

'JOURNEYING TOGETHER': CHALLENGES AHEAD

Josephine Margaret Devadoss, FMA ♦
Chennai

Abstract

Growing internal and external division, a crisis of authority and subsidiarity, gender inequality and ecological degradation, local and global wars, etc., threaten to tear apart not only the world, but also the church in its efforts to be synodal. The article discusses the challenges and ways forward for making the church more synodal in her journey towards a deeper communion, fuller participation, and greater openness to fulfilling the mission of God in the world. A truly synodal church must be free from a fixed, hyper-institutionalised and over-clericalised image of the church and ministry, and focus instead on the shared baptismal vocation of Christ's kingly, prophetic, and priestly ministries, and embrace an ecclesiology of equal discipleship. It must be transparent and accountable, especially concerning sexual abuse, finances, ecclesiastical management, and governance. A synodal church demands the involvement of the entire people of God, especially young people. The Church has to renew herself under the influence of the Spirit by listening to the Word and the world, and network with non-governmental, governmental, or faith-based organizations to create, sustain, and nourish an alternative community space or environment. A new style of leadership and a new relationship of power and authority have to emerge, promoting teamwork and a collaborative vision rooted in listening, co-responsibility, involvement, service, accompaniment, and

♦ **Dr Josephine Margaret Devadoss, FMA [D.J. Margaret]** has a Post-Graduate Degree in Mathematics from Annamalai University, Chidambaram, a Diploma in Salesian Spiritual Studies from Auxilium Pontifical University, Rome, a Bachelor and a Master's degree in theology from Vidyajyoti College, Delhi and a PhD from the Department of Christian Studies of the University of Madras, Chennai. Her doctoral thesis was on "An Inquiry into the Role of Spiritual Beliefs and Practices in Post-diagnosis Care of Women Living with HIV/AIDS." In addition to research articles in the field of women studies, she has authored two books: *Women in Mission* (Chennai: Arumbu Publication, 2006) and *Finding God in Illness and Care-giving* (Chennai: Don Bosco Publication, 2017). She teaches systematic theology and spirituality in various Theological colleges, seminaries, and animation centres. She animates retreats and conducts seminars and workshops for religious, women and young people. Email: djmagifma@gmail.com

empowerment. The synodal church calls for women's partnership and leadership in all of its ministries, which is a prophetic sign for the human family. In the process of synodal care, the interconnectedness of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation is to be reaffirmed, reemphasized, and celebrated. Mary is the model and mother, icon, and inspiring figure of the synodal church (Cf. LG, 62) and in the synodal pilgrimage of our life.

Keywords: Accountability; Clericalism; Networking; Our Common Home; Patriarchalism; Synodal Church; Synodal Leadership; Transparency

Introduction

Growing internal and external division, a crisis of authority and subsidiarity, gender inequality and ecological degradation, local and global wars, etc., threaten to tear apart not only the world, but also the church. Synodality has become ever more important in facing the challenges of the world. For the church, it has become the path ahead and an expression of its very nature, form, style, and mission.¹ Pope Francis has steadfastly invited the Church to travel together on the synodal path, to experience synodality as a way of being, and to grow in a deeper awareness of the Lord's presence in our midst along the way.²

Since 2021, the church has been reflecting on the theme, "For a Church that Journeys Together: Communion, Participation, and Mission." Lots of efforts and initiatives have been under way all over the world to make synodality the dynamic strategy of the church's journey in the present world. This paper focuses on the challenges ahead in the synodal journey of the church towards a deeper communion, fuller participation, and greater openness to fulfilling the mission of God in the world.³

Challenges Ahead in the Synodal Journey of the Church

The synodal journey will do us no good unless we know what its purpose is and where God is calling us through it. Pope Francis

¹Cf. Pope Francis, "Address to the Faithful of the Diocese of Rome," 18 September, 2021, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/september/documents/20210918-fedeli-diocesiroma>, accessed 25.12.2022.

² Cf. Ralph D'Elia, "Synodality Is Already the Church's Method," May 17, 2022, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/synodality-is-already-the-churchs-method/>, accessed 18.12.2022.

³Cf. Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission. Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality*, 07.09.2021, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/09/07/210907b.html>, accessed 18.12.2022.

clearly describes the aim of the Synod in the following words: “to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, and give strength to our hands.” We shall present some of the challenges and indicate some ways forward for making the church more synodal in her journey in the future.

