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LAY FAITHFUL IN A SYNODAL CHURCH

Nelson Mathew, OCarm[♦]

DVK, Bangalore

Abstract

Synodality reveals the Church's identity, essential communal dimension, and evangelization mission under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This communal dimension demands interconnectedness between the faithful, the theologians and the Magisterium and this leads to an interaction between them as a synodal church, which produces new insights. A core element of the Synodal Church is the *sensus fidei*. The journey with the Risen Lord is a spiritual charism and vocation of the People of God where the Holy Spirit acts as a fellow traveller and directs us to God the Father. This is a personal experience where all the baptized participate with an open heart through listening, dialogue, and discernment with one another. Here the participation of the laity is not a matter of goodwill or concession in the synodal church, but rather an essential aspect of the nature of the church. Thus, synodality highlights the transformation from theological orthodoxy to pastoral orthopraxis. Consequently, it becomes imperative that the synodal Church cultivates new and deep relationships among clergy and laity, by building bridges, enlightening minds, and rejuvenating and restoring our strength as Christians in order to serve our Lord in these challenging times.

Keywords: *Communio* Ecclesiology; Journeying Together; Lay Participation; Majoritarianism; Pastoral Orthopraxis; *Phronema*; *Sensus Fidei*; Synodality

♦Fr Nelson Mathew belongs to the Order of Carmelites (O. Carm.). At present, he is doing doctoral research in Moral Theology at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Pontifical Athenaeum, Bangalore, on the topic, "Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Clergy: An Ethical Analysis." He completed his Licentiate in Theology with a specialization in Moral Theology from Gregorian University, Rome. He was the formator of seminary brothers for the last 14 years. He has also worked in various capacities as the Rector of the scholastics of his congregation (Order of Carmelites), Superior of Religious Houses, Spiritual Director, and Manager of the School. Email: nelsonmathew78@gmail.com

Introduction

Synodality of the Church plays an integral role in its being, its design, its management, its structure, and its administration. Synodality reveals the Church's identity, its essential communal dimension, and its evangelization mission under the power of the Holy Spirit. It represents what Christ did on earth when he interacted with children, women, and men, the sick and marginalised, the rich and the poor, and those suffering from sin. We come across a spectacular demonstration of Synodality in the Council of Jerusalem, where the apostles, elders, and all the faithful met under the direction of the Holy Spirit to discuss the pastoral and doctrinal issues of the time (Acts 15:1-35).

The synodal model is a shift from the traditional Church's idea of a teaching hierarchy and a learning laity. Throughout the Second Vatican Council's documents, the synodal life of the Church is emphasized by reflections on the mystery of communion and participation of the People of God in mission, highlighting the identity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the Church. The ecclesial community actively participates in this journey, a journey marked with brotherhood, love, and trust and they share in the one priesthood of Christ through baptism. Our journey of listening to one another can be an authentic experience of discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit.¹ This synod on Synodality is taking place in the context of a global pandemic, local and international conflicts, increasing climatic changes, various injustices, racism, violence, persecution, poverty, huge migrations, etc. Furthermore, the Church undergoes suffering through the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable people, the clergy's abuse of power, doctrinal and moral disagreements between the Magisterium and other faithful, and ecumenical issues.²

1. Synodality and *Sensus Fidei*

The gift of faith is given to the whole Church (*sensus fidelium*). "The *sensus fidelium* refers to the gift of faith that every baptized person possesses so that he or she is instinctively drawn to the object of that faith, God."³ *Sensus fidei*⁴ is a spiritual charism of discernment,

¹Holy See Press Office, *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality: Preparatory Document for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2021), 6.

²Holy See Press Office, *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality, 6.

³Errol A. D'Lima, "*Sensus fidei* and the Role of Laity in the Synodal Church," *Jeevadhara* 47 (2017) 60.

