

2026 LCWR 70th Anniversary Event

Many Charisms, One Spirit, One Call

SYNODALITY AND CONSECRATED RELIGIOUS LIFE

A Journey of Mutual Gift-Giving for the Church and the World

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OPENING

It is a profound joy to be with you — elected leaders and members of religious congregations, women and men, from the United States, together with some sisters and brothers from Latin America and Canada. This gathering is itself a sign of what I want to speak about today : consecrated women and men, across borders, across charisms, and across roles of leadership and membership, walking together in a synodal spirit. The very theme of your 2026 LCWR 70th Anniversary Event — “Many Charisms, One Spirit, One Call” — already expresses what it means to be a synodal Church : a Church in which we all walk together in unity, through the diversity of our charisms, gifts, vocations and ministries.

In 2022 I had the chance to take part in your assembly for the first time, and I was deeply touched by the synodal style I experienced through your process. I learned a great deal from it. So I want to begin by expressing my gratitude — for being here with you this morning, and for the fact that, for seventy years now, LCWR has been a true laboratory of synodality.

As consecrated women and men coming from so many different places and congregations across the Americas, **you are not on the margins of the synodal journey. You are at its heart.** And on behalf of the General Secretariat of the Synod, I want to thank you especially for your commitment in many ways in the Synod since October 2021 and now taking up the importance of the implementation phase of the fruits of the Synod to continue to advance the unfinished reception of the Second Vatican Council. Your vocation to follow Christ and to carry the mission in the context of the Americas, already embody dimensions of synodality that the whole Church is only now beginning to learn.

I also want to say something personal. As a woman religious myself — a Xavière sister formed in Ignatian spirituality — I come to this conversation not as an outsider explaining synodality to you, but as a sister among sisters and brothers who shares the same vocation, and who has had the extraordinary privilege of accompanying the synodal journey of the whole Church from the inside doing so aware of how much I have received from many women and men religious in the United States, especially during my almost two years in Chicago at CTU and then in Boston at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. I would not be the woman religious I am today, serving at the Vatican, without the support, the formation and the accompaniment I received from so many US sisters and other religious. And I am here to listen to what you carry — because the exchange of gifts is not a metaphor. It is what this assembly is actually for.

And in the time we have together now, I want to humbly highlight a few aspects on synodality and religious life.

PART I — WHAT IS SYNODALITY?

Not a programme. A way of being.

Let us first be clear about what we are talking about, because the word is often misunderstood. Synodality is not a programme to be implemented, not a project with a 2028 deadline, not one more meeting about meetings. It is about our deep identity as Church, rooted in the mystery of the Trinity. The Final Document of the Synod, adopted in October 2024, offers a foundational description: Synodality is a constitutive dimension of the Church... It is a way of being and acting, a style of life and mission, that expresses the nature of the Church as a pilgrim people, gathered together by the Holy Spirit to walk together in fidelity to the Gospel towards the Kingdom of God.

Synodality is learned by doing. Through the synodal journey itself we came to understand it more and more deeply, and were able to formulate a definition :

*“Synodality is the walking together of Christians with Christ and towards God’s Kingdom, in union with all humanity. Orientated towards mission, synodality involves gathering at all levels of the Church for mutual listening, dialogue, and community discernment. It also involves reaching consensus as an expression of Christ rendering Himself present, He who is alive in the Spirit. **Furthermore, it consists in reaching decisions according to differentiated co-responsibilities.** Along these lines, we can understand better what it means to say that synodality is a constitutive dimension of the Church (cf. ITC 1).*

In simple and concise terms, synodality is a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform that enables the Church to be more participatory and missionary so that it can walk with every man and woman, radiating the light of Christ.” (FD §28)

Synodality is not the dissolution of authority into an endless conversation - in a synodal church the bishop remains the bishop and the superior general remains superior general. But it is about how we exercise authority. It is a way of exercising responsibility together, each according to their place in the Body, but all together listening to the same Spirit who is at work in every place and time. It starts with our faith in the action of the Holy Spirit in our congregation, in the Church, in the world yesterday, today and in the future.