A Church Capable of Living and Promoting Communion

A church has to become capable of communion and commitment, of participation and networking, of fidelity and credibility in what she believes and proclaims as a true synodal church. The “journey together” towards communion calls for a truly synodal mentality and lifestyle. It has to live and manifest communion and unity, because she has her source, her code, and her goal in the unity of the Blessed Trinity (cf. John 17:21–22). As the People of God on pilgrimage, she has to reconcile all people in the unity of the Body of Christ, through the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:4). “Being truly ‘synodal’ therefore means moving forward in harmony, spurred on by the Holy Spirit” to build communion and ecumenism.⁴

Ecumenical Spaces for Synodal Ecumenism

Bringing people together as a community of communities from all Churches begins with the ecumenical spaces created by the Holy Spirit’s ways and workings. Listening to God through listening to one another, being inspired by the Word of God, becoming involved in the lives of the people, and bearing witness by sharing their wisdom, resources, and love create synodal ecumenism. Ecumenism is coming together to do God’s mission unitedly and cross-culturally.

In the ecumenical synodal process, the test of truth, self-criticism, and evaluation must aim at making the church’s mission more effective by promoting more communion and participation. The dialogue between Christians of different denominations and traditions, united by one baptism, has a unique place in the synodal journey. We need to journey together, walking forward with each other with the common mission of establishing better relationships.

⁴Cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no. 45–48, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html, accessed 18.12.2022.

Unity and communion, based on love, fraternity, and the mutual sharing of resources and energies, can make the church more Synodal.⁵

Synodal ecumenism is possible only outside the structural spaces of the churches and their traditions, faiths, and worldviews. In synodal ecumenism, although there are different parts and different roles played, we are still united in our Christian identity and life. These common factors are the investments for building synodal ecumenism. They are our common ground to journey and work together without compromising. This synodal journey of walking together forward with the common vision of Christian life and mission will favour synodal ecumenism.

God has made human persons to be in communion (Gen 2:18), and we are to discern His will down the road into the years ahead so that we will then know and do that same will as a community of inter-faiths. A continuous conversion process is indispensable to exercising synodal communion among the people of different faiths through sincere self-giving, union with God, and unity with all the creatures (cf. EG, no. 26). We are to create ways so that we can truly live this synodal communion, journeying together to bring the good news to the entire world (Mk 16:15).

A synodal Church is called to follow Christ through the real circumstances of life born of an encounter with the One is the way, the truth, and the life. As Christians we need to believe that it is the Holy Spirit that brings people to accept Christian gospel (cf. 1 Cor 12:4). We are to proclaim and witness to the Gospel; however we need to respect and be sincere about our relationship with people of other faiths. We need to listen and accept them as they are and engage within God's community in doing God's mission.

The Synodal Church has to listen, dialogue, and interact with people of different faiths and also engage in their struggles for creating a community of freedom, equality, justice, and peace. The dialogue at different levels may have to aim at bringing people at the grassroots closer together. This requires a better bond between people of different faiths, perseverance, patience, mutual understanding, and collaboration. Divergences in vision, conflicts, and difficulties are all opportunities for dialogue and collaboration. The interfaith dialogue

⁵Jude Atemanke, "Synod on Synodality "great moment of ecclesial communion": Catholic Bishops in CAR," Bangui, 21 January, 2023 / 9:00 pm (ACI Africa), <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/7455/synod-on-synodality-great-moment-of-ecclesial-communion-catholic-bishops-in-car>, accessed 12.02.2023.

has to take place in the spheres of politics, economics, culture, civil society, and people who live in poverty.

Participative Synodal Journey

Enabling everyone to participate in the synodal journey is a vital ecclesial duty. Without the real participation of all the people of God, speaking about synodality risks remaining a fervent wish. A truly synodal church demands involvement and interaction within the People of God, especially between priests and laity, men and women. This necessitates changing certain overly vertical, distorted, and partial visions of the church, the priestly ministry, the role of the laity, ecclesial responsibilities, roles of governance, and so forth.⁶

Break the Framework of Clericalism and Patriarchalism

If people take the synodal process seriously, then they will be pulled outside their oppressive comfort zone. They will courageously break the fixed frame of a hyper-institutionalized and over-clericalized image of the church and ministry. Pope Francis painfully pointed out that clericalism, whether perpetrated by priests or lay persons, leads to an expurgation in the ecclesial body that perpetuates the evil that the Church is condemning today. "To say "no" to abuse is to say an emphatic "no" to all forms of clericalism," the Pope said.⁷