⁴ *Sensus fidei*—and its historical cognates, *sensus* or *consensus fidelium*, *sensus ecclesiae*, *communis ecclesiae fides*—are theological concepts that denote the personal

possessed by the whole Church, which knows and receives teaching as apostolic truth and, therefore, is to be believed.⁵ The synod on synodality stresses the idea of the *sensus fidei*, which can lay claim to a long history in the Church. This concept received a huge impetus in John Henry Newman's famous essay *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*. In this listening church, none is excluded and all are invited to participate. The concept of *sensus fidei*, therefore, is much older than Newman. "Vincent of Lerins formulated the ancient rule of faith in the fifth century: *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus est*, what is believed everywhere, always, and by all."⁶ By placing itself in the *sensus fidelium*, theology will prove capable of sounding the depths of God's word.

In the Old Testament, God delivers the people of Israel from slavery and makes them special and worthy of speaking to Him; during the period of the exodus journey, they worshipped their God and observed His law, acknowledging that they belonged to Him alone.⁷ The root of the theological concept *phronema*, which is foundational for the *sensus fidei*, is in the New Testament. Paul exhorts the Philippians to 'have this (common) mind (*phroneite*) among themselves' (Phil 2:5).⁸ All three groups, laity, theologians, and clergy are equally important in achieving the true faith of God. "All acknowledged both the objective-abstract and subjective-practical side of faith and listed *sensus fidelium*' among the *loci theologici*, that is, among the criteria of Christian thought."⁹

As Sandra Arenas puts it: "This synodal model is rooted in a dynamic theology of the local churches and in an in-depth consideration of the believing community's sense of faith."¹⁰ It should include the style of government in the Church, leadership structure, doctrinal development, the celebration of the liturgy, and pastoral designs. Synodality denotes the particular style that qualifies the life

capacity of the believer, within the communion of the Church, to discern the truth of faith.

⁵Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, "Human Experience and Catholic Moral Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 76, 1 (2011) 40.

⁶Lawler and Salzman, "Human Experience and Catholic Moral Theology," 41-42.

⁷International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 13.

⁸Lawler and Salzman, "Human Experience and Catholic Moral Theology," 41. This '*phronema*,' Samuel Femiano explains, is understood by him as 'a type of prudential judgment by which the faithful sense the truth of faith'; this judgment is externalized as 'the voice of the Christian people.'

⁹Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, Westminster MD: Newman, 1967, 288.

¹⁰Sandra Arenas, "The Awakening of Chile: Demand for Participation and the Synodal Church," *Louvain Studies* 45, 1 (2022) 110.

and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel.¹¹ *Lumen Gentium* states:

The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name. The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief.¹²

However, when the Magisterium ignores the theologians and lay people in formulating doctrines for the Church, they fail to be faithful to the Church's primary rule of faith.

The whole body of the faithful ... cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of faith (*sensus fidei*) 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.¹³

Reception of doctrines and teachings requires active dialogue, judgment, and consensus in the whole body of the Church, laity, theologians, and Magisterium. Edward Kilmartin points out that the patristic and medieval notion of the reception was "a tributary of the dominant ecclesiology of that age: a communion ecclesiology."¹⁴ Communion, participation, and mission constitute the three pillars of the synodal church which remain intrinsically connected to the vocation of the People of God.

2. Theological Foundation for the Communion of the Laity in a Synodal Church

The theological foundation of synodality is in conformity with the ecclesiological doctrines of Vatican II.¹⁵ *Lumen Gentium* sets out a vision of the nature and mission of the Church as communion which is indeed a living expression of the catholicity of the Church.¹⁶ Every

¹¹Holy See Press Office, *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality*, 6.

¹²Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, § 12, AAS 57 (1965) 5-75.

¹³*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, 92.

¹⁴Edward Kilmartin, "Reception in History: An Ecclesiological Phenomenon and Its Significance," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (1984) 34.

¹⁵International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 10.

¹⁶International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 58.

believer's situation in the Church is divinely graced. The human person as an *Imago Dei* is the primary foundation of the unity of the human family. As the father and creator of all life on earth, God intended that all people be a family and treat one another with brotherly love. Hence, "synodality is not simply a working procedure, but the particular form in which the Church lives and operates."¹⁷ The theology of Synodality and lay participation is based on Christology, Ecclesiology, and Trinity.

