


Parish: Synodality Framework and Check List


<p>A Synodal Church</p>	<p>Synodality is a means of more fully expressing the Baptismal theology of Vatican II, based on a pilgrim church of the People of God, on a journey through place and time. It seeks a church that is closer to the people, distinguished by flourishing interpersonal relationships flowing from a mutual love of Jesus. A synodal spirituality flows from the action of the Holy Spirit and requires listening to the Word of God, contemplation, silence and conversion of heart.</p> <p>In a synodal church, while journeying together, we gather and participate, by right of Baptism, as equals in ecclesial assemblies, structures and processes. In this way the church gives expression to being a community and a communion joined in faith, calling forth the charisms of its members and the appreciation of local contexts, cultures and diversities. A synodal church is built on the relationships of its members, their communities and a culture of humility, deep listening, encounter and inclusion.</p>
<p>A Synodal Parish</p>	<p>In a synodal church it is at the parish level that the church engages most intensely with the faith needs of the People of God. The parish is a community that is not self-selecting but open to gathering and including all. It is the community of the local People of God built on open and trusting relationships.</p> <p>A synodal parish operates on truth, loyalty, clarity, honesty, integrity, consistency, with an absence of obscurity, hypocrisy, ambiguity and ulterior motives (par. 96).</p> <p>The priest leads the community in an engaged and non-clericalist manner that facilitates shared, open decision making and accountable co-responsibility, as an expression of shared Baptismal graces. The parish community is attentive to the priest's sacramental leadership and the priest is open and facilitative in sharing other responsibilities in the administration of the parish - manifesting the unity of a local journeying People of God.</p>
<p>Parish Structures</p>	<p>Empowered by their baptism into the People of God, the laity share jointly in the administration of the parish, through accessible and clearly delineated entities such as the Parish Pastoral Council, Finance Committee, Liturgy Committee, Safeguarding and other appropriate mechanism for shared accountability.</p>

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	<p>The Synod calls for bishops and priests ‘to rediscover co-responsibility in the exercise of ministry’ and exercise ‘a more courageous discernment of what properly belongs to the ordained ministry and what can and must be delegated to others’...</p> <p>Lay people are therefore empowered to participate fully and legitimately in the functioning and reporting of these and other shared leadership and accountability mechanisms (par74).</p>
<p>Parish Liturgies</p>	<p>The liturgy provides the framework for the worship and celebration of the People of God. Liturgical contexts and settings should be within approved guidelines and forms, but need at all times to be accessible, participative and relevant to the local community, its location and multicultural character (par 110ff).</p> <p>‘Ensuring the (Sunday Eucharist) is celebrated in the best possible manner, with particular regard to the homily and to the “active participation” of everyone, is decisive for synodality’ (par142).</p> <p>All possible opportunities should be provided to maximise engagement and participation by women (par 60).</p>
<p>Parish Culture</p>	<p>As the centre for the faith community of the People of God, the culture of the parish is to be built on open and trusting relationships, motivated to advance the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and nurturing of the local faith community.</p> <p>Lay people are invited to participate in all aspects of parish decision making, which is to be open, transparent and properly explained. Transparency, accountability and evaluation build trust and credibility. Decision making is principally a matter for joint community discernment, based on deep listening to all perspectives. A synodal parish should be prepared to explore horizons in the interests of taking the Gospel to others.</p> <p>Synodality at the local church level is an expression of a true ecclesiology, which manifests in a governance framework that inspires trust and engagement. It is pre-eminently a spirituality of the spirit that emerges from listening to the spirit and walking together in ways that resonate with the gospel experience.</p>


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Guidance for Clergy and Lay Catholics: Prompts, Suggestions and Rights