For in Christ, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female..." (Gal 3:28). In Christ, there is equal dignity and equal access to the grace and love poured out for us in Christ through the Spirit (cf. 1 Tim 1:14; also 2 Cor 13:14; and Titus 3:6). Since in Christ none can be higher and none can be lower, we are equal in the eyes of God and each other. To easily subvert the dominating system of the patriarchal church, people have to keep in mind their baptismal vocational criterion of sharing in Christ's kingly, prophetic, and priestly ministries. People have to incarnate in their lives an alternative, not only to patriarchy and hierarchy but to all forms of coercion-based exercise of power and authority. This is a more serious challenge to a synodal church because it is based on and incarnates an ecclesiology of equal discipleship (see Mt 23:8-11). Above all,

⁶Cf. Pope Francis, "Embarking on the Synodal Journey Guided by the Holy Spirit," <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=12577>, accessed 18.12.2022.

⁷Cf. *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God*, Vatican City, 20 August 2018, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-08/pope-francis-letter-people-of-god-sexual-abuse.html>, accessed 24.20.2022.

synodality ought to be expressed in the Church's ordinary way of living and working.

Transparency and accountability are a clarion call in all matters pertaining to the church, especially sexual abuse and finance. The Church has to take all necessary measures to stop and prevent the recurrence of violence and sexual abuse against children and women, and to ensure that those responsible are held to account and reparations are paid to victims.⁸ Pope Francis has emphatically said that without the active participation of all the Church's members, everything being done to uproot the culture of abuse in our communities will not be successful in generating the necessary dynamics for sound and realistic change.⁹

Despite several practical efforts at making the church more transparent, the question regarding financial transparency in the church seems to be largely unanswered. We need to form ourselves more and more in synodality by promoting listening, dialogue, sharing of responsibility, mission, and better participation in ecclesial management and governance.

Synodal Journey with Young People

Making a synodal church a reality demands the involvement of the entire people of God, especially young people.¹⁰ Pope Francis wrote in the introduction to a new Italian book of essays about youth ministry that young Catholics are giving the church a valuable lesson in the real meaning of "synodality." "They have asked us in a thousand ways to walk alongside them—not behind them or ahead of them, but at their side. Not over them or under them, but on their level."¹¹

Rossano Sala wrote an article on "Youth Ministry after the Synod on Young People—Ten Points of No Return," with the last vital aspect being 'Synodality: A New and Exciting Path for the Catholic Church.' Here he clearly points out that the young people of today

⁸Cf. Press Releases, Special Procedures, "UN Experts Urge Catholic Church to Act against Sexual Abuse, Provide Reparations 21 June 2021," <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/06/un-experts-urge-catholic-church-act-against-sexual-abuse-provide-reparations>, accessed 27.12.2022.

⁹Cf. *Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God*.

¹⁰Cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*.

¹¹Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service, "Young people provide great lesson on 'synodality', Pope Francis writes in book introduction," 8 September 2020, 11:59, <https://thedialog.org/vatican-news/young-people-provide-great-lesson-on-synodality-pope-francis-writes-in-book-introduction/> accessed 24.02.2023.

invite the adults to a real conversion from “doing for” to “being with.” First of all, they ask them to journey with them. Their only great common desire is that the church moves on an ever more synodal form.¹² The great dream of Pope Francis is that young people and elders journey together in a synodal church. It is a way of being and working together, young and old, in listening and discernment, to arrive at pastoral choices that respond to reality.¹³

The church has to take action with and through the young people to transmit the faith today and meet the current challenges of the society. Pope Francis desires that the youth ministry be synodal and that it should involve a “journeying together” that values “the charisms that the Spirit bestows in accordance with the vocation and role of each of the Church’s members, through a process of co-responsibility.”¹⁴ In order to make the church’s synodal journey with the young people more vibrant and quick, it has to listen to and dialogue with the young people with an attitude of empathy, sharing, and discernment.