Walking together towards God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit necessitates Christians to have a personal experience of Jesus in their life. "In his account of the disciples at Emmaus, Luke 24: 13-35 gives us a living icon of the Church as people of God, guided on its way by the risen Lord, who lights it up by His Word and feeds it with Bread of Life."¹⁸ The communion, participation, and mission of the synodal church are attainable only through encounters with the Risen Lord. St Paul is able to reiterate, "You are the body of Christ." All the members of this body participate in achieving its goal. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27). All are baptized in the Church and become one body of Christ. *Lumen Gentium* rediscovered the common priesthood of the faithful¹⁹ in which the laity is once again understood to be central in the life of the Church. The concept of the People of God asserts that all Christians irrespective of their function in the Church have received a permanent apostolic task in and through baptism.²⁰ It is a community made of members with a common source of grace and vocation. Women also participate in this priesthood. "Since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church's apostolate."²¹ With the help of the Holy Spirit, and through meditation, study, and lived experience of the Word of God, the people of God proclaim divine revelation. The body of Christ will suffer if some members fail to cooperate properly.

¹⁷International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 42.

¹⁸International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 16.

¹⁹Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 10

²⁰Moses Asaah Awinongya, "Common Priesthood of the Baptized," *Asian Horizons* 9, 2 (2015) 329.

²¹Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, § 9, AAS 58 (1966) 837-864.

Synodality takes place in an ecclesial community through the process of community discernment wherein each member participates in the discernment of God's will for their community and faith. The Second Vatican Council revolutionized the Church's ecclesiology from hierarchical to *communio* ecclesiology. The Church is primarily the community of those united with Christ.²² It is an ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* which presents the Church as a sacrament and the People of God. Despite not using the word 'synodality' in any of its documents, Vatican Council II puts forth a *communio ecclesiology*. The Eucharist creates communion and fosters communion. The Church in her ultimate reality is a fellowship of persons.²³ In the first centuries, synodality was a normal feature of the Church. It is this essential nature of the Church that inspires Pope Francis' proposal for synodality. The synodal church is "the church of the exodus" which means walking together with the clergy and laity. "The Church is, rather, a communion of believers, laity, clergy, and bishops, all of whom are called to listen to the Word of God and to receive the apostolic faith as it is contextualized and revealed to them in their contemporary experiences."²⁴ Furthermore, it fosters a living exchange between the diverse cultures of people. *Gaudium et Spes* states that

with the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage.²⁵

In the synodal church, the dynamic relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is expected, reflected, and expressed. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the synodal church brings unity to diversity. In the Trinity, three persons are always together and they are in a dynamic process of interaction. The Church's communion is rooted in the radical love and unity of the Trinity. Synodality means following the Trinitarian model of walking together. The Spirit remains at the heart of the People of God, directing the Church to the future. It helps us to read the signs of the times and shapes the communion and mission of the Church.

²² Shalini Mulackal, "The Common Priesthood of Women in the Church," *Asian Horizons* 9, 2 (2015) 345.

²³ Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 22.

²⁴ Lawler and Salzman, "Human Experience and Catholic Moral Theology," 52.

²⁵ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, § 44, AAS 58 (1966) 1025-1115.

In the gift and commitment of communion can be found the source, the form, and the scope of synodality, inasmuch as it expresses the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the People of God in the responsible and ordered participation of all its members in discerning and putting into practice ways of fulfilling its mission.²⁶

Faith, healing gifts, miracles, prophecies, spirit discernment, tongues, and interpretation of tongues are gifts of the Trinity distributed to the community and not to any particular group.

3. Synodality as an Effective Participation of the People of God

Many men and women today do not consider the Church as significant in their lives. There are many reasons such as sexual and financial scandals, clericalism, granting only a passive role to the laity, the Church's difficulty to explain her doctrines and ethical positions to contemporary society, hierarchical administration, and so on. In this situation,

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.²⁷

It is possible for lay faithful to contribute to the interpretation of scripture in another time and culture, which poses a challenge since it requires knowledge of different languages, cultures, social rules, and experiences.

