of the mystery of the Church as intrinsically synodal.<sup>274</sup>

#### **4.0 Second Ecumenical Vatican Council**

The Second Vatican Council was indisputably the most significant event in the history and theology of the Catholic Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Council was called for by Pope John XXIII amidst the social optimism of the 1960s. It sought to engage with the modern world in a new and more positive way, creating tremendous consequences for the life of the Church.

##### **4.1 The New Direction taken by the Second Vatican Council**

This Council sought openly and constructively to engage with the modern world especially in its pastoral constitution/declaration on the Church in the Modern World “*Gaudium et Spes*”. One change brought about by the Council that was immediately noticeable was its positive orientation and style toward modern society. It took a pastoral approach in its documents and this change of style was not simply a superficial change of rhetoric. It signified rather an entirely new way of thinking on behalf of the Church.

The Council also signified a break with neo-scholastic theology, which had predominated among Catholic theologians, and which proceeded by tightly argued logical analyses and took the form of precise propositions and definitions. Prior to the Council, all Catholic theologians were trained in this method. Theologians working afterwards were given much more conceptual

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<sup>274</sup>International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church (2014), 41.

freedom. Catholic students of theology following the Council were no longer obligated to go to Rome or Catholic seminaries for theological training.

#### 4.2 The Synodal Significance of Vatican II

The most immediate significant changes effected by the Vatican II Council concerned its specific declarations in a number of key areas. The first of these was the Church's understanding of itself and its relation to the modern world. The Council moved away from language of the Church as the perfect society or the kingdom of God on earth, and described itself as a "Sacrament" to the world and as a "pilgrim Church" that is looking forward to its full realization.<sup>275</sup>

*Lumen Gentium* therefore set out a vision of the nature and mission of the Church as communion, with the theological presuppositions of a suitable re-launch of synodality with well-established mystical and sacramental conception of the Church. Her nature as People of God on pilgrimage through history towards the heavenly homeland, in which all her members are by virtue of baptism honored with the same dignity as children of God and appointed to the same mission, becomes clear with this Council as well as the doctrine of sacramentality of the episcopate and collegiality in hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome.

The Church also assumed a great deal of world-responsibility, and far from emphasizing its separation from the secular world, it spoke of its solidarity with the whole of humanity. The decree *Christus Dominus* emphasized that the local Church is a subject, and encouraged bishops to exercise the pastoral care of the Church entrusted to them in communion with their presbyterate and included the invitation to establish a pastoral council in every diocese, in which presbyters, religious and lay people should take part, this is the nucleus of synodality.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup>*Lumen gentium, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Second Vatican Council.* (Promulgated by Pope Paul VI, on 21st November 1984) 1-3

<sup>276</sup>*Gaudium et Spes, 'Joy and Hope' The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World and from the Second Vatican Council.* Pages 1-3

The Vatican II Council also recognized religious truth outside the Catholic Church and opened up new opportunities for ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue (*Nostra Aetate* #2-3). This made possible a significant condemnation of all anti-Semitism in the Church.

Another significant change was the Council's reformulation of the liturgy. This change was to exercise an immediate and powerful impact on the lives of Catholic believers. The old liturgy that was thought to be unchangeable by many worshipers was replaced by a new liturgy in which the priest faced the congregation and celebrated the Mass not in Latin but in the people's vernacular language (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* # 37-40).

The laity were encouraged to actively participate in the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* # 19), they were given responsibility to engage with the world politically and economically in pursuit of justice and the common good (*Lumen Gentium* # 33-34; *Gaudium et Spes* # 43 & 74), and they were even obliged to make their own opinions known (*Lumen Gentium* # 37).

A final and tremendously important change in the Council's new emphasis was its affirmation of human dignity and religious liberty. The Council declared that no one should be coerced into affirming any religious position, but that persons should be free to act according to their own free conscience (*Dignitatis Humanae* # 2-3), and it even recognized some of the Catholic Church's own culpability in this regard (*Dignitatis Humanae* # 12-13).

All of these changes had a cumulative effect, drastically changing the Church's face. In thus updating what had seemed for many to be its unchangeable façade, the Church opened up the opportunity for radically restructuring and reconsidering the Church's relationship to the world, to other religions, and to science, as well as its understanding of itself. And in this recognition of a new age of human history (*Gaudium et Spes* # 54), the Council signaled what many took to be a new era for the Church.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Class notes on Pastoral Theology by Rev. Dr. Nicholas Obiero Cp, *Pastoral Theology*, (Nairobi: Classnote Don Bosco Utume College, 2020).

#### **4.3 Theologian Karl Rahner's Reaction towards Vatican II Council**

The German Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner saw the Council as having even more importance than those participating realized or intended, and he observed that in Vatican II the Catholic Church had made a “qualitative leap” towards becoming a “world-church” (Rahner, 80). Although it had always been a world-church in potential, he argued, that previously the Church had been too culturally tied to Europe and North America and its relation to the rest of the world was more like that of an “export firm” (Rahner, 78).

According to Rahner, it was during Vatican II, for the first time, that the world-church actually began to exist in history (Rahner, 91). It therefore initiated what he called the transition to the third major time period in the history of the Church. The Church's first transition occurred at its origins when it moved from being a Judeo-Christianity to become a Gentile-Christianity and took on Hellenic and later European thought forms, with all the radical restructuring of the faith that such move involved. The present time, Rahner argued, constitutes the second major transition and involves a new challenge of restructuring that must likewise be met with “Pauline boldness” (Rahner, 86). “At this point,” Rahner wrote, “a frontier has been crossed behind which it will never again be possible to return, even to the slightest degree.”<sup>278</sup>

For Rahner and for many others, then, the Church's action during Vatican II did not simply represent reform or even merely significant progress. Rather, it was the beginning of a new way of being for the Church which was to have tremendous implications for its continued existence. Despite this optimism and euphoria about the Church's new role that was shared by many, the Vatican II Council's effects were also to create a great deal of uncertainty and instability within the Church and would quickly bring it into a state of crisis.

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<sup>278</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations Concerning Vatican Council II. Volume VI: (January 1, 1979)*,

## 5.0 Pope Francis' Attitude towards Synodality

It is difficult to talk about synodality without mentioning Pope Francis who has always dreamed of a collaborative Church, a Church which goes out to the periphery, a Church on a mission, an inclusive Church of which everyone feels part. Pope Francis in his latest encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, on fraternity and social friendship, invites us to dream; as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all.<sup>279</sup>

### 5.1 Solidarity with Universal Love

*Fratelli tutti* is the third encyclical of Pope Francis after *Lumen fidei* (2013) and *Laudato sì* (2015). As is well known, it was signed in Assisi on 3 October 2020, seven years after his election as Vicar of Christ. It is a letter that flows from the heart of a father who wishes to speak to everyone who populates the earth, and does so with the clarity, courage, and determination typical of his style as a Shepherd who seeks the good of those entrusted to him. It reaches everyone in an inclusive way and invites us to “a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance”<sup>280</sup> It further invokes an open fraternity that recognizes the same human dignity for all with which it is possible to dream and build a new humanity, where there is welcome, mutual respect, care for the common home, solidarity, work, peace.

