

A Synodal Church in a Plural World: A Conversation with Mark Guevarra

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Interview Questions and Mark Guevarra's Notes

<p>Origins</p> <p>1. Origins and Background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is synodality? (cf. Pope Francis: “not a parliament or an opinion poll but an ‘ecclesial event whose protagonist is the Holy Spirit’”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For the fullest definition see the International Theological Commission 2018 document “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church.”• Synodality comes from the Greek συν [syn] = together + ὁδός [odos] = path• Synodality implies journeying together. It’s a journey to a world of justice and peace. And it’s a journey that all the members of the church commit to taking: from the Pope, and bishops, all the way up to the newborn baby baptized.• According to the document, synodality is more than just the administration of the church but “the specific <i>modus vivendi</i> (way of living) <i>et operandi</i> (way of operating) in the Church, where all members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her mission.” (6)• From the preparatory document for the synod: It is based on processes of listening, dialogue, and community discernment, in which each and every person can participate and contribute.• In the opening address to the synod, Pope Francis said, “the Synod is not a parliament or an opinion poll; the Synod is an ecclesial event and its protagonist is the Holy Spirit.”• This is important since the church essentially functions as a monarchy, but since Vatican II and with Pope Francis, we are moving towards communal decision-making.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brief overview of synodality in the history of the church: Has the church always been synodal?• How has the concept and practice of synodality evolved (or devolved, as it were) throughout the history of the church?• What is the difference between	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The church has had synods or councils since the first one in Jerusalem as described in the book of Acts, and throughout the centuries.• The synod’s preparatory document offers a short summary and the ITC document have a good summary – there were ways in which at the local level issues were discussed and when unresolved move upward. There is also history of consultation by popes of bishops. However it wasn’t until the 1800’s that we saw a push for a “re-launch of synodal practice” (Synodality, 38). This emerged in its own historical context, including the rise of ecumenism.• While the concept of synodality refers to the involvement and participation of the whole

<p>synodality and collegiality?</p>	<p>People of God in the life and mission of the Church, the concept of collegiality defines the ministry of Bishops in the local Church and the relationship between the local Churches.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what ways did the Second Vatican Council advance the idea of a synodal church? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vatican II provides the necessary foundations for synodality: the emphasis of the Church as the baptized “People of God” (LG 9-17), the doctrine of the <i>sensus fidelium</i> (LG 12), the teaching on conscience (GS 16), the Church’s interpretation of the signs of the times (GS 4), and the role of magisterial authority (LG 12, 25, and DV 10). Since Vatican II, these foundations have created a tension between the competence of the laity (as having authority of conscience and a <i>sensus fidelium</i>) and the authority of the magisterium (as having responsibility over interpreting revelation and formulating teaching). Synodality is the space where these tensions can reveal the work of the Holy Spirit... if we are humble and courageous enough.
<p>2. Pope Francis’s Conception of Synodality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does Pope Francis’s attitude toward synodality differ from that of his predecessors? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pope Francis is really the originator of synodality in the church in recent times. The synods of bishops were certainly used by John Paul II and Benedict, some might argue they weren’t always forums for open and frank discussion as Pope Francis has shifted them. However, synodality is a Pope Francis thing. See America article on Pope Benedict and the synod. Benedict saw the synod as circumscribed – not too open to too much input. This is in line with his <i>communio</i> vs. conciliar view.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Francis is our first post-conciliar pope—he was ordained in 1969, four years after Vatican II concluded. How does his understanding of Vatican II inform his conceptions of synodality? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See America Media article “Pope Francis: My spirituality comes directly from Vatican II” In the preface to an upcoming book, Pope Francis said, “In the history of Latin America in which I was immersed, first as a young Jesuit student and then in the exercise of my ministry, we breathed an ecclesial climate that enthusiastically absorbed and made its own the theological, ecclesial and spiritual intuitions of the council and inculturated and implemented them.” Francis goes on: “The council became the horizon of our belief, our language and our praxis, that is, it soon became our ecclesial and pastoral ecosystem.” “Quite simply, the council had entered into our way of being Christians and of being church, and throughout my life, my intuitions, perceptions and spirituality were simply generated by the suggestions of the doctrine of Vatican II.” Siblings All, Sign of the Times: The Social Teaching of Pope Francis, will be published by Orbis Books in 2022. Pope Francis said that now, more than 50 years after the council concluded its work, “it is

