

INTRODUCTION



Renewing the People of God

Our recent popes have sought to reconnect the Church with the world, to be sure that it reflects and addresses the real concerns of people everywhere. Part of this effort has involved synods—gatherings of groups of bishops from around the world who discuss issues and discern ways to move forward.

Now, continuing this work, Pope Francis has called for a worldwide Synod where not just bishops have a voice, but all the faithful are asked to share their experience, strength, hope, frustrations, and questions so that the Church will be clearly hearing the voices of all its people.

Pope Francis is calling for the Church to grow as the body of Christ—filled with the Holy Spirit and focused on the needs of both the faithful and the world. We are all called to be part of it!

This booklet takes his words on the topic of synodality and offers a guide to help us all play our part in renewing the Church today. May these thirty reflections on Pope Francis's words open our eyes and hearts to this important mission.

1 | JOURNEYING TOGETHER

*The Church is God's people journeying together
through the paths of history toward an
encounter with Christ the Lord.*

We have always been a pilgrim Church, restlessly searching for our home in Christ. At times, however, we have given in to the temptation to settle in, to become complacent and content with the way things are, and we have been satisfied with doing things the same way over and over. Pope Francis is calling the entire People of God to turn this around, to begin journeying anew as searchers walking together as equal children of God to meet and rejoice in the encounter with Christ.

PONDER

Am I too content and settled in my faith?
Have I stopped growing?

PRAY

God of newness and discovery, help us to find new ways to seek you, always mindful of the journey, not just the destination.

2 | UNITY, COMMUNION, FAMILY

*This is what we are called to: unity, communion,
the familial spirit that comes from realizing
that we are all embraced by God's love.*

In our lives as Catholics, we have become accustomed to responding to the top-down structures of the hierarchy—pope to bishops, bishops to priests, priests to people. The synodal practice Pope Francis is asking us to undertake works differently. He is asking us to come together as the children of God—all having something to learn from one another, and all having equal value in God's eyes, no matter where our traditional sense of position may place us. We are one body, one communion, one family.

PONDER

Whom do I see myself as superior to?
Or inferior to? What might this teach me?

PRAY

God of newness and discovery, open my eyes to
your unconditional love, and help me recognize
how much you love everyone.

3 | A PROCESS OF BECOMING

The synodal process is a process of becoming that involves the local Churches, in different phases and from the bottom up, in an effort that can forge a style of communion and participation directed to mission.

Pope Francis stresses that this practice of synodality is active, engaging, and exciting. It offers all of us, working together, an opportunity to become a new way of being Church in our world. We are called to open our eyes and ears and hearts to all the ways God is leading us so that we can all become more effective disciples. When clergy and laity all participate, everyone learns and grows. This deeper level of sharing may take some getting used to, but the fruits of the labor will be richly satisfying.

PONDER

Am I confident of my own voice as a person of faith?

PRAY

God of newness and discovery, help me to find and use my voice in your service.

4 | MORE THAN SIMPLY HEARING

A synodal Church is a listening Church that realizes that listening is more than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn.

Pope Francis reminds us that the Holy Spirit is the force behind this entire process. The only way to hear the Spirit's voice is to listen for it, to put aside our own agendas and truly listen to what everyone has to share. This is a real chance for bishops to hear what their faithful feel and for the faithful to hear what issues their priests face. It is an opportunity for all involved to grow in the Spirit.

PONDER

Am I ready and willing to listen and set my preconceived ideas aside?

PRAY

God of newness and discovery, help me to grow beyond my complacency and to listen with an open heart.

5 | BE NOT AFRAID...

When we are prepared to listen, we become free to set aside our own partial or insufficient ideas....

In this way, we become truly open to accept God's call to a new and different life.

It is no accident that Pope Francis has called for this worldwide Synod as the globe begins to come to grips with a pandemic/postpandemic reality. At this fragile time, we may be more ready to listen, to recognize how the changes that Covid has brought to our individual lives may open us to changing our way of being Church, to discovering how to grow together in new ways that reflect the Spirit of God.

PONDER

How has my life been changed by the pandemic?
Am I more open to accepting others?

PRAY

God of newness and discovery, help me to embrace the changes I have made and to embrace the new ones you offer.