Pope Francis presents the figure of the Good Samaritan in the second chapter and is the key to reading the whole encyclical. It is a parable told by Jesus two thousand years ago, but it is of great relevance and challenges men and women of all times across the globe. He presents some passages from the Old and New Testament where we find an explicit reference to a

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<sup>279</sup> Pope Francis, The Encyclical “Fratelli Tutti” Fraternity and Social Friendship. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Encyclical of Pope Francis. (on 3<sup>rd</sup> October2020) No. 8

<sup>280</sup> Pope Francis, The Encyclical “Fratelli Tutti” Fraternity and Social Friendship. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Encyclical of Pope Francis. (on 3<sup>rd</sup> October2020) No. 1



universal love open to all, because the Most High, the heavenly Father “makes his sun rise on the bad and the good” (Mt 5:45). Pope Francis contemplates the merciful love of the Father. To do so he uses the icon of the Good Samaritan, who stops, and bends over his wounded brother. He is not interested in knowing where he comes from; what matters is to help him with the love that knows compassion and dignity. Others of ‘good standing’, important officials in society and also in the Church, do not stop or bend down to assist this brother, or to waste a few minutes of their time with him or, at the very least, to seek help. None of this! But here a Samaritan who passes by, puts aside his plans, and interests to make himself not only close, but neighbor.

There are lots of physical, moral, and spiritual wounds in our society today that stand to be healed with the same heart as the Good Samaritan. In our secularized and ever-changing society, it can happen that the sight of a person who is suffering disturbs us. It makes us uneasy, since we have no time to waste on other people’s problems. These are symptoms of an unhealthy society. A society that seeks prosperity but turns its back on suffering. In order not to fall into this sin, Pope Francis points out for us the model of the Good Samaritan who with his gestures of great humanity, shows us how our life is linked to that of others.

We all have something of the wounded man in us, something of the person that goes beyond and also something of the Good Samaritan. In our daily choices, in the small or big situations that make up our days, we do not want to be people who turn away and hurry up without stopping, but men and women inhabited by the Gospel, aware that no one must remain on the ‘margins of life’ because we are all brothers and sisters. Pope Francis, in his reflections entitled ‘Let’s go back to dreaming, the road to a better future’, writes that “if we want to leave the crisis less selfish than we entered it, we need to let ourselves be touched by the suffering of others.” In every crisis like the one that the whole world is suffering from, namely the covid 19 pandemic, there is always a way out, provided that the principle of individualism is replaced with the strength of tenderness and solidarity, like beneficial water, which overflows from the mercy

of God, and is capable of transforming suffering into hope. It is not an easy undertaking, but together we can help each other to mature a universal dimension of love that is open to all, overcoming prejudices, historical or cultural barriers, and courageously deciding to embrace those who are ‘wounded’ with a supportive heart and give life to more human times, tailored to the person created in the image of God. Becoming neighbor in the style of the Good Samaritan is possible on the condition that we start from above, from the recognition of the fatherhood of God, in the conviction that "without an openness to the Father of all, there will be no solid and stable reasons for an appeal to fraternity. We are certain that ‘only with this awareness that we are not orphans, but children, can we live in peace with one another.’<sup>281</sup>

#### *5.1.1 A Call to make Solidarity Shine in the Educational Mission*

In our courtyards, in classrooms, in informal environments, on social networks, on crowded streets, in the peripheries, in the various forms of aggregation we often meet people without hope, but with a great desire to live. The time of the pandemic has tried young people hard and their cry for help, has often not often not been expressed. Pope Francis has repeatedly urged the Church to join in full synergy with those who care about the good of children, young people, and families. Through shared educational choices we can build a fraternity that embraces the entire human family according to God's plan.

It is the path to take to be today, like the Good Samaritan, ready to heal the wounds that very often disfigure the life of the new generations. A very serious but treatable wound bears the name of educational poverty. Pope Francis recently reiterated this to a group of young people: “The vocation of a young person is to dream” (To the young people of the Policoro Project, 5 June 2021). A dream founded on hope that speaks to us "of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to

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<sup>281</sup> Pope Francis, The Encyclical “Fratelli Tutti” Fraternity and Social Friendship. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Encyclical of Pope Francis. (on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2020) No. 260

lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love”. These are the same aspirations that inhabit and make the hearts of many young people restless, even in those who, due to personal and family stories, see the desire to live extinguished, yet are hungry for authentic love, for full and lasting happiness. It is in this reality that we must bet on education, feeling ourselves Samaritans with the fire of the *da mihi animas* in our hearts, ready to be co-creators of a new future.

## Conclusion

Pope Francis has inaugurated the path towards the Synod of synodality. We have seen in this paper that synodality has a long history. We can trace its origin in both OT and NT and much more from the teaching of the Magisterium. We have also seen widely that the concept of synodality in the history of the Church has developed gradually. and that Pope Francis from the beginning of his pontificate has been pushing for a more collaborative ministry in the Church. This is evident in both *Fratelli tutti* and *Laudato si'*.

Pope Francis wants synodality to be a process that involves the local churches in different phases from the bottom up, that is, from the smallest unit of the domestic church at the family level to the highest where by the mother Church communes with the triune God. This synodality is therefore aimed at promoting the kind of efforts that can create a style of communion and participation directed to mission as we have seen in this reflection.

This kind of synodality means working together, journeying together, helping one another since we do not just walk in silence alone but share together on the way. It is therefore very much important for the Church because as members of the body of Christ, we need to pick up one another. In our faith journey, we do not just walk alone but with our brothers and sisters who are on the same journey.

It is for this reason that Pope Francis, having read the signs of time, came up with this initiative. It is a clarion call, a wakeup call for all of us to remind us that we are not individuals

on the journey but we are walking with other believers. This involves allowing ourselves as a church community to be led by the Holy Spirit, allowing the Holy Spirit to walk with us and in us hence enlightening us always. Therefore, by listening to one another, we listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. In this way we share our lives as a community deeply rooted in faith, we share our joy, our expectations, our worries and anxieties. This is because every person has something to say: the youths, the laity and the clergy. We carry one another on the journey because each person has a unique dignity and we have to walk together while respecting that dignity and bearing in mind that God has created each and every person in his own image and likeness. This is what this synodality is all about.

# The Impact of Synodality in the Growth of the Church

*Nabaasa Venansio OSM*

## Introduction

Although the basic topic is Synodality, we need to highlight what the Church is, its mission and why it needs synods. Secondly, we have to evaluate if synods have contributed anything to the life and mission of the Church since 1965. In general, a church is a large religious organization bureaucratically organized and closely integrated into a large religious organization with some orders and laws. Secondly, synodality is meant “to foster a closer unity between the Roman Pontiff and the bishops who assist the Roman Pontiff with their counsel in safeguarding and increasing faith and morals and in preserving and strengthening ecclesiastical discipline, and to consider questions concerning the Church’s activity in the world.”<sup>282</sup> But does the Church need Synods? Yes, the Church needs synods, especially if we consider the words of David Bosh, “Christian churches in general especially in pastoral theology are confronted with a number of challenges more than ever before in the history of the Church, Because the Church is pastoral in nature that we see the need of synods. It should be remembered that it was in 1965, that the first synod was convoked by Pope Paul VI as explained in *Apostolica sollicitudo*.<sup>283</sup> Its major topics were the revision of Code of Canon Law, mixed marriages, seminaries and the Liturgy. It also addressed the functions of a synod.

## 1.1 Definition of Terms

### 1.1.1 Synod:

The word synod is derived from two Greek words, *syn* meaning together and *hodos* meaning road or way; hence, synod means ‘walking together’. However, limiting the definition to Church’s usage, the word describes means a meeting of the Catholic hierarchy, that is, the

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<sup>282</sup> Can. 342.