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does he mean when he says that it takes “a hundred years” for the full implementation of a council? 	<p>necessary to make more explicit the key concepts of Vatican Council II, the foundations of its arguments, its theological and pastoral horizon, the arguments and the method it used.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council affirmed the vision of “a church that is open, in dialogue with the world,” he said. And that dialogue has made clear that there is a need “for a church that places herself at the service of humanity, taking care of creation and proclaiming and realizing a new universal fraternity, in which human relationships are healed of selfishness and violence and are founded on mutual love, acceptance and solidarity.” • Vatican II brought change and it takes time for things to resettle.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Francis is also our first pope from the Global South. We know that the Latin American church/CELAM has more readily accepted models of synodal governance (e.g., the continent-wide church assembly this past November). How does Francis’s background as a Latin American priest inform his understanding of synodality? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From America article: “new synodal organism,” as Archbishop Cabrejos put it in his message on the assembly’s first day, which was to be a “school of synodality,” one that invited the people of God, with their pastors, to be the protagonists in the mission Aparecida called for. • See Methodological Guide • At the Aparecida Conference (2007), Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio – later Pope Francis – was elected to chair the important committee charged with drafting the final document. • The Aparecida document is infused in Francis’ <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> which is considered to be programmatic for his papacy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of the key documents and events of Francis’s pontificate that have advanced the cause of synodality (e.g., <i>Episcopalis Communio</i>, the 2019 synod on the Amazonian region)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right from the beginning of his papacy, Francis has manifested a synodal church. When he stepped out on the balcony of St. Peter’s and asked for the prayers of the people. In his call for a “poor church,” an inverted pyramid church etc. Synodality can be a lens to interpret the papacy of Francis. • Evangelii Gaudium, his manifesto, lays out the foundations for a synodal church. • Synod of Bishops on the Family, Synod on Youth, and Synod on Pan-Amazon Region. • Pope Francis, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015 • Apostolic Constitution, Episcopalis communio 15 September 2018 – makes the synod of bishops permanent, freedom to the general secretariat, at the end, papal approval will be more closely aligned with the synod. Also, centers listening to the people, specifies work to be done before and after synods, and it gives power to the synodal assembly.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also from the ITC: Sensus fidei in the life of the Church (2014)
<p>Processes</p> <p>3. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The official title of this synod is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” What are the aims of the synod? • How is it different from the 15 previous synods held by the Synod of Bishops? • (An aside: Can we reflect a moment on the title? How should we think about the three dimensions of the synod’s theme—communion, participation, and mission—and the ways they interrelate?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For 8 aims: see the synod’s Preparatory Document (1) recall HS in church, (2) living a participative and inclusive ecclesial process, (3) appreciating charism, (4) exploring ways of exercising responsibility, (5) examining how responsibility and power are lived in the Church as well as the structures by which they are managed, bringing to light and trying to convert prejudices and distorted practices that are not rooted in the Gospel, (6) accrediting the Christian community as credible, (7) regenerating relationships, (8) fostering the fruits of other synodal experiences • It is all for the mission of the church (paragraph 9): A Church capable of communion and fraternity, of participation and subsidiarity, in fidelity to what she proclaims, will be able to stand beside the poor and the least and lend them her own voice. In order to “journey together,” we need to let ourselves be educated by the Spirit to a truly synodal mentality, entering with courage and freedom of heart into a conversion process that is indispensable for the “continual reformation of which [the Church] always has need, in so far as she is a human institution” (UR, no. 6; cf. EG, no. 26). • It takes place within a “historical context marked by epochal changes in society and by a crucial transition in the life of the Church, which cannot be ignored.” (4) E.g. “tensions and contradictions,” “COVID-19 exposing connectedness and vulnerability,” sins of the church (clericalism), and religious persecution. • It also comes in the wake of the canonical changes of <i>Episcopalis communio</i> which enshrines the need for consultation. • For reflection on 3 dimensions of theme see <i>Vademecum</i> 1.4 • Need to consider this in terms of who and how: Who? All the people of God – all the baptized. How? Ongoing action. Don’t just have it and done, but requires lifelong work. To endure we require communities of support and spiritualities that sustain faith and hope.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The synod will perhaps be the largest consultative process ever. How will the synodal process work? • How will the synod be structured to gather the voices of over 1 billion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the process see the <i>Vademecum</i> • (1) the Diocesan phase – broad consultation, including movements, and religious communities, (2) the continental phase - by August 15th, syntheses are due from each diocese to respective conferences, these syntheses will be further synthesized, and sent on from 7 continents to the General Secretariat which will use it to create the working

