

The Synodal Process and
THE LISTENING CHURCH

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Synodality, the Church and the Holy Spirit

- **Synodality:** walking together and listening to the Holy Spirit
- **Church:** you and me, the body of Christ, the whole People of God.
Groups of faithful people travelling together in relationship with God
- **Why now:** to fulfil God's mission
 - “Discernment of the times” *Pope Francis*
 - “To proclaim and establish among all peoples, the Kingdom of God.” *LG*

Changing Church

- Some churches in the West are in decline
- Disruption
- God is at work
- Relational churches fare better

New Era: CST helps us stay true to mission

“We are living not through an era of change, but a change of era.” *Pope Francis*

- Danger of ideologies
- Confidence in Christian identity, anchored in SVP charism
- Catholic Social Teaching:
 - Helps with political literacy, avoid mission drift, transcends left and right
 - Critiques capital and state, upholds the family, calls for distributed power

New Era: the Unravelling

- Deep spiritual malaise
- Pandemic accelerated trends rooted in philosophy of individualism
- Symptoms: inequality, distress, geopolitical instability, "the machine", damage to family, community and relationships, abandonment of whole communities
- Churches vulnerable to this assault
- Failure of successive governments to act: loss of trust, extreme ideologies gain traction

Identity: God vs Self

- Roots of individualism - the turn from God to the Self
- Tragic realism: things aren't getting back to normal
- God as primary agent: the *Imago Dei* and true identity of human beings
- Sacramental reality: freedom in God vs false freedoms of the machine
- Warning of Babel

The purpose of the Synodal way

- Synodality is happening now to prepare the Church
- Church is called to resist the powers through fraternity and civic friendship
- Catholic tradition
 - Countercultural insurgency
 - Spiritual and relational practices
 - Guidance for statecraft
- Churches weakened by individualism

Becoming a listening Church

"Enlarging the tent"

- When God comes, more people, more energy, more life will come
- Practical steps
 - Inward facing: your formation
 - Outward-facing: relating to neighbourhood
 - Embed the one-to-one conversation as core practice

Becoming a listening Church: inward-facing

"You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." John 15:16

- Synodal conversational model (the spiritual conversation)
- Practices of Discernment:
 - Vocation of lay ministries
 - What is of God, what is not of God
- Formation: Eucharist, learn to pray, adoration, discipleship groups
- Governance: Parish Council, new approach to leadership



Becoming a listening Church: outward-facing

Questions relating to neighbourhood:

How can we become more attentive to where God is already at work so we can join in?

Who are we, as a people, in this place? What is God calling us to do here? Who, among our neighbours are we called to be in relationship with? What can we do together?

How can we build relationships between neighbours who've become estranged?

Who do we know? Where are our blind spots? Do we know someone who can connect us with neighbours we're not in relationship with?

How do we keep it relational – person to person?



Becoming a listening Church: outward-facing

Listening posture | finding God in the neighbourhood | Small and local | sense of family | every conversation matters | value young people | relationship with place | vulnerability can be a strength | relationships with neighbouring institutions | invite neighbours | welcome people not used to church | share buildings, land and assets | pray for and with local business owners | foster encounters between estranged groups | get to know neighbours | become "communities of place" | advocate for decent jobs | poor are the treasure of the Church | end "service-client" dynamic | hand up not hand out | the listening church receives as well as gives

Becoming a listening Church

Build covenantal relationships:

“Seek the shalom of the city - and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its shalom, you will find shalom.”

Jeremiah 29.7

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