<sup>283</sup> Paul VI. Motu Proprio *Apostolica sollicitudo*, Septembre 15, 1965.

pope and bishops, which is convoked by the pope to seek counsel in the governance of the universal Church. John G. Johnson commenting on can 342 defines a synod of bishops as:

A group of bishops who have been chosen from different regions of the world and meet together at fixed times to foster unity between the Roman Pontiff and bishops, to assist the Roman Pontiff with their counsel in the preservation and growth of faith and morals and in the observance and strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline, and to consider questions pertaining to the activity of the Church in the world.<sup>284</sup>

We can identify the tasks of a synod: a synod is a central ecclesiastical institution, it represents the complete Catholic episcopate, it has its own structure and performs its duties for a specific period when called upon to do so and lastly, its task of the Synod of Bishops is to inform and give advice.<sup>285</sup>

The general assembly treats matters that directly pertain to the good of the universal Church. Hence, it is the Roman Pontiff who calls for a synod for he has full power, “by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, namely, and as pastor of the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered...together with their head, The Supreme Pontiff and never part from him.”<sup>286</sup>

### 1.1.2 Mission

The word mission has different meanings. Before Vatican II, mission meant the sending of missionaries to a designated mission territory, the activities undertaken by the missionaries, the geographical areas to where missionaries were sent. After Vatican II, the understanding of mission changed. It was expressed in terms of the propagation of the faith, expansion of the reign

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<sup>284</sup> John G. Johnson, *The Synod of Bishops*, in New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law, edited by John B. Beal, James A. Coriden and Thomas J. Green, (India: Theological Publications in India, Bengaluru, 2019), 342.

<sup>285</sup> John G. Johnson, *The Synod of Bishops*, in New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law, 455-456.

<sup>286</sup> Zinelli's Relatio on *Vatican Council I*: Mansi 52, 1109C, and *Lumen Gentium* no.22.

of God, the implantation of the Church or establishment of new churches. The sole purpose or mission of the Church is salvation of souls.

Indeed, the fundamental task of mission is to proclaim and promote the kingdom of God. The Church therefore, with the help of the synods, is to continue the mission of Christ, which is inauguration of God's reign on earth. The Church is entrusted with the "mission of announcing and inaugurating [God's kingdom] among all people."<sup>287</sup>

## 1.2 Types of Synods

The Central Coetus<sup>288</sup> foresaw that the Roman Pontiff, due to the virtue of his office, would need greater help and assistance each day, so they formulated the forms and membership of the general assembly. In due course, they saw that at least three different types of synods would be needed due to the different challenges each assembly would have to respond to. Hence, we have three kinds of synods<sup>289</sup>.

### 1.2.1 Ordinary Synod

This kind of synod deals with matters which directly concern the good of the universal Church. Therefore, it takes place regularly every few years. Among the most current directives that have resulted from these synods are the teachings in *Evangelii gaudium* [2012] on the New Evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith, the vocation and the mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world in the synod of 2015 and the Synod on Young people, Faith and Vocational Discernment in 2018.

### 1.2.2 Extraordinary Synod

In this type of a synod, bishops gather in an extraordinary session in order to treat affairs which require a speedy [or rapid] solution. It consists of members of whom the greater number

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<sup>287</sup> John Paul II Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no.20.

<sup>288</sup> AcSyn Vat, III, 2:23-24.

<sup>289</sup> Paul VI, *Apostolica sollicitudo*, Septembre, 15, 1965.

are bishops designated by special law of the synod and by reason of the office they hold.<sup>290</sup> These synods take place as the need arises. Extraordinary synods met on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1985 and to explore the pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization in 2014.

### 1.2.3 Special Synod

This kind of synod deals with matters which directly concern the good of a determined ecclesiastical region.<sup>291</sup> They take place as the need arises. The three synods we may highlight here are: *Africae Munus* in 2009, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* about the Middle East in 2010, and the Pan-Amazon Synod titled as *Querida Amazonia* in 2019.

## 1.3 The Purpose of the Synods

The bishops gathered in the synods, assist the Roman Pontiff by their counsel in the defence and development of faith and morals; the preservation and strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline and the study of questions concerning the mission of the Church in the world.<sup>292</sup>

## 2. The Nature and Emergence of Synods

Synods are as old as Christianity itself. Synods, sometimes referred to as assemblies or councils, have been a feature in the life of the Church for centuries. The Apostles, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem for a council there (Acts 15:1-30). However, this essay will be limited to the synods from 1965 onwards. Pope Paul VI in the *Motu Proprio* entitled *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, of September 15, 1965 wrote,

in response to the desire of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to keep alive the positive spirit engendered by the conciliar experience.”<sup>293</sup> The Second Vatican Council affirmed Pope Paul VI’s initiative and made explicit reference to *Apostolica Sollicitudo* in *Christus Dominus*, the Decree on Bishops. And the council affirmed, “Bishops chosen from different parts of the world in a manner and according to a system determined or to be determined by the Roman Pontiff

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<sup>290</sup> Can. 346 §2.

<sup>291</sup> Can. 433 §1.

<sup>292</sup> Can. 342.



will render to the Supreme Pastor a more effective auxiliary service in a council which shall be known by the special name of synod of Bishops.<sup>294</sup>

Hence, the decree explicitly shows that amidst the multiplicity of tasks that the synods take, it the Roman Pontiff who heads the synods and the brother bishops assist him.

A synod is a permanent institution yet it is also able to adapt to circumstances<sup>295</sup>. Is convoked by the pope. It has a permanent Secretariat presided over by a general secretary appointed by the Roman Pontiff, who is assisted by a council made up of bishops, some of whom are elected in accord with the norms of its special law by a previous general assembly of the Synod of Bishops and some of whom are appointed by the pope, whose responsibilities cease at the beginning of a new general assembly.

The Synod ratifies the election of its members, determines the topics for discussion and the agenda, and its proceedings are presided over either by the pope in person or through delegates. And the Pope alone has the power to conclude, transfer, suspend or dissolve the synod.<sup>296</sup> John G. Johnson adds: “This list of papal prerogatives is derived almost verbatim from *Apostolica sollicitudo*.”<sup>297</sup>

The General Secretariat with the assistance of the council members is responsible for preparing the *lineamenta*, a broad outline of the topic, that is presented in such a way as to generate suggestions and observations on the local level. They provide guidance and a structure for formulating responses. In case of a special assembly, fraternal delegates, experts and observers are added to the consultative committee. Subsequently, after the working paper, and all the detailed findings, the recommendations are compiled and finally the list of the

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<sup>293</sup> J. A. Abruzzese, *Synod of Bishops* in New Catholic Encyclopedia, (United States of America: Jack Heraty & Associates, Inc., Palatine, III. 1981), 683.

<sup>294</sup> *Christus Dominus*, 28 October, 1965, no.5.

<sup>295</sup> Schotte, J. *The Synod of Bishops: A Permanent yet Adaptable Institution*, *Stud Can* 26 (1992), 286-306.

<sup>296</sup> Canon. 344, no.6

<sup>297</sup> John G. Johnson, *The Synod of Bishops*, in New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law, 457.

recommendations from the plenary session is submitted to the vote of the Synod Fathers. Lastly, the results are given to the Holy Father as the primary work of the Synod Assembly.<sup>298</sup>

After this brief description on the nature and emergence of the Synods, we respond to the question whether or not the synods have been active in the life and mission of the Church.