<p>Catholics and their affiliates?</p>	<p>document for the synod of bishops (3) synod of bishops October 2023</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you say to people who are rightfully skeptical of the church, particularly its clerical class, to admit and listen to the voices of laypeople and those on the margins? • What is the case to be made for participating in the synod? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect – we all come from different experiences. Given time to heal, our wounds have a lot to teach. • Fears are legitimate • On the skepticism of women see presentation by women in leadership in the synod. • Consider experience of the Call to Action organization. • We must take care – may re-open wounds. We must discern our involvement. • There are profound challenges: exclusion of voices, cherry picking, discrimination, need for structural reforms. • And yet there is always hope. We must trust in the HS active in the church. I profess this. • Fidelity to our individual vocation • What’s at stake? People leaving the church – lives and faith are at risk, the world is divided – we need a solution
<p>4. Strategies for Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once we have decided to participate in the synod, how should we go about doing so? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with your local diocese. Call them or go to the website. Sign up for the diocesan newsletter. Contact the synodal coordinator. Go to synodmeetings.com to look for upcoming meetings. • Read through discussion guides shared by the diocese. • Read through the Official Handbook for the Synod called the Vademecum and read through the synod’s Preparatory Document. • PD 26: The fundamental question that guides this consultation of the People of God, as mentioned at the beginning, is the following: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together:” How is this journeying together happening today in your particular church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together? In order to respond, you are invited to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) ask yourselves what experiences in your particular Church the fundamental question calls to mind; b) reread these experiences in greater depth: What joys did they provoke? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered? What wounds have they brought to light? What insights have they elicited? c) gather the fruits to share: Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound? What is he asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What should we do if our parish or diocese is resistant to participating in the synod? • Can interested parishioners convene independently, or join up with other groups—and does this method risk us “siloing” ourselves off from those who disagree with us? 	<p>opening up for our particular Church?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Episcopalis communio: New addition to Canon Law: The right of the faithful, individually or in association with others, to submit their contributions directly to the General Secretariat of the Synod, remains intact. Also, in Vademecum 5.1: It is also possible for individuals and groups to contribute directly to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops synodus@synod.va • Find a parish in the world or diocese in the world. • Preparatory Document 28: lay associations and movements, of ecclesial and ecclesiastical institutions of various kinds (schools, hospitals, universities, foundations, charitable and assistance organizations, etc.). • Vademecum 5.1: Communal experiences of the Synodal Process are to be encouraged over individual contributions, since they better manifest the synodal spirit of walking together. • Sometimes we need to speak from our communities especially if it isn't safe or if there is history of harm or trauma.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some practical methods for parishioners to be formed synodally, at the local level? • What are some recommended resources to help us organize listening sessions, and recommended procedures and practices for fruitful sessions (perhaps introducing concept of <i>parrhesia</i>)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the Vademecum • Diocesan handbooks and question sheets • YouTube • Organizations: New Ways Ministry, Discerning Deacons • My article: “Toward a Synodal Parish: Practical Methods for Fostering Synodality” • From the Vademecum: Methodological Guide for the Ecclesial Assembly of the Latin American Episcopal Conference and the Plenary Council of Australia • Jesuits of Canada’s Communal Apostolic Discernment Toolkit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should we best seek out and involve the input of those on the margins of the church, including and especially those who have left or who might harbor grievances toward it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with your inner circles. Perhaps there are those in your own family. • Contact your parish to see if they are already involved in ministerial associations, or have parish groups for families in mixed marriages. • Contact spiritual directors