The young expect the church to be a shining example of authenticity and exemplariness in transmitting faith life, credibility and commitment, competence and co-responsibility in working for social transformation, creativity and respect in safeguarding the religio-cultural diversity and unity. This calls for a positive form of personal commitment from the church to a fraternal, welcoming, joyful, and committed community, prophetically combating social injustice, war, and violence. Among the expectations of the young, one that stands out particularly is the desire for the church to adopt a less paternalistic and more candid style of dialogue.¹⁵

Being and Becoming Synodal in Mission

¹²Rossano Sala, “Youth Ministry after the Synod on Young People – Ten Points of No Return,” *Religions* 11, 6, (2020), 313; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11060313>, accessed 25.02.2023.

¹³ Cf. Pope Francis, ANGELUS Sunday, 28 October 2018, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2018/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20181028.html, accessed 25.12.2022.

¹⁴ Cf. “*Christus vivit*: no one excluded,” 24 October 2019, 12:00, (CV, 206), <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2019-10/christus-vivit-no-one-excluded.html>, accessed 25.12.2022.

¹⁵Cf. XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (From 3th to 28 October, 2018), *Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, no. 57, <http://secretariat.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/fede-discernimento-vocazione/final-document-of-the-synod-of-bishops-on-young-people--faith-an.html>, accessed 25.12.2022.

Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church. In synodal synergy, the church is called to activate the ministries and charisms present in her life and to listen to the voice of the Spirit in order to discern the ways of evangelization.¹⁶ Every baptized person, as a missionary disciple of Jesus, is called to be a protagonist of mission. Synodality represents the main path for the Church, called to renew herself under the influence of the Spirit by listening to the Word and to the world.

The ability to envision an alternative future for the Church and her institutions, in keeping with the mandate she has received from the Risen Lord, depends largely on the decision to initiate processes of attentive listening, authentic dialogue, and community discernment, in which each and every person can participate and contribute. The church has to support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment, etc.). It is one of the big challenges for the church to help these members live out their service to society in a missionary way.

Networking for an Alternative Community with Alternative Spaces

The church has a future if it finds new ways to relate to the world and to network. First of all, it has to start from the challenges with which it is currently confronted and take feasible paths to unlock the promising prospect of God's eternal bliss for the world in solidarity with and empathy for the marginalized.¹⁷ The role of the Synodal Church is to enable the churches, agencies, and Christians to develop strategies of mission that would encourage them to create community space for addressing the issue of poverty in the world. If the church enables people to come out of poverty around the world, it may be able to reduce the conflicts, discrimination, and exploitation among the communities to a large extent.

Pope Francis shows us the way to an alternative place of the Church in the world today: "I prefer a church that is bruised, hurt, and dirty because it has been out on the streets rather than a church that is

¹⁶Cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*.

¹⁷Cf. Staf Helleman & Peter Jonker, ed., *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change*, Series VIII, *Christian philosophical studies* 23 (Washington DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2018), 4.

unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security..."¹⁸ In order to strategically develop mission thinking and mission action, the Christian communities have to network with non-governmental, governmental, or faith-based organizations to create, sustain, and nourish an alternative community space or environment. They need to organize and network in order to create an alternative structure within itself whose purpose is to build relationships and friendships, share resources and information, share values and faiths, and also share worldviews.

Role Models for Synodal Leadership

The world is in need of a new style of leadership and a new relationship to power and the exercise of authority. It calls for teamwork and a collaborative vision rooted in service, accompaniment, and empowerment. The skills required for synodal leadership are collaborative involvement, relational virtues, attentive listening, the capacity to give the other person space, the readiness to forgive, and the willingness to put others at the centre. It demands accountability, co-responsibility, participation, and a genuine spirituality of communion.

In response to the new challenges of the Church today, Pope Francis envisions for church governance the idea of a collegial-synodal process that gives priority over bureaucratic decision, spiritual discernment over magisterial authoritarianism, and open-ended thinking over the obsession with continuity as opposed to discontinuity.¹⁹ The relationship between leadership and people in the church has to be rebalanced.²⁰

Synodal leadership entails service (Mk 10:32–45; Mt 20:26–28). As Pope Francis has said, "For the disciples of Jesus, yesterday, today, and always, the only authority is the authority of service, and the only power is the power of the cross."²¹ Being church is being a community that

¹⁸ Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, no. 49, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, accessed 30.01.2018.

¹⁹ Cf. Robin Gomes, "Pope on Synod: The participation of everyone, guided by the Holy Spirit," <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-10/pope-francis-discourse-moment-reflection-eve-inauguration-synod.html>, accessed 25.12.2022.