Three words structure everything: **Communion. Participation. Mission.**

- **Communion** — we are already one in baptism, at a level deeper than all our differences. Communion is not something we have to construct from scratch; it is a gift we have to receive, and then allow to become visible. As community and as Church we are called to reflect the life of the Trinity in our historic context.
- **Participation** — every baptised person has gifts to bring; no one is too small, too young or too poor to contribute. Participation is simply the concrete, everyday form that communion takes.
- **Mission** — all of this is not for ourselves; it is for the world. We listen to one another so that we may listen better to the world discerning better the signs of the times, and serve better the men and women of today we are journeying with.

Synodality as cultural migration

I want to propose an image that I find particularly suggestive for this moment: **synodality — the way to continue the reception of the Second Vatican Council — is a process of cultural migration embraced as a path of conversion.**

It is not about being another Church but about being the Church in a different way to be more faithful to the Gospel in a changing world facing many challenges. It is moving from one culture to another : from a culture of clericalism, hierarchicalism and institutional self-sufficiency to a culture of listening, co-responsibility, discernment and genuine exchange. It is about truly embracing the ecclesiological vision connected to the vision of Revelation set out in *Dei Verbum* 2:

In His boundless love, God freely chose to reveal Himself to humanity through Christ — the Word made flesh — so that in the Holy Spirit we might become partakers of the divine nature itself. God comes to enter into relationship with humanity: not as a distant or hidden deity, but as one who speaks to us as friends, dwells among us, and invites us into friendship with Himself. (DV2)

This dialogical and relational vision of God as Trinity — a God who wishes to communicate with us and to foster a relationship of friendship — underlies synodal ecclesiology, which is a relational ecclesiology. Everything else follows from it. If God relates to us in this way coming to walk with his People, then a Church that does not listen, that does not converse, that does not walk together as brothers and sisters, is not simply inefficient : it is out of tune with the God it proclaims.

Yet while synodality and collegiality marked the style of early Church governance, the second millennium came to understand the Church in a highly institutional, juridical and pyramidal way — as a perfect society divided between those who know and teach, the pastors, and those who are taught, the faithful. We have inherited this vision, and we have not yet finished receiving and implementing that of Vatican II, which calls for a genuine change of culture. We are still in transition — and you know what a transition of this kind costs.

Migration is costly. It requires leaving behind what is familiar. It involves disorientation, loss and the grief of letting go of what no longer works, in order to become inculturated anew in a different context. But it also opens onto something new — a richer, more missionary way of being Church.

Many of you in this room know migration in your bones: through your own experience and that of the people you journey with; through international communities; through sisters who have crossed cultural and linguistic boundaries in mission; through your own experience of navigating ecclesial structures that were not built with women in mind. That experience is not incidental. It is formative for what the whole Church is now being asked to learn. You already know that one does not migrate by decree, that the first generation always pays the highest price, and that what is lost in the crossing is real and must be mourned rather than denied to be reborn in another culture.

The Final Document is clear about the depth of this shift:

“The conversion asked of us is spiritual, relational, and structural — three dimensions that are inseparable and none of which can be achieved in isolation from the others.”
(cf. DF)

Spiritual, relational and structural — and none of the three without the others. A change of structures without a change of hearts is not enough. A change of hearts for a renewal needs renewed or new structures.

PART II — SYNODALITY AS A SOCIAL PROPHECY

This is not only an ecclesial question. In a country — and across a hemisphere — marked by polarization, inequality, migration crises, climate change and the erosion of democratic institutions,

the Church's capacity to walk together across difference is itself a form of prophetic witness. As the Final Document underlines: "**Synodality is a social prophecy; it is a gift for the world.**"

The United States, Canada and Latin America share one common polycrisis with different faces: the collapse of the capacity to live together across difference — political and social inequality, cultural fractures, violence across the hemisphere — met by a dominant culture offering false solutions: build walls, choose sides, win.

Into this context, the synodal Church we experienced in the Synod Aula in October 2023 and 2024 proposes something radical: a community of brothers and sisters equal in dignity who have learned to walk together across profound cultural, linguistic and ecclesial difference — who listen before they speak, seek consensus rather than victory, and ground their common life in prayer rather than ideology.

In the same way, your communities are laboratories for this much-needed prophecy. At their best, your congregations already embody it — synodality is in your DNA and history. The question is whether we can embrace this prophecy more concretely, in light of our age and situation in religious life today, including our greater fragilities, and our willingness to acknowledge them publicly and offer this experience as a gift to a world that desperately needs it.