### **3.1 Synods have been held throughout the Life and Mission of the Church**

Under the authority of different popes, several synods have taken place. These have been essential in assisting the different popes with their counsel especially in the strengthening and the growth of faith and morals and in stressing the observance of ecclesiastical discipline, and in considering questions pertaining to the activities of the Church in the world.

For instance, among the various themes dealt by the Ordinary General Assemblies have been the Christian Family in 1980, the formation of priests in the circumstances of the present day in 1990, the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church in 2008. Similarly, the matters dealt by Extraordinary General Assemblies have included: cooperation between the Holy See and the Episcopal Conferences in 1969, the Twentieth Anniversary of the Conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1985, and the pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization in 2014. Lastly, about eleven synods or Special Assemblies have been held and they include the Church in Lebanon in 1995, Ecclesia in Europa in 1999 and the Church in the Middle East in *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* in 2010.

### **3.2 The Active Role/Contributions of Synods in General**

The first assembly in 1965 held by Pope Paul VI helped in the revision of the Code of Canon Law, mixed marriage and improvements in the Liturgy. Then, there was the impetus given to the renewal of religious life within the Church in the document, *Perfectae Caritatis*.

Similarly, the importance evangelization has been stressed at various meetings of the synods. Synods have reflected on the conciliar documents - *Lumen gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*

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<sup>298</sup> J. A. Abruzzese, *Synod of Bishops*, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 687.

and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* – and produced different documents, such as *Catechesis Tradendae* which teaches the usefulness of catechesis and all forms of Christian religious education. Concerning the family, there has been progress in encouraging and guiding families, affirming their freedom and rights, defining the position and role of families in the Church. This happened at the Synodal Assembly, *Familiaris Consortio*.

At the ecclesial level, the communion and unity of all the people of God have been emphasized, divisions have been renounced, catechesis and evangelization have been stressed, vocation and mission of the laity have been addressed especially through the pope's Synodal Exhortations; *Reconcilatio et Paenitentia* and *Christifideles Laici* respectively. Pope John Paul in praise of the unity of the Church of Christ and charity wrote, "For nearly a whole millennium, the two sister Churches grew side by side, as two great vital complementary traditions of the same Church of Christ keeping not only peaceful and fruitful relations, but also concern for the indispensable communion in faith, prayer and charity...this wound is not yet healed. But the Lord can cure it."<sup>299</sup> And among the healing processes the Pope suggested was a call for reconciliation and the challenge of being witnesses of salvation.

Although there are a number of synods with a world-wide focus and membership, which have contributed so much, in the following section we would like to contextualize two African Synods and the synod on the Pan-Amazon region in 2019.

### **3.3 Contributions of Synods in Africa Today**

The question is: How has the Church in Africa benefited from these synods? In truth, Africa has witnessed some synods whose contributions we must praise. These synods are *Ecclesia in Africa* in reference to John Paul II and *Africae Munus* in reference to Benedict XVI.

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<sup>299</sup> Michael Hurley, *Christian Unity: an ecumenical spring?*, (Republic of Ireland: Dublin, Veritas, 1998), 21.

### 3.3.1 The Contributions of Ecclesia in Africa (14 September 1995)

*Ecclesia in Africa* is the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope St. John Paul II. It was the fruit of the four weeks of the Special Synod for Africa. It studied the lights and the shadows, the challenges and the future prospects of evangelization in Africa. It was much influenced by the teachings of Vatican II Council.

Among the contributions The Synod made were: emphasis on evangelization, inculturation, dialogue, justice, peace and the means of communication.<sup>300</sup> The Holy Father asked for the openness of the Church in a spirit of collaboration and for dialogue with all the people of good will irrespective of their religion, faith or creed. This is a great contribution especially to the Church in Africa a multiplicity of religions are practised. Patrick Mwanja reflecting on the mission of the Church agreed with the words of *Nostra Aetate*, namely, that the dialogue between the Church and non-Christian cultures and religions be seen as a priority for the Church which is by nature and being missionary.<sup>301</sup>

### 3.3.2 The Contributions of Africae Munus (19 November, 2011)

The document of this Synod was a re-affirmation of *Ecclesia in Africa*. The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, of Benedict XVI defined the fundamental structure of the Church's mission in the African Continent. The Pontiff calls for reconciliation, peace and justice. He emphasized that faith works through love. He had already observed that Africa has a multiplicity of languages, cultures, religions; and therefore, for the Church, as the people of God, to work for peace and justice, there is always a need for a dialogue.

This peace and dialogue begins from a family. Apart from the above contributions, Pope Benedict emphasized the rich African heritage that is bound up within the concept of family and respect for the elders. *Africae munus* also promoted reconciliation, peace and justice, while it

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<sup>300</sup> John Paul II, A Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no.16.

<sup>301</sup> Patrick Mwanja, *Introduction to the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church Ad Gentes in Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church: Ad Gentes; with Pastoral Theological Reflections to Assist the Readers*, (Paulines Publications Africa, 2015), 15, See also *Nostra Aetate* no.2.

opposed any form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism.<sup>302</sup> Indeed after the Holy Father's call, there has been some notable change in the areas mentioned above, although in Northern Nigeria and Sudan, there is still poor relationship between the Christians and Muslims.<sup>303</sup>

### **3.4. The Most Current Synod: Pan-Amazon region 2019, *Querinda Amazonia***

It is important to shed some light on the most recent synod. The synod which highlighted the faith and pastoral challenges in the Church of Amazon was inaugurated by Pope Francis on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2018. The assembly invited many missionaries, lay people and representatives of the indigenous people of the Amazon. Here are some of its contributions.

#### *3.4.1 The Contributions of Querinda Amazonia*

The Synod which took place in a fraternal and prayerful environment displayed acute awareness of the dramatic state of rain forest destruction affecting the Amazon.<sup>304</sup> There was participation by the many local Catholics during the consultation period; over 87.000 people participated.<sup>305</sup>

People were able to voice out their feelings which is one important way of effective evangelization and intercultural dialogue. During the exchange of ideas, many challenges about poverty, intercultural phenomena, poverty and immigration were highlighted. These are the current problems also affecting the evangelization here in Africa. The Synod called for conversion, and the spread of the gospel throughout the earth. The voice for a paradigm shift, intercultural dialogue, the participation of the youth, inculturation, the ecological protest against

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<sup>302</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, n.94.

<sup>303</sup> John, Baur, 2000 *Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History 62- 1992*, (Nairobi, Kenya 1994), 366ff.

<sup>304</sup> [www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-02/final-document-synod-amazon.html](http://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-02/final-document-synod-amazon.html), accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2021, no.3

<sup>305</sup> [www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-02/final-document-synod-amazon.html](http://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-02/final-document-synod-amazon.html), accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2021, no.3

global warming, participation of women in some Church ministries, catechesis, the importance of Eucharist in people's lives and the life of priests were some of the topics discussed.

#### **4. Signs and Relevance of Synods**

While reflecting on Synodality in the mission of the Church, we must remember that learn that synodality is the work of the Father, expressed in the representatives of Christ (Apostolic lineage), guided by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence, it has a Trinitarian nature. Similarly, every kind of synod has a Christological character since through the synods, the work of Christ is made present in the Church. Synods are for the benefit of the Church, the people of God. This gives them an ecclesial character, and they only become rich and operative within the body, which is the Church, under the action of the Triune God.

