

Introduction

“A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simply hearing”. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he “says to the Churches” (Rev 2:7).” (Pope Francis)

The ten thematic Nuclei

This Synod is about “journeying together” as the whole Church, the whole human race together with the rest of creation. Its aim is to establish a fresh way of being and working as Church.

Therefore, the **fundamental question** we should ask as we go through this synodal process is:

In line with this fundamental question, the following key points (thematic nuclei) of “lived Synodality” need to be reflected on, to be integrated, explained, simplified and deepened.

1. The Journeying Companions

The model of evangelization adopted by the Synod Fathers of the 1994 Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops is that of Church as the Family of God. This model was adopted because it emphasises warmth in human relationships, dialogue, acceptance, solidarity and trust. Whatever affects the people of our contemporary society becomes a concern for us as the church (the Family of God).

This is so because “the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of men (and women) of our time is the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ,” (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 1).

Now when we talk of “journeying together,” the question that naturally arises is:

1. Who are the ones “journeying together”?

When we view ourselves as the “Family of God” as the Church in Africa, another question that arises is:

- 2. Who is/are part of this Family of God that we perceive ourselves to be?*
- 3. Who is asking us to journey together?*
- 4. Who are our travelling companions?*
- 5. When we talk of people left on the margins in the Church and in society, who are the people who come to our minds? Can we put a finger on them?*
- 6. How should we actively involve them?*

II. Listening

A Synodal Church should be a listening Church. This requires openness of mind and heart, listening without prejudices. One question we should ask ourselves is:

- 1. To who does our particular Church (our Diocese) need to listen?*

2. *How are the laity, especially, young people, women, people of different abilities (the physically challenged), the weak people and outcasts listened to?*
3. *How do we integrate the contribution of Consecrated Men and Women?*
4. *What space is there for the voice of minorities in some of our dioceses and parishes (e.g., the smaller races and tribes such as the Vhenda; Kalanga, Shangani; Shangwe, etc), the discarded and the excluded?*
5. *Do we identify prejudices and stereotypes that hinder our listening?*
6. *How do we listen to the social and cultural context in which we live?*
7. *What is our understanding of inculturation and contextualization?*
8. *Do we still consider them a priority?*

III. Speaking Out

A synodal Church is a Church which not only listens but creates space for people to speak out without any restrictions.

1. *Do we allow people to speak with courage and openness which combine freedom, truth and charity (Cf. Charity in Truth by Pope Benedict XVI)?*
2. *To what extent is the freedom of expression guided by charity in truth allowed in our local context?*
3. *How do we promote a free and authentic style of communication within the community and its organizations?*
4. *How do we manage to say what is important to us? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian Community (the Church), and how are they chosen?*

IV. Celebrating

We journey together in the measure we listen to the Word of God together and together celebrate the Eucharist. This is so because “a community that prays together stays together”. The Eucharist should be the heart-beat of our communities.

1. *How do prayer and liturgical celebration inspire and direct our journeying together?*
2. *How do they inspire the most important decisions?*
3. *How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy and the exercise of the sanctifying function?*
4. *What space is given to the exercise of the ministries of the reader (lector) and acolyte?*

V. Co-responsible in the Mission

We are all missionary disciples. Through this synod we are all called to participate in the mission of the Church.

1. *How is every baptized person called to be key player in the mission of the Church?*
2. *How does the community (the Church) support its members committed to service in society (social and political commitment in scientific research and teaching, in the promotion of social justice, in the protection of human rights, and in caring for our common home, etc)?*

One way to do so is by keeping alive the Social Teaching of the Church and through ongoing formation programmes for the clergy, those in consecrated life and the lay faithful.

VI. Dialogue in Church and Society (Ecumenism)

Our common challenges as the Church and society in Zimbabwe should bring us together so that together we have a common approach in tackling them. For example, issues of our economic challenges need us to put our heads together.

- 1. How are divergences of vision, the conflicts and the difficulties addressed?*
- 2. What experiences of dialogue and shared commitment do we have with believers of other religions and with non-believers?*
- 3. How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the world of politics, economics, culture, civil society, the poor?*

VII. Dialogue with Other Christian Denominations

Dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one Baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. In our case there are various levels of encounter, from family up to national institutions.

- 1. What relations do we have with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations? What areas do they concern?*
- 2. How do we relate with those Christian brothers and sisters who may be hostile to us? Do we try to reach out to them in charity and truth? Are some of our relationships marked by pride, jealousy, suspicion or lack of confidence in our identity?*

In some dioceses there is what is called ‘Ministers’ fraternity” where religious ministers from various denominations meet regularly to discuss common challenges and opportunities for evangelization within their areas of operation. The lay faithful also meet and collaborate with Christians of other denominations at funerals and other celebrations. The question to be asked is what fruits have we drawn from this “journeying together”?

- 3. What are the difficulties we have encountered?*

VIII. Authority and Participation

A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. Lay people also participate in the teaching function of the Church, particularly in catechetics, faith formation, and missionary activity.

- 4. How is authority exercised within our particular Church?*
- 5. How do we identify the goals to be pursued, the way to achieve them, and the steps to be taken?*

Some Dioceses and parishes work with pastoral plans and strategic plans worked out by all stakeholders in the Diocese or parish in keeping with the principle “people support what they help create”. In our dioceses we have consultative bodies such as the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC); the Diocesan Finance Committee; the Council of the Laity, the Presbyteral Council and the Association of Priests.

6. *How are these bodies effectively consulted in the major decisions of the diocese?*
7. *What are the other practices of teamwork and co-responsibility within our dioceses?*
8. *How are lay ministries and assumption of responsibility by the faithful promoted?*

In some dioceses leaders at various levels are given leadership courses and team building courses. Be that as it may, the question remains:

9. *How do Synodal bodies function at the level of the particular Church? Are they a fruitful experience?*

IX. Discerning and Deciding

As noted above, in our dioceses we have consultative bodies like the Diocesan Presbyteral Council, the Association of Priests, the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Body of Consultors and the Diocesan Finance Committee. In the parish we also have the Pastoral Council, the Finance Committee and other bodies.

1. *How are these bodies effectively consulted as part of the discerning process?*

In some dioceses goals are determined by the combined planning of various stakeholders of the Diocese. All this is important because in a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit.

2. *By what procedures and methods do we discern together and make decisions? How can they be improved?*
3. *How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchically structured communities?*
4. *How do we articulate the consultative phase with the deliberative one, the process of decision-making with the moment of decision – taking?*
5. *How and with what tools do we promote transparency and accountability?*

X. Forming ourselves in Synodality

The spirituality of journeying together is called to become an educational principle for the formation of the human person and of the Christian, of the families, and of the communities.

1. *How do we form people, especially those who hold roles of responsibility within the Christian Community to make them more capable of “journeying together,” listening to one another and engaging in dialogue?*

As mentioned above, there are some dioceses which offer leadership and team-building courses to the leaders at various levels to enhance more collaboration and Synodality. The questions remain:

2. What formation do we offer for discernment and the exercise of authority?
3. What tools help us to read the dynamics of the culture in which we are immersed and their impact on our style of Church?