



Embracing Synodality at the University of the Incarnate Word

Communion, Collegiality, and Synodality

We cannot properly understand the principle of synodality without making at least a quick reference to the concept of communion. Communion expresses the profound substance of the Trinitarian mystery and the Eucharistic mission of the Church. It demands a clear recognition of the common dignity and mission of *all* the baptized. Further, it finds its source and summit in the Eucharistic celebration. Furthermore, it is expressed in and through the variety and ordered richness of the charisms, vocations, and ministries of all the baptized.

It is only in an ecclesiological context of communion that we can truly understand, talk about, and operationalize the principle of synodality. However, before we talk about it, we need to make sure to distinguish it from a closely related term, expressly, collegiality.

Collegiality is the specific form in which ecclesial synodality is manifested and made real *through the ministry of Bishops* on the level of communion of the local Churches in a region and on the level of communion of all the Churches in the universal Church. The latter phrase simply means that the pope seeks feedback and advice from the episcopacy, which serves as his advisory panel while trying to respond to the most pressing issues of the day.

Synodality is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, which reveals and gives substance to her being a communion, especially when all her members journey together, gather in assembly, and take an active part in her evangelizing mission. In other words, the concept of synodality refers to the involvement and participation of **the whole People of God** in the life and mission of the Church (International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, 46.47).

Embracing Synodality

What does it mean to embrace synodality - or to use Pope Francis' phrase, to be formed in a synodality spirit?

Essentially, it means to feel, sense, and perceive in harmony with the Church. In other words, to be formed in a synodality spirit means to live out a spirituality of incarnational communion and to use it to guide our educational efforts, our Christian formation endeavors, and our ministerial engagements, both at the altar and in the many fields in which we encounter our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Concretely speaking, we live in a synodality spirit when we exhibit the following five distinctive markers of a spirituality of incarnational communion:

- being aware of our stature as baptized members of the Body of Christ;
- participating in the life of the Church, especially in the celebration of the Sacraments of Holy Eucharist of Reconciliation;
- listening to the Word of God in order to enter into a dialogue with it and put it into practice;
- following the Magisterium in its teachings on faith and morals; and
- going out to meet our brothers and sisters, first and foremost to the poorest and the most excluded.

I am sure that most of us recognize these markers since they are deeply embedded in our institutional history, in our vision and mission, and in many of the principles that guide our institutional commitments.

At the same time, Pope Francis, the USCCB, and the Association of Catholic Colleges have asked us to enter into a period of revision and renewal to make sure that we, the University of the Incarnate Word, are fully embracing synodality and living it out in the way of a true spirituality of incarnational communion.

At the University of the Incarnate Word

Embracing synodality at the University of the Incarnate Word means that all of us, both individually and as a community, are involved in an ongoing process of revision and renewal. For these reasons and echoing Pope Francis, the USCCB, and the Association of Catholic Colleges invitation, I would like to invite all of us to use the upcoming Lenten season to ponder and pray about the following key questions:

- Am I involved and fully participating in the life and mission of the Church, as corresponds to a baptized member of the Body of Christ? How.
- Do I/we participate in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist? How often?
- Do I/we participate in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation? How often?
- Do I/we listen to the Word of God in order to enter into a dialogue with it and put it into practice?
- Do I/we go out to meet my/our brothers and sisters, first and foremost the poorest and the most excluded.
- Do I/we follow the Magisterium in its teachings on faith and morals?
- Am I/are we open to create a new model, a new way of being in communion with each other that brings about true conversion and transformation of the community of the University of the Incarnate Word?

Coupled with reflection, I would like to invite all of us to use the upcoming Lenten season to engage in one -or all- of the following actions to embrace a process of spiritual renewal:

- I/we will intensify my/our daily prayer and my/our participation in the sacramental life of the Church and the University of the Incarnate Word.
- I/we will engage all the members of my/our university community to clearly recognize the common dignity and mission of *all*.
- I/we will make sure that I/we follow the Magisterium in its teachings on faith and morals.
- I/we will promote a prayerful process of discernment in which all voices are respected, heard, and taken into consideration as part of a prudent decision-making process

The synodal process into which we are being invited to participate is our institutional mission. It is a mission of participation, of belonging, of inclusion, of dialogue, of equality. Its guiding principle, synodality, is a way of walking together. It is an opportunity, especially for us who are lay members of the Church, to build something together, to be creative, and to imagine a new University and - why not? - a new Church.

May the Incarnate Word help us enter into a personal and communal process of revision and renewal, embrace a true spirituality of incarnational communion, and bring about authentic spiritual discernment and genuine conversion this coming Lent and beyond.

In Christ,

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