

*Journeying Together:
Theological Foundations for Pastoral Planning*

Synodality In and Of the Church

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In this series, we have attempted to ground our understanding of the Beacons of Light initiative in the understanding of the Church as the Family of God. As the Family of God, we journey together in a synodal way, imitating the walking together of the Trinity. This “walking together” requires walking also with Christ, to whom we united ourselves in the Eucharist, and whom the Church must radiate to the world. . The whole Church is guided also by the Holy Spirit, who calls us together and who leads along our journey. It was the Spirit who overshadowed Mary at the conception of Jesus and who descended upon the Apostles when they were at prayer with Mary at Pentecost.

Trusting in the power of Christ and His Spirit and taking confidence in the Virgin Mary, whose children we have become, the People of God in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati prepare for the journey that lies ahead. In speaking of the Church as a family that journeys together, we can speak of synodality *in the Church* and *of the Church*.

Synodality *in the Church* refers to the divine life in which members of the Church share in the synodality of the Trinity; this sharing happens in a variety of ways, most prominently through the liturgy and sacraments, in which the whole People of God journey toward the heavenly Jerusalem, with members of the Church exercising their diverse charisms and ministries. Ecclesial synodality takes on flesh in institutions (diocesan synods, parish finance councils, pastoral councils, etc.), especially when those structures are animated by the Risen Lord and attentive to what the Spirit says.

These “institutions” will be extremely important in Beacons of Light as “Families of Parishes” develop pastoral plans. Difficult decisions will need to be made about how to work together, about finances, schools, and facilities. The focus cannot be about clinging to the past or holding on to power; rather, the focus must be on the mission of evangelization and discovering what the Risen Lord and the Spirit have prepared.

Synodality *in the Church* is also related to *koinonia*, which refers to the new relationship that disciples have with God and one another. The communion of the Church is revealed as an initiative of the Trinity rather than a result of the will of people who associate for reasons of convenience, common interests, or business.

Koinonia is an unconditional gift from God who desires that all share in the life of His Son and share solidarity with one another; it is also a spiritual work involving sharing in the suffering and consolation of others (Rom 12:13; 2 Cor 1:5-7; Phil 3:10; 4:14) and performing concrete works of charity (cf. Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13; Gal 2:9; Phil 1:5; Phil 6). *Koinonia* refers to a spiritual union *and* to a visibly operating concordance of hearts and minds (Acts 2:42), beginning with baptism through which one is incorporated into the life of Christ *and* the Church, forming a *societas*.

Journeying together as a family is one of the most visible and meaningful forms of ecclesial communion, involving many modes of participation in the Church. If communion is a sharing in the

faith and mission of the Church, this journeying is the sign and fulfillment of communion through which communion appears in all its complex dimensions: divine and human; invisible and visible; animated by the Spirit and organized by humans.

Of course, there will be some resistance from those unwilling to change or fearful of change. Patience will be necessary. Each person and each parish within a family must ask: Am I a bridge to unity within the parish or am I a barrier? Are we truly searching for the way forward or serving as obstructionists? How are we becoming an evangelizing community?

In addition to synodality *in the Church*, we can also speak of synodality *of the Church*. This refers to the Church which is like a "sacrament or sign and instrument both of a very close-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" and which "desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission." (*Lumen Gentium*, 1) It describes the journey of the Church with all of humanity in history.

This way of being is properly understood not as an expression of power but as a *representatio ecclesiae*, whose authority comes from Christ for the service of humanity. What type of face do we as a Church want to show forth? Can we be a Samaritan Church? Precisely because the Archdiocese of Cincinnati offers so many services through schools, hospitals, Catholic Charities and the like to so many non-Catholics, we must be conscious of our responsibility toward those in the wider community whom we serve. A focus on *service* rather than *power* can help us discern the way forward in promoting the common good and bringing the joy of the Gospel to those around us.



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