



WALKING TOGETHER:

Seven Calls to Synodal Leadership

in the Mission
of the Church

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INTRODUCTION

Development and Peace — Caritas Canada has been inspired by the synodal journey that the Holy Father has called us to: "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."¹ We have recognized our charism within this call to synodality and have prepared this guide to Synodal Leadership as a service to the Mission of the Church.

What is Synodality?

The word synod comes from the Greek "Synodus," which essentially means "walking together." Synodality is more of a verb than a noun. It describes "the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God."²

Practically, this means that everyone of us in the Body of Christ has a call to leadership. It is our communion in the Body of Christ that ensures this leadership is exercised in complimentary ways that promotes harmony as opposed to discord. "A synodal Church is a Church of participation and co-responsibility. In exercising synodality she is called to give expression to the participation of all, according to each one's calling, with the authority conferred by Christ on the College of Bishops headed by

the Pope. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit."³

What is Synodal leadership?

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)

Synodal leadership is a leadership that makes room for the Holy Spirit and thus builds up the communion, participation and mission of the People of God. It differs from other secular forms of leadership in its recognition of, and reliance on, the presence of the Holy Spirit. This guide outlines 7 calls of a Synodal Leader.

A Synodal Leader is called to:

- » **Accompany...** people to walk together in the mission of the Church
- » **Listen...** to others and the Holy Spirit with openness to be transformed
- » **Speak up...** and share ideas
- » **Dialogue...** and encounter others in communion
- » **Encourage participation...** of everyone in a spirit of teamwork and shared responsibility
- » **Discern and decide...** through a process that values consultation and consensus
- » **Learn...** through ongoing formation

1. Francis, *Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

2. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018, 46

3. Ibid., 67

Who is the guide for?

This guide is for **all people called to exercise leadership in the Mission of the Church according to their unique roles**, whether they are laypersons, members of religious communities and consecrated life, or clergy (Bishops, Priests, and Deacons). Leadership roles can be paid or volunteer in nature. They are found in the communities of the family, the parish, the diocese and eparchy. They are found in lay movements and associations. They are found in Catholic organizations and institutions. Leadership roles that serve the mission of the Church can even go beyond and into the secular world! Catholics and people of goodwill who exercise synodal leadership in their places of work and recreation can be important witnesses to the Gospel.

Using the guide

The 7 calls of a synodal leader found in this guide are designed to assist people in the development of their own synodal leadership skills, either as an individual or as a group. The guide may also be used to assist those involved in the choosing of candidates for specific leadership positions. Each call in the guide contains a short text and several questions for personal or group reflection. In a small group setting, you may wish to open your discussion with the Prayer to the Holy Spirit that precedes the 7 Calls in the guide. If you are leading a group, you may wish to capture some of the reflections of group participants in writing or encourage the participants to do so themselves. If time allows, the method of Spiritual Conversation (Appendix) can also be a useful way discuss each of the calls in the guide and what they might mean for your context.



Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*Come, Holy Spirit,
dwell in our hearts
and make us
the temple of your glory,
a home
of prayer and praise.*

*Come, Holy Spirit,
make our heart
a listening heart,
attentive to the whispers
of grace.*

*Come, Holy Spirit,
into each of our lives.
Help us to discern your will
and to live it joyfully
throughout this day
that God gives us.*

*Come, Spirit of fire,
enflame us
ever more with your love,
and enlighten our hearts
as you call us
to consecrate ourselves to your service*

—Dominican Sisters of Estavayer-Le-Lac—

A SYNODAL LEADER is Called to:

ACCOMPANY... people to walk together in the mission of the Church

To accompany people, a leader must love and care for them. Otherwise, we fail in the commandment of Jesus, "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34-35). Dragging people behind us by force or by compelling them through fear does not build a healthy community, nor a healthy mission. We are called to accompany people, standing close by their side and walking with them on the journey. Meeting people where they are can be challenging, but it is necessary for the community to grow. The Church is a community that walks together to a common destination, full communion with God. To get there, this community must be marked by love. Accompanying others is how we achieve this. When we succeed, we also succeed in the mission of the Church, drawing more people to the loving embrace of God. As they said of the first Christians, "See how they love one another."