The concept of synodality also overshadows, though in an implicit way, the hierarchical structure of the Church. This is because, it is Pope who calls the bishops to meet, formulates the responses about the given challenge before consultations are made. Through consultation process, we witness the presence and the role of the hierarchical structure.<sup>306</sup>

Without a synod, we cannot really talk of the Church and a living and its practical mission. This is because, we encounter challenges everyday but through the synods, the Pope with the help of the bishops, is able to find possible solutions.

In the two African Synods we witnessed their contribution to topics such as areas of liturgical development especially the call for inculturation and the invitation to witness to peace, justice and dialogue.

The Church, understood as the Mystical Body of Christ, has the visible and external offices, whose work we must acknowledge. These exist in the Church to help in the understanding and renewal of the faith inherited from the Apostles and various Fathers of the

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<sup>306</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no.18-29.

Church in order to meet the present and the future challenges, and among the many institutions includes Synod of Bishops.

One of the challenges that is affecting the Church is strengthening the understanding of the Sacrament of Marriage. On the foundation given by Blessed Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*, *Ecclesia in Africa* by John Paul II, *Africae Munus* and meditations in *Familirias consortio*, the pastors in Africa have been able to deepen awareness of nature of the Sacrament of Marriage. Similarly, the two synods about Africa led to the publication of *Christ's New Homeland-Africa* which is an attempt to answer some of the challenges that marriage faces the problem of marriage.

## **5. Evaluation: Pastoral Implications and Challenges**

In our essay, we have observed that the synods have marked a watershed in the life and the mission of the Church. The implications are clear, because as of the different synods, missionary activity and vocations have increased in different parts of the world. There has been a clear affirmation of the presence of God and availability of salvation through the means of inculturation [*in contrast to the official stand of the Church before Vatican II*] and in the synods, there has been an acknowledgement of the importance of peace, justice and dialogue [*Nostra Aetate* no.1-2] even among the people of other religions.

It sounds exciting to talk of synodality but it is also difficult to take into consideration all the participants' views. For instance, the Special Synods on Africa have encouraged inculturation, peace, justice and dialogue with other religions. However, as a consequence, some pastors unknowingly have ended up in syncretism. On the matter of peace, justice and dialogue, some parts of the continent are still crying due to the mass killing of Christians by some fundamentalists; the Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Allied Democratic Forces in Congo.

Times and seasons are constantly changing. Today, for example, the entire world is affected by covid-19 pandemic. This has called for a paradigm shift in terms of means and

methods of evangelization. This has affected the effectiveness of the apostolate. Similar to Covid 19 is global warming. The entire world is affected by pollutions due to industrialization. In his Encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis has expressed his concerns re pollution and climate change, loss of biodiversity, breakdown of society, global inequality<sup>307</sup> and among others.

Pope Paul VI constantly called for effective participation of all the bishops in the life of the Universal Church<sup>308</sup> but what about the involvement of the laity? We must thank Pope Francis who on 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>, October 2021 in Rome, formally opened a two-year process leading to “a synod on Synodality”.<sup>309</sup> Hence, the laity can participate on local level. From pastoral theological view, synodality is for the mission of the Church yet, the laity are involved in this duty of evangelization which is the; “basic duty of the people of God”<sup>310</sup>

## Conclusion

It cannot be denied that synods contribute immensely in the promotion of evangelization, and help the faithful responding to Jesus’ call, “Go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). Their defense and development of faith and morals, preserving and strengthening of ecclesiastical disciplines and always studying the mission of the Church in the world is witnessed. But one can be tempted to ask, “Do the faithful and even the bishops execute the teachings or recommendations from the Pontiff?” Also due to present global challenges of poverty, hunger, diseases and underdevelopment, many faithful find themselves getting rid of the teachings and capitalize on what gives them quick answers.

In a nutshell, synods have done well but we need more synods, for instance, on the ways to eradicate poverty in Africa. People are not able to embrace Christian values because they sleep

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<sup>307</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato si'* no. 20-52.

<sup>308</sup> *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, introductory paragraphs.

<sup>309</sup> <https://www.synod.va/en/documents/english-version-of-the-preparatory-document.html>, accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2021.

<sup>310</sup> Ad Gentes, no.35.



with empty stomachs, they are affected by different diseases and the education they receive is only theoretical. Hence, there is a need for a synod on the theme of poverty.

The open theological question in this essay is whether the synods are pastorally beneficial to all the faithful or just to some particular people due to their economic condition. We see a great opportunity for the expression of ideas through the faithful's participation in synods; this in turn, stimulates the involvement of everyone in the mission of the Church.

# **Roots, Expressions and Future of Synodality in the Church Today**

*Rev. Fr. Oballa Solomon K.I. SDB*

## **Introduction**

At the start of this reflection on ‘Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church Today’, the famous words of Prophet Amos ring true “Do two walk together unless they agree?” (Amos 3:3). The Church is a pilgrim community and the term ‘*synodos*’ – ‘walking together’, expresses the reality of pilgrimage. Therefore, the true synodality that the Church longs for, is a call to become in the full sense of the word, what she is meant to be – the Pilgrim People of God. In this essay, we intend to inquire into the roots and expressions of synodality in the Church in order to be able to offer some proposals as to what true synodality should be in the contemporary and future Church.

Our research will embrace sources from the various branches of Catholic theology. We hope to accomplish this task using the tools of careful reflection, intellectual investigation and critical analysis.

## **1.0 The Roots of Synodality and its Expressions in the Contemporary Church**

The Second Vatican Council rightly notes that “at all times and in every race, anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him (Acts 10:35). He (God) however wills to make men and women holy and to save them not as individuals without any bond or link between them but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness” (LG 9). This means that God’s plan of salvation is revealed not simply to individuals but to peoples and that from the beginning of times, God has sought to create a community. God’s plan of salvation began when he observed that “It is not good that man should be alone, I

will make for him a companion” (Gen. 2:18). In the fullness of his time, God called Abraham with the promise to make him the father of a great nation (Gen 12:2). And when it was proper, according to his Divine Plan, God chose for himself the people of Israel. Indeed, if God revealed himself to an individual, it was always from and for the good of the community.

The Church is the scion of that family of God’s people according to the New Covenant. The People of God have as their head, Christ the Son of God, “who suffered death for our sins and rose for our justification” (Rom 4:25). He came to call unto himself, “a kingdom of priests to God his father” who are to bear witness to him and to offer a response to anyone who asks a reason for the hope of the eternal which is theirs (LG 10). All those who are baptised form a community of the priestly people of God and are appointed to Christian religious worship, are reborn as sons and daughters of God and are imbued with the strength to give witness by their life as children of God strengthened by the Holy Spirit (LG 11).

Baptism is the doorway through which persons enter into the community of the priestly people of God. This priesthood of Christ’s believers consists of the common priesthood of all the faithful and the ministerial priesthood of the Holy Orders. These two priesthoods differ essentially and not only in degree, but are nevertheless ordered one to another and both share in their own specific ways in the priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priesthood rules and forms the people of God especially by the celebration of the sacraments, chief among them, the Eucharist. The baptised exercise their priesthood by participating in the Eucharist, by reception of the sacraments, prayer, thanksgiving, by the witness of a holy life, abnegation and an active charity (LG 10b). In the exercise of the ministerial priesthood, the ordained are able to educate all believers to the faith especially through the teaching office of the Church entrusted to the apostles. This teaching office is called the Magisterium of the Church.