Pope Leo XIV, who is a true gift from the US church at her best, calls us from the beginning :

"We want to be a synodal Church, a Church that walks, that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, that always seeks to be close, especially to those who suffer."
(Urbi et Orbi, 8 May 2025)

He highlights that the peace we seek must be disarmed — it begins with the disarmament of our hearts, our prejudices, our fears. And it becomes disarming — it creates around itself a space where the other can lay down their weapons in turn.

Women and men religious have been practicing this disarmed and disarming peace for centuries — in hospitals during wars, in schools in occupied territories, in communities across racial lines, in the accompaniment of those whom society has discarded. This is not private spirituality. It is public witness. It is what the Final Document calls "*the prophecy of the culture of encounter*" (DF 121).

With Pope Leo we understand more and more how synodality is a path for peace - as Pope Francis already highlighted in his conclusion at the end of the Synod « *Perhaps without speaking too much of synodality, peace can be achieved through processes of listening, dialogue, and reconciliation. Synodality is not just another ecclesial programme: it is a grammar of peace that the Church proposes to the world, by first living it within herself.* » And it is so needed today. As women and men religious, our vocation is prophecy. The question is now how to be ever more prophetic in the context in which we actually live? The answer, is clear: through synodality lived as a social prophecy and as a "grammar of peace." Not peace as the absence of conflict, but peace as a learned language and non-violent way to face tensions and conflicts — a way of speaking and listening that makes it possible for people who disagree to remain in the same room, and to remain there long enough for the Spirit to do something and at the end to bring harmony.

PART III — THE EXCHANGE OF GIFTS

The theological heart of synodality

The core notion for understanding and living synodality, on which I want to dwell now, is the **notion of “the exchange of gifts”** (DF 120–123). It is, I believe, the key that unlocks the deepest meaning of synodality — and its most direct connection to our life and our mission.

“The diversity of local Churches is not an obstacle to unity but a gift of the Spirit... Each culture, each tradition, each charism brings something irreplaceable to the community’s understanding of the Gospel.” (cf. DF 120–123)

The exchange of gifts is, first of all, a theological reality. As baptised persons, we are incorporated into the same Body of Christ, and **what we hold in common is stronger than our differences of vocation, charism, role, gender or age**. Yet precisely because we are one Body, each vocation is unique: each member brings what no other member can bring. No single voice, tradition, or charism exhausts the fullness of Revelation. We need one another — as baptised, as religious, as congregations, as members of the People of God — genuinely and structurally, not merely symbolically.

That is the greatest lesson of the synodal process: **we need the other**. Just as bishops have experienced the enrichment of discerning alongside non-bishops during the synodal Assemblies in Rome, we as consecrated women and men also need the laity and the ordained. Our discernment deepens when we listen to perspectives shaped by lenses different from our own.

What we have received is meant to be shared: a charism given by the Spirit is always for the common good. So today, as women and men religious, we have much to give the Church — and much to receive from others. What we are called to do during this LCWR assembly — living this exchange of gifts as a community of faith in a spirit of synodality — can draw inspiration from what Pope Leo shared with the cardinals at the consistory, when he told them: *« Our College, while rich in many skills and remarkable gifts, is not called primarily to be a mere group of experts, but a community of faith. **Only when the gifts that each person brings are offered to the Lord and returned by him, will they bear the greatest fruit according to his providence.** »*

Because *“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.” (...)* A spirituality of synodality also requires asceticism, humility, patience and a willingness to forgive and be forgiven. **It welcomes with gratitude and humility the variety of gifts and tasks distributed by the Holy Spirit for the service of the one Lord (cf 1 Cor 12: 4-5).** It does so without ambition, envy or desire for domination or control, cultivating the same attitude as Christ who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil. 2:7). We recognise the fruits of a spirituality of synodality when the daily life of the Church is marked by unity and harmony in pluriformity. No one can progress along the path of authentic spirituality alone; we need support, including formation and spiritual accompaniment, both as individuals and as a community.”

With these lenses, we can now turn to the Final Document of the Synod itself and what it specifically says about consecrated life.