Synodality should empower the laity, religious, and clergy to organize themselves as an ecclesial community. "A correct understanding of the synodal character of the Church will include the view that participation is not a matter of goodwill or concessions, but rather a constitutive element of the nature of the Church."²⁸ Lay people are not to be in a subordinate order in the Church or to be passive and the objects of the clergy's ministry. Rather, they are valuable collaborators of the pastors in formulating doctrines, making decisions, evangelizing, and engaged in all aspects of church life. "Synodality is primarily a *permanent processual ecclesial structure* and within this process synodal events take place in which particular

²⁶International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 43.

²⁷International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 73.

²⁸Arenas, "The Awakening of Chile: Demand for Participation and the Synodal Church," 107.

issues are discussed.”²⁹ Whenever the clergy forgets that the Holy People of God are anointed with the grace of the Holy Spirit, they generate dynamics of division, isolation, and closed circles, which lead to narcissism and authoritarianism.

3.1. A Relook at the Concept of Participation of the Entire Church at the Local and Universal Level

A central objective of the Synod on Synodality is to redesign the role of the laity in the life of the church. Participation involves listening to one another, consulting, dialoguing, discernment, welcoming, and exchanging ideas. It is the purpose of synodality to bring together bishops, priests, religious, and laity to make decisions for the Church’s policies. “In the Catholic and apostolic vision of synodality, there is a reciprocal relationship between the *communio fidelium*, the *communio episcoporum*, and the *communio Ecclesiarum*.”³⁰ Ethics are rooted in the ethos of a community. Synodality provides a rich and resourceful Christian ethos to save the Church from collapse. The synodal process is no longer only an assembly of bishops but a journey for all the faithful, in which all the local Churches have an integral part to play.

The synodal path is rooted in the concrete faith experience of the People of God. As People of God, the Church performs the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office.³¹ The successful participation of different sections of the People of God at the parish, diocesan and universal levels is very important for the synodal church. It is the parish that encapsulates the mystery of the Church in a visible, immediate, and everyday form. The parish community as the basic unit of the synodal church gathers around the Eucharist and interacts with one another as they share their faith experiences and the mystery of Christ. Liturgy, especially the Eucharist, is a “communal celebration” and it demands the active participation of the faithful.³² Eucharistic life enables the People of God to feel the presence of the Risen Lord and carry on His mission with the help of the Holy Spirit. “Because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread.”³³ The parish community participates

²⁹Arenas, “The Awakening of Chile: Demand for Participation and the Synodal Church,” 106.

³⁰International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” 66.

³¹Peter Neuner, “Dignity of Laity in Vatican II & Post-conciliar Documents,” *Asian Horizon* 9, 2 (2015) 265.

³²Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, § 27, AAS 56 (1964) 97-138.

³³Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 7.

in different ministries of the Church such as family apostolates, youth and children ministry, choir, parish council, approval of the yearly budget, and so on. Lay people understand the importance of synodality through their marriage and family lives. The family is the smallest unit of the Church. In the synod on the family, Pope Francis tried to highlight that what makes this synod unique is the ability to attract the participation of all the members of the Church in its reflections to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying with regard to family in contemporary society.³⁴ The family forms the fundamental principle of synodality communion, participation, and mission.

The participants should have attitudes such as a time for sharing, humility in listening, the courage to speak, adaptability to changes and newness, openness to conversion and change, discernment, capacity to understand the signs of the time, the ability to face the challenges of journeying together, leaving behind prejudices and stereotypes, clericalism, and so on. Forgetting the true role of the lay people leads both to clericalism in the Church and laicism in the world.³⁵ Clericalism holds lay people in subjection and passivity within the Church, making them incapable of taking responsibility for themselves. The synodal model helps to overcome cleric-centralism in the church. "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 taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will."³⁶ Additionally, synodality will ensure protection for children, abolition of clericalism, women's place in the church, justice for the survivors of power and sexual abuse, decentralization of power, diversification of leadership, eradicating of persistent forms of religious colonialism, and repudiating ecclesial classism.³⁷

3.2. Synodality and Lay Participation of the Church in India

India is a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and pluralistic society. The Church in India encounters a lot of problems such as the decline of family values, an increasing number of divorces, growing materialism, youth's addiction to social media, the decline of spiritual and moral values, a lack of commitment to Christian vocations,

³⁴Vimal Tirimanna, "Consulting the Laity and *Sensus Fidelium*," *Asian Horizons* 9, 2 (2015) 371.