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should we cultivate the ecumenical dimension of the synodal process, and what should be our hope for ecumenical dialogue within this particular synod? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vademecum 2.3: speaks about ecumenical dimension • ITC document looks at the Reformed traditions and Anglicanism with long practices of synodality. We have much to learn. • Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue (III – 2018) speaks about “receptive learning” and “receptive ecumenism.” This is a methodological shift in which the churches stop asking what the other needs to learn from them and begin asking what they need to learn from the other. It is more about self-examination, inner conversion and discerning what the Lord is calling for rather than convincing or judging one’s partner in dialogue. See Crux article.
<p>Possibilities</p> <p>5. Changing the Culture of the Church</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zooming out a bit to see our synodal efforts in a broader social, political, and theological-spiritual context: Why might Pope Francis have selected this particular moment, in both the church and the world, to convene this particular synod? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Pope Francis’ Address at the Opening of the Synod: May we experience this Synod in the spirit of Jesus’ fervent prayer to the Father on behalf of his disciples: “that they may all be one” (<i>Jn 17:21</i>). This is what we are called to: unity, communion, the fraternity born of the realization that all of us are embraced by the one love of God. • Fratelli Tutti 7: the Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly erupted, exposing our false securities. Aside from the different ways that various countries responded to the crisis, their inability to work together became quite evident. For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all. Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality. • FT 8: It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. • Living out what it means to be the Body of Christ. Baptism preparation, welcoming before Mass, WYD Poland.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Pope Francis’s hope for this synod? • What should our hopes and expectations be? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address at the Opening of the Synod: Dear brothers and sisters, may this Synod be a true season of the Spirit! For we need the Spirit, the ever-new breath of God, who sets us free from every form of self-absorption, revives what is moribund, loosens shackles and spreads joy. The Holy Spirit guides us where God wants us to be, not to where our own ideas and personal tastes would lead us. Father Congar, of blessed memory, once said: “There is no need to create <i>another Church</i>, but to create a <i>different Church</i>” (<i>True and False Reform in the Church</i>). That is the challenge. For a “different Church”, a Church open to the newness that God wants to suggest, let us with greater fervour and frequency invoke the Holy Spirit and humbly listen to him, journeying together as he, the source of communion and mission, desires: with docility and courage.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it realistic to think that the synod will move us toward a less clerical model of church governance? (cf. MG: “[A]postolic succession could be accepted as a reality within a spectrum, rather than either/or. In doing so, the hegemony embedded in it can be <i>freely danced with rather than strictly followed.</i>”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is my hope that the synod will nurture theological and therefore doctrinal and legal changes in the church. For example, Parish Pastoral Council are non-binding. A strong PPC coupled with the continual acceptance of our baptismal dignity can be a good check to the “in persona Christi” power of the parish priest. See Instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church", of the Congregation for the Clergy, 20.07.2020 Instruction 25: The ‘culture of encounter’ is conducive to dialogue, solidarity and openness to others, as it is person-centred. Naturally, a Parish must be a place that brings people together and fosters long-term personal relationships, thereby giving people a sense of belonging and being wanted. Instruction 26: The Parish community is called truly to master the “art of accompaniment”. If deep roots are planted, the Parish will become a place where solitude is overcome, which has affected so many lives, as well as being “a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey and a centre of constant missionary outreach.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some ways that the synod may help us depolarize the church? How can we help bring about this depolarization? (cf. MG: “Finding joy in another’s differing view is no doubt challenging, especially in a time of deep polarization; and yet, this is a task of synodality. The key to finding joy may be in a commitment to the Christian journey and mission of encounter.”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perhaps not so much the synod but a spirituality of synodality. Synodality is as much a communal process as it is an individual one. Such a spirituality is non-dualistic, it finds God in all things, it seeks unity etc. But this type of being requires us to confront our own fears, doubts, griefs, greed etc. Without this attitude fostered by spirituality, we will continue to be polarized. This is why the synod organizers have stressed the need for cultivating a synodal spirituality. I know of grad students in theology who are working on synodal spirituality in small groups and even religious education curriculum as fostering this. This work needs to be done. Spirituality, practicing small steps (what we need to do to change a behaviour), spiritual direction, tapping into the spiritual wealth of the church including Richard Rohr, being with the other, listening to hearts – finding both pain and joy, humility - vulnerability
<p>6. The “Light of Nations”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the synod have the potential to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See Pope Francis’ Address at the Opening of the Synod: May we experience this Synod in the spirit of Jesus’ fervent prayer to the Father on behalf of his disciples: “that they may