PART IV - CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE FINAL DOCUMENT

The Final Document does something remarkable: it does not treat consecrated life as a sector to be consulted, or as a problem to be managed. It treats it first as **a resource for the whole Church's synodal journey**. And it names women's participation with particular clarity and urgency.

In substance, the Synod Document said this:

65. Over the centuries, the Church has also been enriched spiritually by the many different forms of consecrated life. From the very beginning, the Church has recognised the action of the Spirit in men and women who have followed Christ along the path of the evangelical counsels, consecrating themselves to the service of God, whether through contemplation or other forms of service. They are called to interrogate Church and society with their prophetic voice. **Across their centuries-long history, the various forms of consecrated life elaborated what we now recognise as practices of synodal living.** These include how to practise discernment in common and to harmonise together individual gifts as well as pursue mission in common. **Orders and congregations, societies of apostolic life, secular institutes, as well as associations, movements and new communities, all have a special contribution to make to the growth of synodality in the Church.** Today, many communities of consecrated life are like laboratories for inter-cultural living in a way that is prophetic for both the Church and the world. At the same time, **synodality invites — and sometimes challenges —** pastors of local Churches, as well as **those responsible for leadership in consecrated life** and in the movements, to strengthen relationships in order to bring to life an exchange of gifts at the service of the common mission. (DF 65)

Notice the vocabulary: *laboratories, prophetic, an exchange of gifts at the service of the common mission*. This is the Synod — bishops and lay people from every continent — speaking to the whole Church about us women and men religious. And notice too that the last sentence cuts both ways: synodality invites *and sometimes challenges* both pastors and those responsible for leadership in consecrated life. The challenge is addressed to this room as much as to any chancery.

On women specifically, the Final Document is one of the most direct texts of the Magisterium :

“There is no reason to prevent women from assuming leadership roles in the Churches: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped.” (DF 60)

And later **it calls strongly for “a greater recognition and support for the lives and charisms of consecrated men and women and their employment in positions of ecclesial responsibility” (DF 77c).**

This is not a vague aspiration. It is a direct call — addressed to the whole Church, including those dioceses and episcopal conferences that have not yet implemented what is already canonically possible. A great deal of what is asked for here requires no change in law whatsoever. It requires a change of imagination, and then a decision. We can also acknowledge the great contribution of US women and men religious since many years who have been pioneers in opening new paths, sending the first women to get Doctorate in Theology, to be presidents of Catholic Universities, to become canon lawyers and formators in Seminary, to become chancellors and leaders in dioceses... they have inspired and empowered many other women and men.

Another aspect is also highlighted: **the structures built in religious life are models.**

“The structures proper to consecrated life, in which superiors render account to their communities and chapters, can serve as inspiration for the development of analogous practices in other ecclesial contexts.” (DF 99)

Centuries of communal discernment. Our chapter processes, our experience of listening before deciding, our traditions of consulting the whole community — this is exactly what parishes, dioceses and civic institutions are now desperately trying to learn. You have been doing it for centuries. And your processes of mutual accountability, your experience of electing leadership, your traditions of communal review and renewal are **models for dioceses, parishes and movements** that are only now beginning to discover what participatory governance means. The rest of the Church is trying to learn what we have been practicing for centuries.

That is why we must **find more ways to share our synodal experience and wisdom.** Do not hesitate to invite priests, bishops and others to learn discernment together with you, or to place yourselves at the service of these synodal processes, grounded in prayer and listening. We need to step outside our structures and comfort zones to journey humbly with those who differ from us — including those whose outlook may still be clerical — just as we go out to meet migrants, welcoming them as they are and building bridges through dialogue. At every level, the Church needs intercultural and intergenerational dialogue, and the Conversation in the Spirit method we will practice together these days is a great help toward that. Do not give up.

What women's and men's apostolic congregations give :

International networks as ecclesiological gifts

« We recognise that institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life, as well as associations, movements and new communities, have the ability to take root locally and, at the same time, connect different places and milieus, often at a national or international level. (DF 118)

You are part of the connective tissue of the whole Church. The presence of sisters and brothers from Latin America and from Canada in this room is not incidental. It is a sign of what the Church is called to be : a communion of communities, a Church of local churches.