## **1.1 The Magisterium**

The task given to the Church to teach the people of God is a command. To carry it out is a fulfilment of the commission which the Lord gave when he said, “Go and make disciples of all nations (...) teaching them to observe all that I have taught you ... (Matt 28:19-20). In the Church, bishops occupy the office of the apostles. They fulfil this command by providing believers with an authentic interpretation of the Word of God in the contexts of their time and place. Whoever listens to them, listens to the Lord. (Luke 10:16). Bishops enjoy the fullness of the Holy Orders<sup>311</sup> and have the duty to school the faithful in love and of the knowledge of the whole mystical body of Christ (LG 23). They are the custodians of the revealed Word which has been given to the entire people of God. This means that, should there arise a dispute or ambiguity regarding the true meaning or of interpretation of the Word of God among the faithful, the bishops acting together as one, with the help of the Holy Spirit can provide an authentic interpretation.<sup>312</sup>

Among the bishops, the Bishop of Rome occupies a central office. His primacy of place among the bishops derives from the primacy of Peter among the apostles, whose office he occupies. The Pontiff, true to his office, sometimes fulfils the special task of teaching the faithful through the publication of circular letters i.e. the encyclicals and other similar literary materials. The collective body of these teachings, constitutes what is called today, the Magisterium of the Church. The practice of issuing circular letters for the instruction of the Church began in the pontificate of Gregory XVI (1831-1846). It has since been enlarged and now includes other forms of communication covering virtually any topic which the Pontiff wishes to address for the

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<sup>311</sup> Richard Gaillardetz, *By What Authority*, (Minnesota, Liturgical Press), 2003, 59.

<sup>312</sup> Ladislav Orsy, *The Church; Learning and Teaching*, (Dublin Dominican Publications, 1987), 45.

benefit the entire people of God.<sup>313</sup> Individual bishops also use this tool to fulfil their magisterial role within the particular Churches entrusted to them. To ensure that their teachings are doctrinally sound, the Pontiff and other bishops often enlist the assistance of theological *periti*, some of them lay Catholics, who offer guidance on the crafting and deliverance of such doctrinal teachings.<sup>314</sup>

In the Church, distinctions can be made between several forms of magisterial teachings. These include (1) The infallible teachings of the Pope – these are rare and their core subjects are not subject to revision. (2) The non-infallible pronouncements by the Pope which can be a pronouncement of the truth of a matter of evolving theological importance. (3) Declarations made by an office of the Holy See with the approval of the Pope. (4) Declarations made by an office (with routine approval) whose core teaching does not have the express authority of the Roman Pontiff and whose content is subject to scrutiny. (5) Pronouncements from episcopal synods, conferences or individual bishops which are to be weighed and measured according to their content.<sup>315</sup> The People of God participate in the Magisterium of the Church in an active way through reception, that is, they carry forward the ideas and teachings of the Church in their daily lives.<sup>316</sup>

## **1.2 Leadership in the Church**

Leadership in the Church is largely exercised, although not exclusively, by those who have received the Sacrament of the Holy Orders. According to the Code of Canon Law “only clerics can obtain offices for whose exercise, the power of Orders or the power of ecclesiastical governance is required (CIC 274, 1983). This means that only clerics can obtain those offices

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<sup>313</sup> Orsy, *The Church*, 48.

<sup>314</sup> Orsy, *The Church*, 49.

<sup>315</sup> Orsy, *The Church*, 53.

<sup>316</sup> Jose Comblin, *People of God*, (New York, Orbis Books, 2004), 193.

whose discharge requires the exercise of the powers given by the reception of the Holy Orders. This does not mean that the lay faithful cannot or do not participate in the exercise of leadership in the Church. The Code of Canon Law states that lay members of the Christian faithful can cooperate (*cooperari*) in the exercise of ecclesiastical governance or jurisdiction according to the provisions of law (CIC 129, 1983).

The above shows that leadership in the Christian community is a matter of cooperation. It is not an exclusive right of a certain portion of the Christian community but one in which every person and group in the church is to cooperate in. The openness of ecclesial leadership to all is a very essential aspect of Synodality as the CDF notes that “the ecclesiology of the People of God stresses the common dignity and mission of all the baptised in exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries. In this context, the concept of communion expresses the profound substance of the mystery and mission of the Church, whose source and summit is the Eucharistic Synaxis”.<sup>317</sup> Leadership in the Church is therefore a cooperation, a collaboration and a communion between the faithful and their ministers.

### 1.3 Between the Universal and Particular Churches – A Eucharistic Ecclesiology

The Church of Christ (*Ecclesia*) as one is central any Eucharistic Ecclesiology. This means that the Church exists both as communion with God above and as a body of communion between believers themselves. Thus linked to God and humanity at the same time, the Church fulfils her mission in a vertical and horizontal form.<sup>318</sup> The mission of the Church, rightly called *communio* by the Fathers, reflects the nature of the Church as Eucharist and gathering.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html), accessed 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

<sup>318</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1996), 76.

<sup>319</sup> Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 81.

Every Eucharistic celebration is celebrated at the instance of a particular place, time, context, culture, people and public sensibility.<sup>320</sup> This highlights the fact that the Church at every instance is a local Church. Each local Church is also apostolic in nature. This apostolicity leads her to open her arms to the wider community of believers around the world, who confess the “One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of all” (Eph. 4:5). This is the Catholicity of the Church.

The Catholicity of the Church is the spiritual bond which unites all God’s people in one and through which the whole world is suffused with an active filiation that reshapes the whole of humanity into the people of God.<sup>321</sup> Thus, in the mystical body of Christ, ecclesial locality receives its meaning from communion with the wider family of God’s people through sharing in the universal brotherhood (Eucharistic Ecclesiology). The local Church has no relevance and power or meaning of its own except that which is given to the entire people of God and the universal Church has no existence except that which is expressed in the local Churches spread across the globe.

#### **1.4. Episcopal Collegiality**

The Second Vatican Council notes that “St Peter and the Apostles constitute together a unique apostolic college. In like fashion, Peter’s successor and the bishops, the successors of the Apostles, are related with and united to one another” (LG 22). This unity is called the Collegiality of the Episcopacy. Through the exercise of Collegiality, all those who occupy the chair of the Apostles in the Church throughout the world are united in carrying forward the mission given to the whole Church. The collegiality of the episcopacy is meant to safeguard the

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<sup>320</sup> Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 81.

<sup>321</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *The Community called Church*, (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1980), 14

communion of the entire people of God.<sup>322</sup> This is shown in the Council of Jerusalem which is recorded in Scripture as the first exercise of synodality in the Church (Acts 15:4-29).

The College of Bishops has no authority over the entire Church except when it is united to its head, the Successor of Peter, whose primatial authority reaches every part of the Church. The full authority of the Episcopal College over the whole Church is expressed especially in ecumenical councils. In the mind of the Vatican II Council, the nature and manner of operation of the Episcopal College is drawn from the nature of the Church which is at once universal and local. The primacy of the Successor of Peter with regards to the collegiality of the episcopacy, has been described by Ratzinger as a primacy of communion in the midst of the Church living as a community and understanding herself as a *Communio Ecclesiarum*.<sup>323</sup>

### 1.5 The Faithful and the Sensus Fidei

The entire Christian people stand upon a firm Christological foundation traceable to the words of Christ when he said to Peter, “You are *Petrus*, and on this rock, I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). This statement points to the indefectibility of the entire Church and the unerring perception among the People of God, regarding the true faith.