³⁵Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 47.

³⁶International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 68.

³⁷Arenas, "The Awakening of Chile: Demand for Participation and the Synodal Church," 100.

gender and caste discrimination, a lack of commitment to ecumenical unity, the institutionalization of the church, large migrations, etc. Moreover, poverty, injustice, oppression, religious discrimination, ecological issues, and other issues demand social justice. Therefore, the People of God should work for a synodal church that promotes interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, and social justice. Seeing itself as a welcoming, inclusive community, the Church in India should experience Christ's continuing presence and embody values like love, justice, equality, mercy, and peace. It is a sorry fact that a large number of poor and oppressed Christians remain excluded by the church in India. We also need to increase the involvement of women in the life of the Indian church.

Journeying with God's creation is our vocation. Communion among Christians and other religious people is a demand placed by the synodal Church. This communion is possible when we realize that God is the Father of all and we are sisters and brothers of the same Father. In the Indian context, it does not appear to be a cakewalk to walk and work together with other Christian denominations and non-Christians. At present, Christian missionary activity faces threats, attacks, bloodshed, suffering, loss of life, and even persecution. The unique teaching of Jesus "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44) makes us the children of God. A constructive dialogue with men and women of different religious confessions and convictions is required to bring about together a culture of encounter.³⁸ The synodal church involves all people of goodwill to come and think and plan together to fight against all oppressive and dehumanizing forces.

4. The Charism and Mission of the People of God in the Synodal Church

Synodality aims at transforming the Catholic Church from theological orthodoxy to pastoral orthopraxis. It does not mean reformulating the structure of the Church. Synodality is not an end in itself and a social strategy. Its purpose is evangelization, the existential reason of the Church. Based on the doctrine of the *sensus fidei fidelium*, all members of the Church are agents of evangelization.³⁹ As the synodal praxis matures, it increasingly recognizes the importance of communicating the Gospel message and responding to the signs of the times. The synodal church invites all its

³⁸International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 106.

³⁹International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 9.

members to share responsibility, develops their charisms and ministries, and intensify their bonds of fraternal love.⁴⁰ Through their baptism and confirmation, all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself.⁴¹ The missionary work of the Church begins, endures, continues, and culminates in encounters with the Risen Lord in the Eucharist every day, and the faithful are aware of the importance of communion, participation, and mission.

The whole People of God are protagonists and agents of the proclamation of the Gospel. "It involves listening to the Word of God, understanding faith in sapiential, scientific, and prophetic ways, discerning the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel, and being in dialogue with society and cultures, all at the service of the proclamation of the Gospel."⁴² In carrying out her mission, the people of God are called to constant conversion, with availability to the gift of the Holy Spirit, both at a personal and pastoral level. It involves renewing mentalities, attitudes, practices, and structures, in order to be ever faithful to her vocation.⁴³

Since the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God, this sacred synod invites all to a deep interior renewal; so that, having a vivid awareness of their own responsibility for spreading the Gospel, they may do their share in missionary work among the nations.⁴⁴

Pope Francis underlined "every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries," but rather that we are always "missionary disciples."⁴⁵

By baptism, all her members are awarded the 'dignity of children of God and their active participation in the mission of the Church is necessary and indispensable.⁴⁶ As part of its mission, the Church stands for the total well-being of all humanity, and this requires

⁴⁰Michael Czerny, "The Church Becoming Synodal, Part 1: *Lumen Gentium* and the Inverted Pyramid." www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/church-becoming (2021) (accessed on 04-08-2022).

⁴¹Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 33.

⁴²International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 75.

⁴³International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," 104.

⁴⁴Vatican Council II, *Ad Gentes: Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*. AAS 57 (1965) 35.