²⁰ Cf. Hellemans & Jonker, *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change*, 18.

²¹ Cf. Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades, "'Journeying Together' as the Pilgrim People of God," October 19, 2021 // BISHOP, <https://todayscatholic.org/journeying-together-as-the-pilgrim-people-of-god/>, accessed 18.12.2022.

walks together. It is not enough to have a synod; you must be a synod. The three aspects of listening, co-responsibility, and involvement of the laity as full members of the Church are to be revived in synodal leadership.

Women Partnership and Leadership

Today, there is a consciousness among women regarding their partnership with men in the life and mission of the church. The “journey together” in the synodal church calls for women’s partnership and leadership, which is a prophetic sign for the human family. Jesus’ inclusion of and ministry to and through women within his own life and teaching are powerful examples of the partnership of women and men in the church (Lk 8:1–3).

The biblical theology of a “new creation in Christ,” in which there is “neither male nor female,” (Gal 3:28) is a powerful affirmation of the commitment to equality in the synodal church, and all of its ministries. The church has to affirm the full and equal participation of women in all of its ministries.

This synod has to bring about a new style of leadership and participation by women. The synodal church must promote a circular style of leadership and animation. It has to provide women with sufficient space to bring them into more powerful leadership roles within the Church hierarchy. Then women could contribute to the organization and the exercise of leadership with the right skills for the particular mission of the church. The synodal leadership of service should be free from clerical and hierarchical domination.²²

The Church has to offer women formation to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal style. It has to mobilize the women’s potential in their communities and enhance their leadership roles in the sense of the basic principles of representation, differentiated decision-making power, and shared responsibility. More inclusive attitudes, respectful relationships, and a cooperative approach that includes women are needed today for the betterment of the church and society. The final documents on young people and the

²²Cf. Timothy Nerozzi, “What Does It Mean for A Woman to Serve with the Synod of Bishops? February 8, 2021, <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2021/2/6/what-does-it-mean-for-a-woman-to-serve-with-the-synod-of-bishops>, accessed 21.02. 2022.

Amazon emphasize the urgency of offering “a greater recognition and a greater valuing of women in society and the church.”²³

Synodal Care for the Earth our “Common Home”

The Encyclical *Laudato Si'* [Praise be to You] is developed around the concept of integral ecology as a paradigm to articulate the fundamental relationships of the person: with God, with one's self, with other human beings, with creation. Humans are forgetting their interconnectedness with the earth and with those around and ahead of them who depend on their good stewardship of the gift of creation (Gen 2:15). The synodal care for our common home will make it a more fitting place for us and for the future generation.

The synodal care invites us to develop a “loving awareness” of the earth, our common home, and the society in which we live so that we can share and act on the values we hold right and just. In the process of synodal care, the interconnectedness of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation are to be reaffirmed, reemphasized, and celebrated. We need to live in harmony with nature, preserving a humble reverence for the intricate beauty and balance of creation.

The synodal church has to abide by the encyclical's moral exhortation to save the earth for rich and poor; young and old, and everyone who inhabits this planet. It has to pay attention to one of its striking ethical features by focusing on the intrinsic value and rights of non-human creatures and ecosystems. It has to cultivate an attitude of reverence toward creation and live in harmony with the entire environment by living the six goals of *Laudato Si'* (the Cry of the Earth, the Cry of the Poor, Ecological Economics, Simple Lifestyles, Ecological Education, Ecological Spirituality, and Community Involvement and Participation).²⁴

Mother Mary: An Icon and Mother of the Synodal Church

From the Annunciation through Pentecost, the synodal journey was integral to Mary's life in the economy of salvation. It all began with her ‘fiat’ at the annunciation (Lk 1:26–38), leading to openness, attentive

²³Cf. Carol Glatz, “Speakers: A Church Inclusive of Women is More Synodal,” Social Justice, Vatican City, March 8, 2021, <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/social-justice/speakers-church-inclusive-women-more-synodal>, accessed 25.02.2023.

²⁴Cf. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, *On Care for Our Common Home*, Published 24 May, the Solemnity of Pentecost, in the year 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, accessed 25.12.2022.

listening, dialogue, and actively living the word of God that enabled the Holy Spirit to come to dwell upon her and the Son of God to become incarnate within her.²⁵ Mary's visitation of her cousin, Elizabeth (Lk 1:39–56) and their conversation welling up from their hearts along with the babies in their wombs, proclaim the greatness of God. In the Magnificat, Mary sings of God's intervention in the divine fulfilment done in and through authentic human existence (Lk 1:46–55).