The people of God, schooled in the Sacred Tradition (word and sacraments) of the Church of Christ, rest secure in the promise of Christ who himself forms and abides with his Church.<sup>324</sup> Thus, it is not the hierarchy alone who know the truth of the faith, but the faithful as well, who can tell when a teaching is doctrinally flawed. This perception which is like a spiritual

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<sup>322</sup> Charles Murphy, An Essay towards Better Understanding in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 46, No 1, (1985), 39.

<sup>323</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, The Pastoral Implications of Episcopal Collegiality, in *Concilium*, 205, 8, No 1, 1965, 25.

<sup>324</sup> Francis Sullivan, *Magisterium*, (Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 2011), 5.



sixth-sense, does not fail among the faithful people of God. “It is the living profession of faith of all the faithful in its continuity and age long identity. It is the way of being Christian today while walking in the footsteps of those who walked it before and by doing so, preparing those who will walk it tomorrow”.<sup>325</sup> It is the awareness in every Catholic Christian who reflects on what is required to live in the communion of the Church, and the realization that the tradition and life of the Church might be developed through them.<sup>326</sup>

## **2.0. Modern Concerns on Synodality**

The fruits of the renewal which began at the Vatican II Council are yet to be fully harvested in the church. This will not be possible until the inclusion opened by the council reaches every nook of the Church. In fact, today the appetite to locate a proper form for the manifestation of a truly synodal Church, stands in need of clear theological foundations as well as purposeful pastoral directives. It is necessary that there be purposeful thinking and that directed actions be taken to ensure that the dream of true synodality becomes a reality in our church today.

### **2.1. A Theology of Communion**

The usage of the term “*communio*” to describe the state and being of the Church developed in the New Testament era. It has several different meanings and can be used to describe the style of life of the early believers after the example of Christ himself (Luke 8:1), especially in anticipating the last days (Deut 15:4). It is also used to describe the fellowship between the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3, 6), and the family fellowship of believers (1 John 1:3, 7) in Christ’s humiliation and exaltation (Rom 6:8, 8:17, 6:6, 2 Tim 2:12) and a share in the

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<sup>325</sup> Bernard Dominique Dupuy, The Constitutive Nature of Ethics in the Confession of the Christian Faith, in *Concilium*, 211, 1 No 6, (1970), 77.

<sup>326</sup> Dupuy, *Constitutive Nature of Ethics*, 78.

Spirit (2 Cor 13:13). It is thus clear that communion is foundational to an understanding of Church as a whole, both as revealed in scripture and confirmed in history.<sup>327</sup>

Scripture also affirms that communion is an offspring of the life and mission of Christ himself. It is the Lord who gathers the one people unto himself. This gathering is put in place, first of all, by the washing in the waters of baptism.<sup>328</sup> All those who are baptised are gathered into the new family of God over which Christ presides. In the words of Ratzinger, “the ultimate goal at which this gathering aims is perfect unity – a unification with the Son, which at the same time makes it possible to enter into the living unity of God himself so that God might be all in all”<sup>329</sup> Communion is a matter of concern for the modern understanding of synodality because it is the basis on which the People of God journey as one. The demands that ecclesiological communion places on the Church today will advance of the work which the Holy Spirit began through Pope Paul VI when he instituted the Synod of Bishops at the conclusion of the Vatican II Council.

## **2.2. Cooperation in Charitable Duty**

We must note that while the teaching on the spiritual communion of all Christ’s followers belongs to the realm of the orthodoxy of the Church, the cooperation in charity needed to keep alive this communion, belongs to the realm of orthopraxy. In other words, spiritual communion among believers must show itself in visible material cooperation among them.

To cooperate in charitable activity is to respond to the desire of Pope John Paul II expressed in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, when he says that “the new century will have to see us more than ever intent on valuing and developing the forums and structures

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<sup>327</sup> Sam Obu, *Communion and Authority in the Church*, (Rome, Libreria Ateneo Salesiana, 2020), 15.

<sup>328</sup> Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 33.

<sup>329</sup> Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, 33.

which, (...) serve to ensure and safeguard communion.<sup>330</sup> The cooperation that the Church needs in our time is one which demands every member of the Church getting actively involved in “shared endeavors, community struggles, confrontations, tasks, movements, and working together in an effort to change the world”.<sup>331</sup> Unity of faith on its own, is not sufficient; unity of action must follow as well. This means that the face of the whole Church must be shown, in her involvement with the world, inside and outside the Church. It involves the whole Church growing in an understanding of collegiality which also includes synodality.

### 2.3. Models of Ecclesial and Synodal Pilgrimage

There are various models of synodality in the Church today. According to Bradford Hinze, there are three such approaches which have become popular since synodality became a frequently used term, especially since the pontificate of Pope Francis. According to Hinze, they are: the Synodal Way, the Way of Restorative Justice and the Way of Seekers at the Margins.<sup>332</sup>

#### 2.3.1. The Synodal Way

This is the system of synodality advocated by Pope Francis and which is built on the further development of the notion of collegiality proposed by the Vatican II Council.<sup>333</sup> It seeks to promote a fuller and more developed theology, policy and praxis of synodality. Francis’ belief that the baptismal community of all the faithful, and the *Sensus Fidei* provide formidable resources to support collegiality at all levels of the Church, is key to understanding how the Synodal Way operates. The Pope does not just speak about this reform but also embodies it in his actions. To this sensitivity is credited the Pope’s frequent criticism of such ecclesial anomalies as

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<sup>330</sup> John Paul II, *At the Beginning of a New Millennium*, (Nairobi, Pauline Publications Africa, 2001), 36.

<sup>331</sup> Comblin, *People of God*, 69.

<sup>332</sup> Bradford Hinze, Can We Find a Way Together? The Challenge of Synodality in a Wounded and Wounding Church, in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Declan Marmion, (ed), 85, No 3, (2020), 217.

<sup>333</sup> Hinze, *Can We Find a Way Together?* 216.

clericalism, triumphalism, and the misuse of power by bishops and network of bishops especially at the level of the Vatican Curia.<sup>334</sup> This also is reflected in his moving out towards those aggrieved within the Church or who for one reason or another are banned from the sacraments etc.

### *2.3.2. The Way of Restorative Justice*

The Way of Restorative Justice is principally built on the common understanding of Restorative Justice, known and practiced in Christian tradition through the ages. It is very useful in cases of criminal behavior and in addressing harm done to persons from abusive relationships, aggression, bullying, violence in war etc. Restorative Justice asks “what has been done”, what damage has it effected”, “what motives are behind such action”, “what can be done to repair the wrong,” sometimes by ensuring that the victims come to terms with how their aggressors could ever have thought of inflicting such injury on them.<sup>335</sup>

Within the scope of synodality, it will ordinarily favour free speech (*parrhesia*) and dwell mostly on the cases of clerical sexual abuse in the Church. Here, a victim is able to reach a closure with their aggressor and the experience can transform them into a survivor. The ultimate aim of Restorative Justice is to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation. These are not simple decisions but, in some sense, are gifts from God, and as such, are not always the primary outcomes of such processes. Restorative Justice primarily helps the victim to enter a process of restorative healing.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Hinze, *Can We Find a Way Together?* 217

<sup>335</sup> Hinze, *Can We Find a Way Together?* 224.

<sup>336</sup> Hinze, *Can We Find a Way Together?* 224.