⁴⁵Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: To the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, § 120, AAS 105 (2013) 1019-1137.

⁴⁶Czerny, "The Church Becoming Synodal, Part 1: *Lumen Gentium* and the Inverted Pyramid" 2021.

working together and journeying together. Special care should be taken to involve those persons who may risk being excluded: women, the handicapped, refugees, migrants, the elderly, people who live in poverty, Catholics who rarely or never practice their faith, etc.⁴⁷ Therefore, the Church must conscientiously and effectively train its faithful to be synodal for their participation in pastoral responsibility.

There are innumerable opportunities open to the laity for the exercise of their apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. The document *Apostolicam Actuositatem* states:

In our own times, new problems are arising and very serious errors are circulating which tend to undermine the foundations of religion, the moral order, and human society itself, this sacred synod earnestly exhorts laymen—each according to his own gifts of intelligence and learning to be more diligent in doing what they can to explain, defend, and properly apply Christian principles to the problems of our era in accordance with the mind of the Church.⁴⁸

Local Churches allow for an incisive initiation of synodal structure by integrating their Christian witness into specific human, social, cultural, and linguistic situations. As a diocese with a similar history, culture, frequency of meetings, procedure, and objectives, the Diocesan Pastoral Council is proposed as the most suitable permanent structure for implementing synodality within the local church. At the local level, the synodal process is more practical; it involves discernment through listening, accessibility to all people regardless of power or status, cultural awareness, the inclusion of all people, especially the marginalized, respect for their dignity, transparency and accountability.

5. Challenges of a Synodal Church

Synodality demands a sustained process of self-purification, authentic transformation, and a constant process of discernment. The closed or prejudiced approach to the consultation may destroy the very purpose of synodality. The participation of all faithful is not an easy process. Laity represents the overwhelming majority of the People of God, but they lack formation in many areas of Church life. The vagueness and lack of conceptualization of the concept of participation undermine the participatory process. A possible danger of synodality is that mere public opinion may be treated as the *sensus fidelium*. Therefore, the people of God are to be guided by the Magisterium and they need to cultivate mutually respectful dialogue.

⁴⁷Holy See Press Office, *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality, 6.

⁴⁸Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 6.

The *Vademecum* for the Synodal Journey reminds us of the following challenges. Instead of being a spiritual process led by the Holy Spirit, synodality can become a corporate strategic exercise.⁴⁹ It lists other challenges such as the temptation for egoistic and immediate concerns of the people, listening only to those who are already involved in Church activities, seeing only problems, focusing only on structural issues, and the loss of focus on the objectives of the synodal process.⁵⁰ Christians are called to look beyond the visible confines of the Church, conflict, division, etc. The purpose of the synodal church is not to establish 'lay parliamentarism.' It is not just a question of collecting public opinion. Synodality is not majoritarianism, where minorities are continually denied their dignity and right. 'Majoritarianism' is characterized by an emphasis on numbers, manipulation, pressure tactics, campaigning, canvassing, and intimidation.

Conclusion

The rediscovery of the People of God as a whole, as a single reality, is the greatest contribution of Vatican Council II. Since we live in a culture where the demands of the Gospel and even human virtues are not often the objects of appreciation, a synodal church emerges as an excellent model for lay participation. It seeks not only personal salvation but the salvation of the whole People of God through the transformation of the Church and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. This transformation is achieved through mutual listening between the Magisterium, the theologians, and the laity. The church has suffered catastrophic consequences due to the turning of a deaf ear to the cries of the People of God. Living in a synodal church means being generous and open to learning from all quarters of life. The pastors need to have the capacity to improve the participation of the laity and interpret the signs of the times in the light of faith and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. A synodal church encourages the faithful to dream about the Church we are called to be, to instil trust, to bind up wounds, to forge new and deeper relationships among the clergy and laity, to draw close to each other, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, to warm hearts, and to restore strength to our hands and a spring in our steps.

⁴⁹Holy See Press Office, *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality, 13.

⁵⁰Holy See Press Office, *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality, 13.