When have you experienced love and care from a leader who accompanied you and how did it make you feel?

What was a time that you were called to accompany someone to help them grow as a person within your community?

How can you accompany your community so that people look and say, "See how they love one another."?

"I am always amazed to witness in the groups of young people that I accompany, how little by little, each one takes their place and brings their unique voice for the good of all and the mission of the Church. I think that a good leader in the Church will seek not to draw attention to himself, but rather rejoices in seeing others flourish, all while fostering and furthering that which would have remained hidden."

—Jonathan—

LISTEN... to others and the Holy Spirit with openness to be transformed

Synodal leaders listen respectfully to others. Listening does not just mean hearing but a willingness to be transformed by the other's point of view. This requires them to open up a space within themselves for others and for the Other. This kind of listening is best done in small groups where we can develop fraternity, speak out and welcome others. A synodal leader also listens to the needs of the world. They will be particularly attentive to impoverished people and social injustice. Listening in this way becomes an exercise in humility and solidarity in a society where we are called to be missionary disciples. Finally, synodal leaders listen and pray to the Holy Spirit by listening to the Word and the Breath of God in discerning what they are called to do. This process of listening to others, to the needs of the world and to the Holy Spirit requires



us to value moments of silence in order to open our ears and our hearts.

How can I improve my listening skills?

How can listening to others be put into practice in our group, movement, parish, diocese or organisation?

How do I react when I hear a different point of view from my own?

“To listen to be transformed means to me to listen with an open heart, open mind and open will. To let go of my preconceived notions and be fully present to the person that is speaking and sharing.”

–Gabrielle–

SPEAK UP... and share ideas

The leader who acts according to the vision of a synodal Church fosters a climate of trust and respect in which everyone has a turn to speak. Whether in a meeting, a consultation, a conversation in the Spirit or a decision-making process, it is important that the floor is not monopolised by one person. The synodal leader values interesting ideas, useful experiences, constructive criticism and relevant questions from everyone. They will encourage participants to trust

each other to express themselves and communicate their point of view. It is the role of the leader to identify whether or not there is a consensus about the work being done together. To do this, it is important to take account of similar, marginal and prophetic statements, while not overlooking disagreements.

What do you find most challenging in the call to speak up?

When were you part of a conversation that required courage for you to speak up and share your idea or ideas? What was it like?

What do you think are ways of speaking up and sharing ideas that will inspire people to listen to you?

“To speak out, to share what’s inside me with confidence, courage and even audacity, is to allow myself and others to advance my thinking, to strengthen it, to enable it to evolve. The Spirit sometimes manifests itself in words that I might be inclined to repress at first, that may be expressed with difficulty, but which open new perspectives.”

–Christian–

DIALOGUE... and encounter others in communion

Dialogue couples the call to listen with the call to speak up in our encounter with others. This is especially important when significant challenges or disagreements arise in the life of a community. Using the power of authority to arrive quickly at a solution and disregarding or ignoring the viewpoints of others can be tempting. But this "monologue" only weakens or falsifies our communion. There are many means of promoting dialogue that nourish communion. One particularly effective means is Spiritual Conversation (appendix). This method has been an important part of how the universal church carried out the synod on synodality. It ensures that a true dialogue, where people both listen and speak up, can take place. Dialogue can also go beyond our Christian community to help guide our relationship with the wider world. Such dialogue serves our mission by leading us to encounter others and move towards the universal communion God desires for us all.

Think of an experience where a leader in your life took a 'monologue' approach to a problem and disregarded or ignored your point of view?

What is an example of a current significant challenge or problem in your community where a dialogue could be helpful?

When have you been part of a dialogue where you could feel the Holy Spirit was acting? What was it like?

"An adult expresses her desire to be baptized in the Catholic Church, and I take the time to listen to how she came to her encounter with Jesus and welcome what is motivating her to be baptized. In a pastoral dialogue, I tell her how walking in the footsteps of the risen Jesus is a source of inner freedom for me, and of joy when I share his message of love with those around me".