Beyond your structures and your networks, you also bring to the Church and to the world four gifts that I want to name explicitly, as they are important dimensions of a synodal Church, a church for « todos, todos, todos »

Mission in proximity to the margins. Your sisters and brothers work in schools in underserved neighborhoods, in hospitals with the poorest patients, in shelters with migrants and refugees, in prisons, in conflict zones. You carry a knowledge of the poor — not *about* them, but *with* them — that no synodal process can afford to lose. In Latin America particularly, your congregations have been on the front lines of Base Christian Communities, of liberation theology's best pastoral fruits, of accompanying communities through violence and displacement.

Intercultural community as lived testimony. In many of your institutes, members from many different countries live, pray, discern — and argue — together. This is not easy, and I do not want to romanticise it. But it is precisely what the Church, and what American society, needs: communities where difference is not a problem to be managed but a gift to be received. You have been practicing the exchange of gifts long before it had that name.

A living alternative to individualism and competition. In a culture that relentlessly pushes individuals towards self-sufficiency and competition, your vowed life proposes a radically different anthropology: human beings are constitutively relational, made for communion, and completed only in gift. In a polarized society, that witness carries prophetic weight far beyond the walls of your communities.

Theological wisdom that is embodied, not merely academic. The theology you carry is not only in books. It is in your practices, your traditions, your ways of praying, your experience of founding charisms renewed across generations. The Final Document explicitly calls religious communities **places of synodal formation** (DF 143–144) — not only for your own members, but for the wider Church.

What We Receive — and Need to Receive

But the exchange of gifts is genuinely reciprocal. **We are learning — perhaps more acutely as our congregations face aging and declining membership — that we cannot continue the journey alone.** This vulnerability, though often difficult to embrace, is itself a gift: to be more dependent on others, more in need of accompaniment, is not a failure of religious life, but perhaps one of its most profound spiritual invitations at this moment.

For many years, the imagination shaping us as religious cast us in a particular role — the ones who helped, taught, trained, and cared for others; the accompaniers, the supporters, those who carried others. And if we are honest, many of us still carry an unconscious pattern that ranks religious life above marriage and family — a hierarchy that baptismal theology does not support, and that the synodal journey calls us to dismantle.

Perhaps our deepest conversion toward a more genuinely synodal life is this: to recognize that what we share with all others — as human beings, as baptised disciples of Christ — is stronger and more fundamental than what distinguishes us as women religious. To walk truly as companions on the journey, together with Christ, all of us brothers and sisters, building relationships of authentic mutuality rather than a one-directional logic of giving and receiving.

We have no future without others. We have much to give — centuries of charism, mission, communal wisdom, and prophetic witness — but also much to receive and learn, from lay people, priests, and bishops, even when, perhaps especially when, understanding does not come easily on either side. We cannot be the Church without them. And we cannot be the Church in the United States, discerning its own path in a challenging moment, without fostering genuine mutual relationships with local Churches around the world.

The presence of sisters and brothers from Latin America and Canada in this room is not merely a gesture of inclusion. It is a genuine, prophetic sign of the exchange of gifts the universal Church needs — one that calls us to honestly name and uproot any post-colonial mindset still tempting Western countries and institutions, including our own congregations.

Honesty therefore requires naming possibly what women's and men's apostolic congregations are called to receive for instance :

From the laity — especially lay women. Lay women — mothers, professionals, women navigating secular workplaces and family life in a polarized and often hostile culture — bring a knowledge of the world that even the most mission-oriented congregation can lose touch with over time. Their experience of raising children in divided communities, of living with economic precarity, of building a life of faith within institutions that were not designed with them in mind, their great resilience: this is not merely practical knowledge. It is theological knowledge — knowledge of God gained through a particular way of carrying the weight of the world. The synodal Church asks us to receive it, genuinely and humbly, and not only to serve those who carry it.

From our sisters and brothers in Latin America and the Global South. The Church of the Global South is not a recipient of mission from the North. It is a source — of missionary creativity, of theological wisdom hard-won through contexts of poverty and persecution, of pastoral forms like the Base Christian Communities that the Northern Church is only beginning to learn from. The sisters and brothers present here from Latin America and Canada are not guests at a table set by others. They are full partners in discernment, and their presence reshapes the table itself.

