

Avenues for reflection about improving synodality and the mission in the process of "walking together"

Following the Synodal Assembly held on June 19, a document was drafted summarizing the steering committee's presentation and the Assembly's reflections on the lack of involvement in the diocesan missionary transformation project and, more generally, a certain distance experienced between the archdiocese and the parishes/missions/communities. Our analysis of these elements has led to the development of a number of avenues for reflection. We hope that they will prove to be seeds that bear fruit, and that your comments will strengthen our common interests so we may solidify our core identity as "We."

Challenges

Communication within the Church is a key factor in fostering unity, cohesion and the advancement of pastoral ministries. However, it is clear from the various elements that have been pointed out that several difficulties stand in the way of this communication, and particularly that between the archdiocese and the parishes, missions and communities.

- One of the challenges is the **one-sided aspect of Church communications**, whereby the archdiocese is the main sender and the parishes are the receivers. This kind of "top-down" communication dynamic does not encourage genuine dialogue or active participation.
- **Administrative inflexibility and the lack of proximity** represent further obstacles to communication. The common "We" must be given priority to have the sense of belonging to a community and fully experiencing the synodal dynamic. There must be a reaching out to others, especially on the part of the archdiocese towards the faithful. Instead of perceiving the archdiocese as separate from the parishes, we should look on the entire church community as an interconnected whole, in which every person is heard, and where the presence of Christ is experienced within the community. Everyone has a role to play and a voice to be heard.
- **A failure to listen is another fundamental obstacle.** Listening to the hopes and sufferings, the needs and expectations of the faithful is essential in order to

be able to respond in a way that is adequate and relevant. Listening must then be followed up with concrete and timely action to avoid creating any sense of frustration or abandonment. This encounter should be based on listening, fraternal communion and encouragement. The time has come to stop circulating documents that dishearten or breed sentiments of incompetence or remoteness from the realities on the ground. Instead, we need to focus on an approach that values the faithful, encouraging, listening and supporting them; an approach that makes everyone feel valued and loved and capable of making a contribution and participating actively in the life and mission of the Church.

We need to promote a culture of dialogue and communion, in which the archdiocese and the parishes/missions/communities are continually communicating and cooperating with one another.

This culture should not be based on rigid administrative structures, but rather on closeness, listening, encouragement and the sharing of charisms. In this kind of dynamic, everyone should feel valued and loved, capable of making a contribution and participating actively in the life and mission of the Church. Together, we need to create opportunities for encounters and communion, in the course of which we learn to be together, to walk together, in a truly synodal process.

In fact, synodality, which is essential to bringing about this diocesan missionary transformation project, is a process of listening and discernment, in which all are invited to participate actively and to share their experiences, hopes and concerns. The contributions of parishes have to be valued and taken into account as much as those of the archdiocese. Parishes, missions and communities have their own charisms, and these spiritual gifts must be acknowledged and valued. They can be drivers of change and innovation, often even more than the archdiocese itself. By allowing these charisms the opportunity to express themselves, we foster innovation, animation and creativity, all essential factors in the vitality and growth of our faith community.

The following are the expectations of the archdiocese that were expressed at our synodal assembly and grouped together under main headings:

1. Effective and appropriate communication

- Clear, concise messages with specific targets and that take into account the realities of each individual parish, mission and community.

- Communications at an appropriate pace, in order to avoid information overload.
- Messages presented in an engaging and motivating manner, with an emphasis on joy and positivity.
- Communications that are more interactive and two-way, rather than one-way.

2. Support and resources

- Appropriate resources and support for putting initiatives into practice.
- Support to help mobilize pastoral staff, especially volunteers.

3. Acknowledgment of and respect for differences

- Acknowledgment of and respect for the varied realities of parishes, missions and communities.
- Specific support for those communities that are more vulnerable, such as French-speaking communities.

4. Participation and cooperation

- Encouraging active participation in the decision-making process.
- Putting into practice a genuinely synodal approach encouraging dialogue and participation on the part of everyone.

5. Strengthening the bonds of trust

- Actions and behaviours that help to restore and strengthen trust between the archdiocese and the parishes, missions and communities.

CONCLUSION

In the synodal dynamic, the importance of reaching out to one another, in particular from the archdiocese to the faithful, is vital. Proximity, presence and listening are indispensable in reconnecting with the humanity of each person. Long and complex documents should be eschewed in favour of an approach that values, encourages, listens and supports.

In the footsteps of Jesus (Mark 6:34) who was moved with compassion on seeing a large crowd assembled, for they were like sheep without a shepherd, we too must

reach out to others, listening to them and responding to their needs. This is what fraternal communion is really about.

In conclusion, we must recognize that the parishes, missions and communities are both equally senders and receivers of communications. The synodal dynamic is a process of walking together, a delicate dance of listening, dialogue, respect and active participation. In this way, a dynamic of real unity can be developed. To achieve this, we must implement a change of culture, an openness to proximity and listening, and acknowledge that every voice counts, that every person is loved and valued.