### 2.3.3 The Way of Seekers at the Margins

This refers to the path of synodality which appeals to the sensibility of those in the Church who find themselves at her margins. It includes those who are dissatisfied, but still participate in the life of the Church and the sacraments. It includes those also on the margins from outside the Church who are dissatisfied, disaffiliated and disengaged. Among these are also many Catholics who are dissatisfied with the Church and yet, display a deep longing for spirituality, closeness to God and the sacraments.<sup>337</sup> Some of them have a longing for certain doctrinal and theological changes in the Church. Many of these persons show deep faith but are at variance with the Church on certain aspects of Church life and practice.

This Way asks the leaders of the Church to honor the discernments of the *Sensus Fidei* in the personal life of each Christian and to respect the discernment of the faith taking place in communities of the faithful, Small Christian Communities and other faith-based groups.<sup>338</sup>

## 3.0 Dialogue as an Essential Aspect of Church Life, Mission and Prayer

Being called the priestly people of God is an adequate and a binding description of the nature and mission of the Church. The Church is a sacrament to the whole of humanity.<sup>339</sup> Dialogue in the synodal path involves listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying as well as the courage and openness to do so. Dialogue must therefore give priority to listening.

As a step towards making certain that dialogue and listening become part of the Church's collegial and synodal process, Pope Francis issued on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2018, an Apostolic Constitution, *Episcopalis Communio*, in which among other things, he granted power to the

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<sup>337</sup> Hinze, *Can We Find a Way Together?* 226

<sup>338</sup> Hinze, *Can We Find a Way Together?* 228.

<sup>339</sup> Wolfgang Beinert, Priestly People of God, in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Declan Marmion, (Ed),. 85, No 1, (2020), 14.

Synod of Bishops to participate in the ordinary magisterium of the Pope. This document is important because in it, the Pope attempts to link collegiality to synodality.<sup>340</sup> The final document produced by synods, will henceforth, receive authentication by the Pope and be added into the official teachings of the Church.<sup>341</sup> In the same document, Pope Francis also stabilizes the synodal process in a way that allows a wider participation of all the faithful in what becomes the content and views of the synod proceedings. To this end, each synodal process is to begin from, and must first involve parishes, then the dioceses and episcopal conferences before the universal synod of all bishops. At each level, the participation of both clerics and the lay faithful is key and necessary. This practice has now been made a norm.<sup>342</sup> In this way, Pope Francis certifies that everyone in the Church has an opportunity to contribute to her life.

#### **4.0. The “*Oremus*” as the Cry for a Truly Synodal Church – What Synodality entails for the Church Going Forward**

One of the most used invocations in Catholic Liturgy is the appellation “*Oremus*” – Let us Pray! It is not only an invocation but also an invitation. In the liturgy, the priest leads the assembly, but he understands that the prayer being made, is a communal activity even though he makes the prayer in the name of the community. The Church jealously safeguards the communal aspect of Christian prayer by ensuring that as much as possible, Christian celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy, has at least, one member of the faithful in attendance (CIC 906, 1983). In

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<sup>340</sup> Massimo Faggioli, From Collegiality to Synodality: Promise and Limits of Francis’ Listening Papacy, in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Declan Marmion, (Ed.), 85, No. 4, (2020), 361.

<sup>341</sup> Adams Rasmussen, *Episcopal Communion Gives the Synod of Bishops Teaching Authority*, <https://wherepeteris.com/new-apostolic-constitution-episcopal-communio-gives-the-synod-of-bishops-teaching-authority/>, accessed 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

<sup>342</sup> Christopher Altieri, *Episcopal Communion, Three Things You Need to Know about the Pope’s Document*, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/episcopal-communio-three-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-popes-new-document/>, accessed 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

cases where a priest “for a just and reasonable cause” must celebrate mass alone, he must still make the invocations in plural. This is to show the communal aspect of every Christian prayer.

The Christian faithful are not an appendage to the Church, but are essential to it. According to Joseph Palakeel, “a synodal Church, in which the entire people of God *journey together* to evangelize and to bring about the Kingdom of God, is the best form of the exercise of collegiality which includes a process of common listening and communal discernment to the Spirit for fulfilling the mission of the Church”.<sup>343</sup>

Thus, the path of synodality which the Church has set out upon, is not likely to be one which will seek to overthrow the clerical state in a bid to satiate those who harbour resentment towards the hierarchy or Church leadership. It will not be one which will enforce a laicisation of the clergy and enthrone a clericalization of the laity. It is rather, going to be one which will enable the establishment of structures within the universal and particular Churches that will present forums for the people of God to contribute their best in Church leadership and life thus, involving them a in the pilgrim journey of the Church.

Synodality will reveal itself in a willingness and determination to overcome the cover-up mentality that throws a blanket over the misdeeds of leaders of the Church. It will give the Church the courage to apologize when things go wrong and to be serious about it. The true spirit of synodality which the Church seeks, is one which must be functional and not merely structural. The enforcement of synodal procedures must have the force of law and transgressions should attract a penalty. If nothing is done to ensure that the provisions are given stability, there vis

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<sup>343</sup> Joseph Scaria Palakeel, *Journeying Together to Evangelize; A Look at the Synodal Church of Pope Francis*, in *Asian Horizons*,. 1, No 14, (2020), 120.

danger of a mere “cosmetic” reform, found only in the pages of ecclesial documents, gathering dust in fading brown books and good only to be cited in further academic research works.

We must also acknowledge that the path of synodality already embarked upon and which will be the focus of the Synod on Synodality in 2023, will not satisfy everyone’s plans regarding the Church. For instance, it is not expected that the synod will devolve the powers to elect bishops to local Churches, or that clerics who have been unfortunate to fall into scandal, will now be subjected to reproach by the laity in the courts of public opinion rather than by the law of the Church and, when necessary, the civil law. It is not expected that the laity will suddenly be appointed to ecclesiastical offices in the Church which require the powers of the Orders for their due execution, unless certain parts of the Code of Canon Law which support this practice are revised to include that possibility or to effectively deregulate such offices.

Nonetheless, we can expect that the synodality which the Church needs will be one that will definitely open the way for a greater participation of the lay faithful in the structures of governance of the Church, especially where they have, until now, been almost absent or scantily represented. The new path to be taken should provide more structures like those that have been set up for the Synod of Bishops, and these should be extended to more areas of the life of the Church. There should be more attention to the Church as a *synodos* – a walking together; there should be more listening, more consultations within the local Church and the faithful should become more than silent spectators.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Colum Kenny, Participation – Active, Meditative and Thinking, in *Doctrine and Life*, Bernard Tracy (Ed.), 53, No. 10, (2003), 607.



## **5.0. Conclusion**

True synodality in the Church will, as Pope Francis foresees, promote the necessity of dialogue and inclusion, tone down ecclesial triumphalism, rebuke clericalism and condemn all forms of abuse. It will also provide justice for those who have suffered abuse, exclusion and any other form of scandal. True synodality is really about inclusion. Therefore, the synodal process will be successful if it leads the Church to open her arms more and more in welcome to those within her, who feel disaffected, disengaged and disenfranchised. The goal may not lead to approval of every doctrinal proposal or allow every liturgical adjustment but will provide an avenue for listening so that Christians can feel listened to, accepted and welcome.

Synodality is a harkening to the voice of the Lord who says “cast into the deep” (Luke 5:4). It is like the casting of a net into the sea to bring into the unity of brotherly communion, all those who are called Children of God. A true synodal process today, one able to achieve its ends and purposes, must also be one expressed above all, through action and not words alone. In a nutshell, synodality needs a true conversion of the heart. A synodal process which is real and effective needs churches and their leaders to live, pray and work together as brothers and sisters in the family of God.

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For a synod  
in communion I partic