<p>become a prophetic sign of inclusion and communion for other civic bodies and organizations? (cf. ITC: “Today, when growing awareness of the interdependence between peoples forces us to think of the world as our common home, the Church is called to demonstrate that her Catholicity and the synodal way in which she lives and works are a catalyst of unity in diversity and of communion in freedom.”)</p>	<p>all be one” (<i>Jn 17:21</i>). This is what we are called to: unity, communion, the fraternity born of the realization that all of us are embraced by the one love of God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fratelli Tutti 7: the Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly erupted, exposing our false securities. Aside from the different ways that various countries responded to the crisis, their inability to work together became quite evident. For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all. Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality. • FT 8: It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. • Living out what it means to be the Body of Christ, baptism preparation, welcoming each other before Mass, Pope Francis’ call to youth to greet one another at WYD Poland.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some synodal processes, practices, and skills that might be useful to organizers and others working for social change (e.g., deep listening, “narrative reflection” and Richard M. Gula’s insight that “all transformation involves a repatterning of the imagination to attend to stories that make life worth living,” the “honest exercise of imagining oneself in the place of the other,” etc.)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siblinghood and social friendship - see <i>Fratelli Tutti</i>. • FT 77: Today we have a great opportunity to express our innate sense of fraternity, to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people’s troubles rather than fomenting greater hatred and resentment. Like the chance traveller in the parable, we need only have a pure and simple desire to be a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up the fallen. • FT 78: We can start from below and, case by case, act at the most concrete and local levels, and then expand to the farthest reaches of our countries and our world, with the same care and concern that the Samaritan showed for each of the wounded man’s injuries. Let us seek out others and embrace the world as it is, without fear of pain or a sense of inadequacy, because there we will discover all the goodness that God has planted in human hearts. Difficulties that seem overwhelming are opportunities for growth, not excuses for a glum resignation that can lead only to acquiescence.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In <i>Fratelli Tutti</i>, Pope Francis invokes Pius XI: “Conflict between different groups ‘if it abstains from enmities and mutual hatred, gradually changes into an honest discussion of differences founded on a desire for justice.’” What are some ways that the synodal process can bear the fruit of justice within the church and world, particularly by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of how the synodal process can bear the fruit of justice – Pope Francis’ journey of reconciliation with the indigenous peoples of Canada. The synodal process will bring light to wounds and the reality that the church wounds. See Bradford Hinze’s article: “Can We Find a Way Together? The Challenge of Synodality in a Wounded and Wounding Church,” <i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>. This calls for a restorative justice approach. There is no justice without healing and reconciliation. • Justice for LGBTQ people - see Ish Ruiz’ paper p.22 Quotes below: • Bryan Massingale, “the <i>sensus fidelium</i> becomes a catalyst for doctrinal development and change of magisterial teaching, even teaching long-held to be immutable for it proscribes

centering marginalized voices? (cf. MG: “[Synodality] seeks to unearth hidden voices or hidden perspectives that allows theology to be seen in a new light. . . . if synodality claims to hear all voices, then those of the oppressed and the structures that continue to inflict violence will be revealed.” / “[A] liberative Holy Spirit needs to be incarnated in our communities of resistance providing us with a praxis of transformation by allowing us to move from words of comfort to political resistance.”)

‘intrinsically evil’ behavior.”

- Happening with two German bishops are proposing a reform to the Church’s doctrine on sexual morality in a chapter of a new book.
- Listening to LGBTQ theologies might yield new insights for the church e.g. theological anthropology, gender essentialism, etc.
- Bryan Massingale argued that challenges to LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Church are grounded in idolatry, thus asserting that the Church would need to deconstruct its oppressive idolatrous view of God as a heterosexual man so it can better understand how LGBTQ+ people are also made in the Imago Dei.
- Queer understanding of God liberates.
- Walking a synodal path with LGBTQ+ people should inspire the magisterium to enter the hermeneutical dialectic circle of understanding along with these theologies.
- Ormond Rush’s proposal of a hermeneutical circle of understanding, which amounts to a dialectic process between the magisterium and the faithful.

- All of this to lead to legal changes e.g. same-gender marriage

- Massimo Faggioli, “It is clear that Francis’s synodality developed a primacy of listening to the voices of the peripheries of the Church; yet to be seen is the impact of this kind of synodality for the governance of the Church at the central level in the long run.”