Mary synodally journeyed with Joseph at different times during Jesus' childhood. First of all, Mary, as a pregnant woman, had to make a synodal journey with Joseph, far and under challenging conditions, from Nazareth to Bethlehem in Judea (Lk 2:2; cf. Mic 5:2–3), in order to fulfil an imperial command that all individuals should return to their ancestral towns and be registered. The arrival of Mary and Joseph at Bethlehem, David's city, and their stay at the manger where God was born in our human form (Mt 2:1–11), were significantly synodal.

The birth of Christ was also made synodal by two kinds of witnesses in two different ways: first, by the shepherds, after the angel's announcement; second, by the Magi, who were guided by a star. The episode of the flight to Egypt (Mt 2:13–15) portrays Mary, the synodal mother, accompanying Jesus, the New Moses, who inaugurates the New Exodus, the pilgrim church, on its journey to salvation. This synodal flight to Egypt was necessary for the definitive fulfilment of Hosea's prophecy (Hos 11:1) of the deliverance of God's people.

In the event of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Lk 2:22–39), Simeon and Anna become instruments the Holy Spirit employs to make Christ known to others, and they in turn become part of Mary's synodal journey in the history of salvation. Then Mary's continued synodal journey is led to the event of losing Jesus in the temple and finding him as he astonishes the teachers and religious leaders (Lk 2:41–52). Mary hears Jesus speak the words that she did not expect and treasured all of these things in her heart as she took him back home.²⁶

The passage in the Gospel of John presents Mary's motherly synodal presence at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2:1–12). She appears there as the Mother of Jesus at the beginning of his public life, and in a significant way, she contributes to that "beginning of the signs," which

²⁵ Cf. Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito, *Journeying Together with Mary...* https://www.thefloridacatholic.org/dioceses/palm-beach/journeying-together-with-mary/article_4ee2c814-328b-11ec-8e77-47922abfabe5.html accessed 12.02.2023.

²⁶Cf. Barbarito, "Journeying Together with Mary."

reveal the messianic power of her son (cf. Lk 4:38). This episode highlights Mary's motherly solicitude for human beings in the reality of their wants, needs, and sufferings. Another essential element of Mary's maternal task is found in her words to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you." Thus, the Mother of Christ presents herself as the spokeswoman of her Son's will, pointing out those things that must be done so that the salvific power of the Messiah may be manifested. Her faith not only evokes Jesus' first "sign" but also helps to kindle the faith of the disciples.

After recalling Mary's intervention at the wedding feast of Cana, we find Mary in the public life of Jesus, wherein she was declared as blessed among those who heard and kept the word of God (cf. Mk 3:35; Lk 11:27-28) by faithfully living it (cf. Lk 2:19, 51; LG, n. 58). Again, she hears him replying to those who had told him that she and their relatives had arrived and were wanting to meet him: "My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Lk 8:21). Doing the will of God is one of the significant characteristics of Mary's synodal motherhood. Another passage from John's Gospel that confirms Mary's synodal motherhood in the salvific economy of grace is Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, his Paschal Mystery. Mary's synodal life is a gift: a gift that Christ himself personally makes to each one of us (Jn 19:25-27).

The Church's birth and its manifestation to the world enable us to glimpse the continuity of Mary's synodal motherhood. In the redemptive economy of grace, brought about through the action of the Holy Spirit, there is a unique correspondence between the moment of the Incarnation of the Word and the moment of the birth of the synodal church. The person who links these two moments is Mary: Mary at Nazareth (Lk 1:38) and Mary in the Upper Room at Jerusalem (Acts 1:14). In both cases, her discreet yet essential synodal presence indicates the path of the synodal church.

