



SYNODALITY



Knights of the Southern Cross Formation Program 2022

Session 6 Forming Ourselves in Synodality

It is absolutely necessary for us to take into account a heritage of faith that the Church has the duty of preserving in its untouchable purity, and of presenting it to the people of our time, in a way that is as understandable and persuasive as possible. (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 3)

Cultural and religious shifts in the last decade have produced an erosion of tradition in religion and society accompanied by processes of increasing pluralisation and secularisation. The recent discussions of the Plenary Council have highlighted the need for a focus on discernment and on formation in faith.

Following on from the importance of discernment comes the focus of discerning how we might form ourselves in synodality. Archbishop Costelloe in his paper on Discernment for the Plenary Council makes the point : *There should be no doubt that God speaks to each of us in the depths of our hearts and is revealed to us in the midst of our own life experience. Equally it is true that what you or I might want for the Church could well be exactly what God wants for the Church. A problem arises, however, when we simply presume that what we want and what God wants are the same thing, without really engaging in a profound process of discernment to determine whether the many voices to which we are all attentively listening are revealing or obscuring the voice of the Spirit.*

Processes of discernment help us to listen carefully to what is going on within us and, as we share this with others, what is also going on within them. Many of us have had to learn the hard way that this requires honesty, humility and openness to each other. It is not easy to let go of long-cherished ideas and convictions, or to have them challenged by the obvious sincerity of people who see things differently from us, but this is what it means to *listen to God by listening to each other.*

In essence, the focus on formation in synodality is looking at the formation offered especially to those in positions of responsibility in the Christian community, to help them to be more capable of listening and dialogue.

So, what do we mean when we speak of formation? First of all, formation is Christ-centred. It is scripturally rich and grounded in the Church. Formation is intentional, on-going and reflective. It starts from people's lived experiences and focuses on the growth of individuals and communities in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation, and in capabilities for mission and service in the world.

A good example of formation is given by The National Catholic Education Commission that describes the mission of Catholic Education as a process that is systematic, collaborative, graduated and ongoing. Forming ourselves in a Synodal Church we might also expect to follow a similar process – with an immediate understanding that personal change – like change in any organisation is seen as a *process* and not a quick event. Fundamentally, the Church comes to us as a gift from God. We are called to



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receive it with gratitude and, as full members of the Church, to do all we can to ensure that it, that we, remain faithful to what we have been given.

In the Plenary Council, Archbishop Costelloe explains: 'we are being invited to restore the Church so that its true nature and identity, and its beauty, can be seen again. We are being called to walk together again the path of true fidelity. But if we are, together, to do this we need to understand the gift we have been given, rejoice in it, love it, and be ambitious for its future'.

So this highlights for us the importance of Synodality, which entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning. Our challenge is to discern how people are formed in our church community to be more capable of "walking together," listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue. Similarly, we might ponder what formation is offered to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal way?

Reflection and Discussion

- 1 What do we need to help us to be more capable of 'walking together', listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue?
- 2 What training do lay leaders need to ensure they exercise their authority in a synodal way— i.e., that every member of the community is welcomed, respected and listened to?
- 3 How do we create a Church community that promotes inclusion, listening to one another, participating in the mission, and engaging in dialogue?
- 4 What type of formation do we need to offer our community to grow spiritually and ensure the participation of all the faithful?
- 5 Is there any particular process needed for KSC to be formed in synodality?

Prayer:

So then, together, listening to the Holy Spirit, let us be led by God, as we pray:

**We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts.
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.**

**We are weak and sinful.
Do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance
lead us down the wrong path**

nor partiality influence our actions.

**Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together
to eternal life and not stray
from the way of truth and what is right.**

**All this we ask of You, who are at work in
every place and time, in the communion of
the Father and the Son, forever and ever.
Amen**