—Micheline—

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION... of everyone in a spirit of teamwork and shared responsibility

Synodal leaders encourage the participation of all. This participation is based on the recognition of the dignity that comes from baptism and a common belonging to the ecclesial Body of Christ. The baptised are sent to accomplish a common mission received from Christ. They participate according to their charism, talent and vocation. Before doing so, they need to create links between themselves to better collaborate in proclaiming the Gospel. Their fraternity bears witness to a Church that is open and welcoming to all. They come to live in unity and are not afraid of diversity; on the contrary, they value it, knowing that it is a source of richness. Synodal leaders brings people together, accompany them and encourage them to speak up and listen to each other during a meeting, consultation, training session or any other activity. Inclusive participation of this kind enhances the communion, remarkable talents and constructive ideas of individuals.



What can I do to encourage inclusive participation?

What are the obstacles to participation in my group, movement, parish, diocese or organisation?

How can consultation, collaboration and participation be improved in our activities?

“Where your gifts and talents meet the needs of the community, those are your opportunities to lead as a Catholic.”

–Greg–

DISCERN AND DECIDE... through a process that values consultation and consensus.

The synodal Church becomes a space for the action of the Holy Spirit, who invites us to recognise the signs of his presence. These are best glimpsed in “spiritual conversation”, also known as “conversation in the Spirit”, which is an outcome of the synodal experience. It enables us to study the complex issues that arise in the world and in our missionary action. The leader values it as a way of consulting people, inviting them to speak and encouraging them to listen to each other in order to discover

what the Spirit is calling them to do. This makes it possible to experience community discernment, to seek consensus as an expression of the presence of Christ in the Spirit and to participate in a decision-making process. Listening on the part of the leader or competent authority shows that his or her decision is not taken alone or in isolation, but “with the participation of all”, that is to say, in a synodal way.

How can we rethink the discernment and decision-making process within our group, movement, parish, diocese or organisation?

How can a clearer link between the decision-making process as a whole and the specific moment when the decision is taken help us to better identify the responsibilities of the various players at each stage?

What can I learn from the relationship between community discernment and decision-making by the competent authority?

“When we can all agree that “without You, I can do nothing”, we are much more likely to find the discernment we are looking for.”

–Tom–

LEARN... through ongoing formation

The calls to Synodal leadership found in this guide are calls from the Holy Spirit that never cease. To master synodal leadership is to be committed to ongoing formation in its practice for our whole lives. It is not something that can be 'achieved' in a final way until we encounter Jesus at the end of our earthly lives and hear the words, "Well done good and faithful servant." There are many sources for this ongoing formation. Personal reflection on our own attempts at synodal leadership is essential. So too is sharing these reflections with others who have a shared commitment to synodal leadership. The universal church, in its renewed commitment to synodality, stands ready to support local churches in their efforts to form the People of God in synodality according to their culture and context. There are many resources from the Vatican that can be adapted according to local needs – this guide is an example!

Based on the calls to action above, can you think of any experiences in your life where you have either acted as a synodal leader or been led by synodal leader? What was it like?

What do you find are the biggest challenges to staying committed to ongoing formation (on any topic) in your life? What are some solutions that have worked for you?

What resources (besides this one!) are you aware of that are offered by the Church to assist you in your journey of synodal leadership?

"We have always said at Development & Peace – Caritas Canada that we are not going to just talk about synodality, we are going to live it. This is the way we learn, by doing."

–Brenda–



Conclusion

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Synodal leadership is embodied in these seven calls to action that guide the baptized to walk together and better accomplish the Church's mission. Whether it's assuming responsibility for a diocese, a parish, an association or a Catholic organization, the Church needs leaders capable of living out their service in this new way. Synodal leadership is characterized by its cooperative nature. It values the accompaniment of people, listening to others and to the Holy Spirit, speaking up to share ideas, encour-



tering others through dialogue, participation of all in a spirit of co-responsibility, communal discernment and decision, and learning through ongoing formation. To achieve this, we need a personal conversion to overcome certain habits and acquire new skills for the sake of the mission Christ has entrusted to us.

When we agree to serve together, synodality becomes a school for learning about communion. It transforms our way of being and makes us more faithful to Christ's message. Today's Church needs generous people of courage to "walk together". In this synodal Church, men and women, according to their charism and vocation, become leaders who open new ways of proclaiming the Gospel.