From the above reflections, we can infer that Mary is the model and mother, icon, and inspiring figure of the synodal church (Cf. LG, 62). In the synodal pilgrimage of life, we are invited to imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, who was always in communion with the triune God, ever ready to offer herself and actively participate in the work of redemption, and faithful to her unique mission in the grand plan of salvation. As a model for all disciples, she reminds us of the universal call to listen attentively to God with openness to the Holy

Spirit.²⁷ One of the fundamental aspects of Mary's synodal journey is service.²⁸ Cardinal Mario Grech said that Mary was an icon of a synodal church because she was a woman with a mission, who accepted her responsibilities with joy, adding that "a synodal church cannot be anything but a missionary church, one which does not simply deliver itself to the world, but which brings the Lord Jesus and the joy of the Gospel."²⁹ Mary is our most able guide and sure companion towards a synodal church. Let us follow Mary's synodal life of listening, dialogue, cooperation, collaboration, service, courage, mediation, participation...³⁰

Conclusion

Synodality is a call to be a different kind of church. It is the way for the church to be herself and to live out her mission in the world of today. It is to be connected to mission and communion and to the experience of being a community that reflects God's ways. It should lead to empowerment, reassurance, confirmation, and encouragement of every person's vocation and ministry. It has to lead to a new vision of the church through a greater love for all God's people and a commitment to ecumenism. A change of approach in interfaith dialogue should endorse synodality. This will lead to a new way of working in a more collaborative style.

Synodality is a great opportunity for a pastoral conversion in terms of mission and ecumenism. However, as Pope Francis has warned, we need to pay attention to three risks: formalism, intellectualism, and complacency.³¹ Synodality has to be one of unity, communion, and the

²⁷Cf. Earl Fernandes, "Synodality: Walking with Christ. The Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary," *The Catholic Telegraph*, October 21, 2021, <https://www.thecatholictelegraph.com/walking-with-christ-the-holy-spirit-and-the-virgin-mary/77739>, accessed 12.02.2023.

²⁸Cf. Conference of Mons. Norberto Rivera, "The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life and Ministry of the Priest," Wednesday, 9 July 1997, Yamoussoukro, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc_con_ccclergy_doc_19071997_conri_en.html, accessed 12.02.2023.

²⁹Cf. John Paul Cordina, "Mary, 'an Icon for a Synodal Church' – Cardinal Grech," December 8, 2022 7:40 PM, <https://newsbook.com.mt/en/mary-an-icon-for-a-synodal-church-cardinal-grech/>, accessed 12.02.2023.

³⁰Cf. John Paul Cordina, "Mary 'an Icon for a Synodal Church' – Cardinal Grech," December 8, 2022 7:40 PM, <https://newsbook.com.mt/en/mary-an-icon-for-a-synodal-church-cardinal-grech/>, accessed 12.02.2023.

³¹Cf. Pope Francis, "Embarking on the Synodal Journey Guided by the Holy Spirit", <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=12577> accessed 18.12.2022.

fraternity born of the realization that all of us are embraced by the one love of God in the spirit of Jesus' fervent prayer to the Father on behalf of his disciples: "That they may all be one" (Jn 17:21). Synod on synodality will be truly beneficial if it becomes a living expression of "being church," of a way of acting marked by true participation.³²

By her very presence and proclamation, the synod has made the Church a Church of closeness, in words and deeds, weaving stronger bonds of friendship with society and the world. The church has to get itself immersed in today's problems and needs, bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God.³³ A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible church. The fruitful experiences of synodality on a local level should foster a more synodal approach to participation and leadership.

A lifestyle of collaboration and participation has to be lived and promoted at the grassroots, at the local and global levels. For the church to be synodal, it means being relational, inclusive, dialogical, discerning, and generative. Synodal church requires synodal leaders with a vision and practice of servanthood. The Synod on Synodality on which the Church has embarked has the opportunity to draw the world into an experience of faith capable of embracing all of life.

Mary, as the Model and Mother of synodality, invites us to listen attentively to God in order to serve humanity authentically. As an icon of a synodal church, she asks us to be missionary disciples of her son Jesus, doing whatever he tells us. Following Mary's synodal life of listening and questioning, dialoguing and collaborating, serving and networking, contemplating and accompanying, let us dream of a "distinctive church" that is open to newness, docility, and courage, journeying together with the Holy Spirit, the source of communion and mission. Let us promote a synodal church that is more caring, more available, with priests who are more approachable, and with people who are more responsible. Let us move towards a new way of looking, a new way of believing, a new way of living, a new way of relating, and a new way of being the church.

³²Cf. Pope Francis, "Embarking on the Synodal Journey Guided by the Holy Spirit."

³³Cf. Pope Francis, "Embarking on the Synodal Journey Guided by the Holy Spirit."