From young women and men who are not entering religious life. The significant decline in vocations across the United States is not only a demographic challenge to be managed. It is a prophetic question to be received with humility: *What is the Spirit saying to us through the fact that many of the women and men most shaped by our values — educated, justice-oriented, spiritually serious — are largely choosing other forms of life?* Receiving this question honestly, sitting with it in prayer rather than defending against it, is itself an act of synodal conversion.

From those at the margins of our own communities. Every congregation has members whose voices are not fully heard — elderly sisters and brothers whose wisdom is undervalued in a culture that prizes productivity, sisters and brothers from minority cultures within the institute who navigate subtle or not-so-subtle forms of exclusion, lay collaborators who are treated as employees rather than genuine partners in mission. The exchange of gifts does not begin at the level of the universal Church. It begins inside our own walls, in the quality of our daily relationships, in the structures of our common life.

The synodal conversion we are called to is not primarily institutional. It is personal, relational, and spiritual. It asks us to let go of the logic of self-sufficiency — however nobly motivated — and to discover that we are richer, more faithful, and more missionary when we truly walk with others, receiving from them what only they can give.

PART V - THE UNFINISHED CONVERSION

So we shouldn't be afraid to humbly acknowledge that as **women's and men's apostolic consecrated life we haven't finished our synodal conversion.**

We, too, encounter clerical dynamics that are sometimes subtle. I met them first in my own congregation, and in my travels I have found them also within religious institutes: hierarchies between vowed members depending on their formation, their background or their social origin; between sisters and lay collaborators; between those in leadership and those in mission; between cultures within the same congregation. The Final Document names this clearly:

“Clericalism, fostered by priests themselves or by laity, generates a division in the ecclesial body that encourages and helps to perpetuate many of the evils we denounce today.” (DF 74, citing Pope Francis)

Clericalism is a cultural pattern that can inhabit any institution — including ours. The synodal conversion therefore asks each of us to reflect on our own call for conversion what requires honest naming of the attitudes and patterns that obstruct it. Four in particular deserve attention:

- **Authoritarianism** — the tendency to decide without consulting, to impose rather than accompany, to treat authority as a form of ownership rather than service

- **Egocentric narrow-mindedness** — reducing the horizon of discernment to one's own perspective, incapacity to genuinely receive the contribution of others
- **Reluctance to share** — hoarding information, resources, or responsibility; a mentality of scarcity that treats collaboration as a threat rather than a strength
- **Competition and rivalry** — relating to other members of the community or other institutions as competitors rather than as partners in a shared mission

These are not marginal failures. They are deeply ingrained cultural patterns — present in ecclesial life as in every human institution — that the synodal journey calls us to name, examine, and uproot.

Formation: the Condition of Everything Else

This is why we need to keep investing in formation, with special care given to forming our formators and leaders well, embracing the vision of the Final Document of a comprehensive, ongoing formation for all:

*"One of the requests that emerged most strongly and from all contexts during the synodal process is that **the formation provided by the Christian community be integral, ongoing and shared.** Such formation must aim not only at acquiring theoretical knowledge but also at promoting the capacity for openness and encounter, sharing and collaboration, reflection and discernment in common. **Formation must consequently engage all the dimensions of the human person — intellectual, affective, relational and spiritual — and include concrete experiences that are appropriately accompanied.** There was also a marked insistence throughout the synodal process upon the need for a common and shared formation, in which men and women, laity, consecrated persons, ordained ministers and candidates for ordained ministry participate together, thus enabling them to grow together in knowledge and mutual esteem and in the ability to collaborate."* (DF 143)

Thus we are called to discern how that text fits with our own formation programmes : integral, ongoing and shared; engaging the intellectual, affective, relational and spiritual dimensions; including concrete experiences that are properly accompanied; and — this is the point that might challenge our habits — held in common between men and women, laity, consecrated persons, ordained ministers and candidates for ordained ministry. How much of your formation is still done separately? And how we could contribute to this new vision of formation for a synodal church that also requires new participative pedagogies and new spaces to experience formation with lay and ordained.

The Synodal Competencies We Need to Form

Forming for synodality means attending concretely to a set of competencies and spiritual attitudes on which everything else depends. **The spiritual foundation** is primary. Without deep roots in prayer, in the Word of God, and in the discernment of spirits, all the techniques and methods of synodality risk becoming empty procedures. The spiritual conversion comes first and sustains all the rest.