Priests & Religious	<p>Synodality aims to nurture co-leadership and co-responsibility for the local parish. It works by bringing all parishioners (ordained and non-ordained) together at every stage of the parish operations. It builds a shared sense of engagement, ownership and accountability.</p> <p>It starts at first principles, namely the shared baptismal rights of all in the Catholic community. While the priest may be the only ordained member of the community, Synodality proceeds from the baptismal rights and responsibilities extended to all.</p> <p>In a time of declining priest numbers it offers the potential to relieve the ordained minister of many onerous obligations, entrusting to lay people wherever possible a range of tasks that may be related to, but separate from, the roles that only an ordained person can undertake.</p> <p>At a management level a synodal parish shares the burden of organisation and mission tasks, making the local faith community more engaged, vibrant and self-sustaining.</p> <p>Synodality, at all levels is based on deeper more respectful relationships between all involved in parish operations. For priests it will involve stepping back from customary practices of determining and outlining what and how the parish is to function, to instead engage in shared and deep discernment with parishioners as to the essential needs and characteristics that will give greatest expression of faith in that community. Decision making is always to be open, shared, evolving from commonly grounded discernment and then explained openly, fully and accountably.</p> <p>Synodality is not some particular form of governance for religious settings, rather it is applying the methods and motives that ought to characterise a church based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the shared journey of his disciples.</p> <p>For priests and religious, a key challenge will be building and maintaining honest and open working relationships with parishioners and especially those participating in properly structured parish mission and planning functions. In most cases parishioners are effectively volunteers, while working to balance employment and family commitments. Parish clergy and other paid staff need to be sensitive to this divide and adopt approaches that will facilitate engagement by all.</p> <p>It is recognised that there can be major cultural challenges in moving to such operating approaches. It is reasonable and to be expected that there will be a need for development of people/relationship skills, for both priests and lay people. Such opportunities should be embraced to ensure that all are able to function at the required levels of open, honest and committed engagement.</p>
Lay People	<p>As synodality derives from the shared right of all the baptised to participate in the functioning of the church and ways similar to those adopted for the early church, it follows that a clear message for lay people is that they are and</p>

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	<p>should see themselves empowered to participate in the church at all levels and by conscientiously doing so to share in its co-leadership and shared accountability.</p> <p>In a truly synodal parish parishioners will not have to ask repeatedly to share in the full life of the parish, rather they will be aware of and able to respond to open and welcoming opportunities for participation.</p> <p>Active participation by lay people and priests will require genuine engagement by all in shared & respectful discernment and decision making. Lay Catholics should look to assist their priest with manifold tasks that will allow the priest to focus his time and energies on sacramental and faith leadership roles.</p>
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Tracking Synodality: How to measure implementation and effectiveness

Answers to the questions below will provide a good picture as to how serious/successfully the implementation synodality is being approached in your parish. The answers will provide a template for evaluation processes that are to accompany the implementation of synodality and provide an indication as to where remedial interventions are best focussed.


Topic/Area/Issue		Y/N/Comments
1.	Are appropriate parish governance entities established with clear statements of role and function?	
2.	Are parishioners aware of these governance entities and encouraged to participate?	
3.	Does the Parish Priest clearly state his positive approach to implementing synodal practices and encourage lay participation?	
4.	Is each meeting conducted with a clear and specific agenda, with all relevant facts shared openly with all, and do members of relevant entities feel they are able to raise issues for consideration and have them properly addressed?	
5.	Are meetings conducted in the spirit of true discernment with deep respectful listening by all participants, leading to proper reflection and considered decision making?	
6.	Does the Parish Pastoral Council have overall responsibility for the operation of the parish and its related entities?	
7.	Are decisions when taken, and the reasons for them, clearly understood by all in the meeting and then fully explained to the wider parish community?	

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Topic/Area/Issue		Y/N/Comments
8.	Are parish activities and operations characterised by an environment of truth, loyalty, clarity, honesty, integrity and consistency, with an absence of obscurity, hypocrisy, ambiguity and ulterior motives?	
9.	Are parish communications clear, effective and readily accessible for all, including those from differing cultural/language backgrounds?	
10.	Are opportunities for the involvement and participation of women parishioners maximised in all aspects of parish life, including liturgies?	
11.	Are parish meetings held at times that maximise the opportunities for participation and engagement?	
12.	Does participation in the liturgy and other parish activities reflect the wider multicultural and minority groups composition of the faith community?	
13.	Is there a general sense within the parish community of satisfaction and confidence in the open and shared co-leadership/ co-responsibility and accountability for the functioning of the parish at all levels?	
14.	Is the approach of the parish priest seen as facilitative of a synodal functioning parish or an impediment to that? In what ways and how might that best be addressed by cultural or other skills development?	
15.	Has there been an increased sense of engagement and co-responsibility among lay parishioners resulting from their involvement in a synodal model parish?	
16.	Does the parish support adult formation experiences for its members, such as courses?	
17.	Are the Sunday Eucharist liturgies celebrated in the best possible manner, with particular regard to the homily and to the “active participation” of everyone?	
18.	Has the parish’s experience of synodality been based on evidence of ‘a more courageous discernment of what properly belongs to the ordained ministry and what can and must be delegated to others’?	
19.	What evaluation mechanisms would parishioners suggest are appropriate/required to advance parish synodality?	

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