We hope that this guide serves you and your community well in your own development of synodal leadership. If you have found this guide helpful, or if you have feedback on how it can be developed and improved for future versions, please write to us at info@devp.org with the subject line "Synodal Leadership".

*"The synodal process
is also a learning
process, in the course
which the Church
gets to know
herself better and
to identify the most
suitable forms
of pastoral action
for the mission her
Lord entrusts to her."*

*—Pope Francis, Opening Address,
XVI Ordinary General Assembly
of the Synod of Bishops, 2024—*

APPENDIX: The Spiritual CONVERSATION

Source: [The Spiritual Conversation](#) from Vatican website of the synod: www.synod.va

Spiritual conversation focuses on the quality of one's capacity to listen as well as the quality of the words spoken. This means paying attention to the spiritual movements in oneself and in the other person during the conversation, which requires being attentive to more than simply the words expressed. This quality of attention is an act of respecting, welcoming, and being hospitable to others as they are. It is an approach that takes seriously what happens in the hearts of those who are conversing. There are two necessary attitudes that are fundamental to this process: active listening and speaking from the heart.

The aim of spiritual conversation is to create an atmosphere of trust and welcome, so that people can express themselves more freely. This helps them to take seriously what happens within them as they listen to others and speak. Ultimately, this interior attentiveness makes us more aware of the presence and participation of the Holy Spirit in the process of sharing and discernment.

The focus of spiritual conversation is on the person to whom we are listening, on ourselves, and what we are experiencing at a spiritual level. The fundamental question is: "What is happening in the other person and in me, and how is the Lord working here?"



Carrying out Spiritual Conversation: The Basic Steps

Estimated time: About 2 hours

1. Preparation: Before coming to the group meeting, participants carry out a time of personal prayer and reflection over the question at hand. Usually some background information as well as some points and questions for prayer are provided. An adequate time of about 30 min to 1 hour can be set aside for this. At the end of the prayer period, participants take stock of the fruits of their prayer and decide what they will share with the group.

2. Gathering: Ideally each group can comprise about 6-8 persons. A facilitator is appointed for the group meeting and he or she welcomes all the participants. An opening prayer is said, and each person may share one or two words that describe his or her interior state at that moment. The facilitator may also briefly recap the sequence of steps as below. Usually volunteers are also requested for note-taking and time-keeping.

3. The First Round: Each person takes turns to share about what happened during the personal



prayer time and shares the fruits of his or her prayer. Everyone is given the same amount of time to speak (e.g. 3 minutes). The focus is to listen to one another rather than simply think about what one wants to say. Participants are invited to open their hearts and minds to listen to the one who is speaking and be attentive to how the Holy Spirit is moving. Between each person, the group may take a brief pause to absorb what was said. During this round there are no discussions or interactions between participants except to ask for clarification about a word or phrase if necessary.

4. Silence: A time of silence is observed, during which participants attend to how they have been moved during the first round, what struck them as they listened, and what were the notable points of consolation or desolation if any.

5. The Second Round: Participants share what emerged within them during the time of silence. No one is obliged to speak, and participants can share spontaneously without any particular order. This is not a time for discussing or refuting what someone else says, nor for bringing up what participants forgot to mention in the first round. Rather, it is an opportunity to respond to questions like:

How was I affected by what I heard?

*Is there a common thread in what was shared?
Is there something missing that I had expected
would be said?*

Was I especially touched by a particular sharing?

*Have I received any particular insight or revelation?
What is it?*

*Where did I experience a sense of harmony with
others as we shared with one another?*

This second round enables the group to realize what unites them. It is here that signs of the action of the Holy Spirit in the group begin to manifest themselves, and the conversation becomes an experience of shared discernment.

6. Silence: Another time of silence is observed for participants to note how they were moved during the second round, and particularly what key points seem to be emerging in the group.

7. The Third Round: Participants share what emerged from the preceding time of silence. They may also take note of the ways in which the Holy Spirit may be moving the group. A prayer of thanksgiving can conclude the conversation.

8. Review and Report: Finally the group can briefly review and reflect on how the conversation proceeded, and decide on the main points they will report from the conversation.



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission



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