Five key competencies flow from this foundation:

- **Integral self-awareness** — knowing oneself honestly, including one's biases, resistances, and blind spots, as the precondition for genuine listening
- **Assertive and effective communication** — speaking in the first person from one's own experience, with clarity and respect, neither dominating nor retreating into silence

- **Collaborative integration and teamwork** — working genuinely with others, not simply alongside them, building on the diversity of gifts present in any group
- **Intercultural and intergenerational dialogue capabilities** — the capacity to engage across difference with curiosity rather than defensiveness, recognizing that what is unfamiliar may carry a gift
- **Shared leadership competencies that promote cooperation** — leading in ways that enable others to contribute fully, rather than concentrating initiative and decision-making in a single person

To embrace a genuinely synodal posture is to commit to a particular way of standing in the Church and in the world. It involves:

- **A posture of humility and "decentering"** — placing oneself not at the centre but in right relationship with God, with others, and with the mission; accepting that the Spirit may speak through anyone, including those we might not expect
- **Being one among others in the People of God** — receiving one's own vocation and authority as a gift to be exercised in relation, not in isolation; recognizing that no one — however gifted or experienced — possesses the fullness of the Spirit's wisdom alone
- **Adopting an accompaniment approach** — walking with people in their actual situations rather than managing them from above; being present to the journey rather than simply directing its outcome, recognizing that all relationships in the synodal Church are marked by genuine reciprocity: no one is only a teacher, no one is only a learner
- **Developing a listening and interpretative attitude** — not merely hearing words but seeking to understand what lies beneath them; attending to what the Spirit may be saying through the experience of those who speak

A Synodal Style of Leadership

All of this converges on the question of leadership — because how leaders lead shapes the culture of everything around them. A synodal style of leadership is not a weakening of leadership. It is a deepening and a purification of it.

It is, first, **leadership for mission** and for communion — leadership whose ultimate criterion is not institutional maintenance or personal reputation, but the fruitfulness of the Church's witness and service in the world. And this takes three interconnected forms:

A servant leadership — modelled on the kenosis of Christ, who *"did not come to be served but to serve"* (Mk 10:45). Authority exercised as service empties itself of the need to dominate, to be seen, or to be in control. Its goal is to help people and communities to grow liberating the true liberty to follow Christ to fully love and serve the others.

A collaborative leadership — that actively creates space for others to contribute, that builds teams rather than dependencies, that recognizes the charisms of those it leads and puts them at the service of the common mission.

A discerning leadership — that does not substitute its own judgment for the movement of the Spirit, but learns to read that movement through prayer, through listening, and through the shared wisdom of the community consenting to decenter one self to let the Spirit be the true leader. This discerning leadership embrace *The style of accompaniment* — walking with people through their questions, their resistances, and their growth, rather than imposing solutions from outside. And it requires to humbly follow *The style of Jesus' kenosis* — the willingness to empty oneself, to lay down the prerogatives of status or knowledge, in order

to take decision according to the call of the Holy Spirit we discern what is often a paschal journey to die to one's own idea and vision to be guided by the risen Christ.

This is the leadership the synodal Church needs. And it can be formed — if we are willing to invest in the formation that makes it possible. I invite you to keep these two frames in front of you during these days, and to ask yourselves as congregation: where are we already doing this well, and where do we still have to learn?

PART VI — THE CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

I would like now present briefly the best fruit of the Synod, and what appears more and more as the way forward for a synodal Church in which we practice together ecclesial discernment for mission

Before I describe the method, I want to say something foundational: **the Conversation in the Spirit is not a facilitation technique. It is an ecclesial spiritual practice**, rooted in the conviction that the Holy Spirit speaks through the whole assembly — and not only through those who hold authority, expertise or seniority.

This conviction is not new to you. Your founders and foundresses believed it. Your charisms were born of women and men who listened to the Spirit speaking through circumstances, through the poor, through their communities — often against the institutional resistance of a Church that did not always believe the Spirit could speak through women and through those on the margins. The Conversation in the Spirit recovers and formalizes what your tradition has always known.

The Final Document describes it as the most transformative fruit of the entire synodal process:

The three movements

First movement — Speaking from experience. Each person speaks in the first person, from their own prayer and lived experience. Not from their position. Not from their expertise. Not from what they think the group wants to hear. From what they have actually experienced of God in relation to the question at hand.

This is already countercultural. In most leadership meetings — including General Councils — people speak from their roles and from their agendas. The Conversation in the Spirit asks for something different: vulnerability, interiority, honesty about what is actually happening in our prayer and in our communities. It also asks for restraint from everyone else, which is often the harder asceticism.

Second movement — Resonance. After each person has spoken, there is silence. Then others share what resonated — what touched them, what surprised them, what stirred something in their own prayer. Not agreement or disagreement. Resonance.

This movement is designed to slow down the reactive mind — that part of us which is already forming its response while the other is still speaking. It cultivates genuine listening across difference. I have seen it work between sisters from cultures that seemed to have nothing in common, between so called « conservatives and progressives », and between women who had been in conflict for years.

Third movement — Discernment. Only after these two movements does the group seek to discern gathering the fruits of the sharing : not the sum of individual opinions, but the convergence that emerges when the Spirit has been given the space to speak through all the voices. The criterion is

not a majority vote, but the quality of the consensus — the shared sense that “*this is what the Spirit is saying to our community.*”

These three movements are not three techniques. They are three conversions: from speaking about to speaking from within; from reacting to receiving; from deciding by counting to deciding by listening and discerning.

During these days we will have the chance to practice this synodal method as a process of discernment in common, listening together to the Spirit. For many of you it is not new; but discernment is an art, and we never finish learning it. The more we learn it and practice it, the more we are able to help others to discern, personally and communally.

At this stage, as the synodal method is spreading everywhere, there is a great need for trained facilitators. May we, as religious, take our part — practicing it ourselves, and fostering a ministry of listening and facilitation, so that more and more people may experience it: beginning with the children in our schools and universities, the staff in our houses, and the people we serve. So that they may experience it as a grammar of peace, and as a pathway towards a disarmed peace.

CONCLUSION — THE SPIRIT IS ALREADY AT WORK

What I have learned in these years accompanying the synodal process of the universal Church is this: **the Holy Spirit is not waiting for us to be ready.** The Spirit is already at work — in the communities you lead, in the lay women and men who serve alongside you, in the poor who receive your ministry and who, in turn, give you back the Gospel.

The exchange of gifts is already happening. Your task — our task — is to receive it consciously, gratefully, and courageously, and to continue our journey with Christ that is a paschal journey of self-offering by love. The fecundity of our life is not about numbers or expertise but depends on our continuous availability to answer Christ call in a spirit of self-offering for the service of the others and the greatest glory of God.

The Final Document ends its treatment of consecrated life with a word that I want to leave with you: “*Institutes and associations are called to act in synergy with the local Church, participating in the dynamism of synodality.*” (DF 118)

Not passively. Not occasionally. Not only when invited. **Actively.** Bringing your charisms, your centuries of experience, your prophetic witness — not only inside your communities, but into the life of the local Churches fostering mutual relationships of fraternity, into the formation of lay leader, through collaboration with clergy, and into the building of a culture of encounter in deeply divided societies.

You have been walking since your founders and foundresses first set out in mission. The question before us is not whether to walk; it is whether we are willing to walk more consciously, more openly, more humbly — receiving from others what only they can give, and offering to others what only you can give.

That is synodality. And that is your vocation, at this moment in the history of the Church and of the world.

Resources

- Official website of the General Secretariat of the Synod, with all official documents in different languages: <https://www.synod.va/>
- Final Document in English: <https://www.synod.va/en/news/final-document-of-the-xvi-assembly.html>
- Pathways for the implementation phase of the Synod: <https://www.synod.va/en/the-synodal-process/phase-3-the-implementation/resources.html>
- Infographic on the synodal method of Conversation in the Spirit: <https://www.synod.va/en/resources/communication-tools/infographics.html>
- Synod Resources website (find or share resources): <https://www.synodresources.org/>
- Register for the Synod Newsletter: <https://www.synod.va/en/documents/choose-your-mailing-list.html>
- My articles on synodality: <https://bc.academia.edu/NathalieBecquart>