

## **What is ‘synodality’?**

### **What does the term ‘synodality’ mean?**

The term ‘synodality’ comes from the ancient Greek word *synodos* (σύννοδος), which in the first place refers to a gathering of bishops, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for common deliberation and action in taking care of the Church. Although ‘synodality’ is a new term, which first appeared in theological literature of the last few decades, it is derived from an old way of understanding the Church. Broadly, this expression refers to the idea of the active participation of all the faithful in the life of the Church. [3]

### **Where does the term ‘synod’ come from?**

“Synod” is a Greek word, composed of the word *syn* (σύν, meaning ‘with’) and the noun *hodos* (ὁδός meaning ‘path’). In a Christian context, the word refers to the path along which the People of God walk together. We are reminded of Jesus’ words who called Himself “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14,6), and of the fact that the first Christians were originally called “followers of the Way” (cf. Acts 9,2; 19,9.23; 22,4; 24,14.22). [3]

### **What is the difference between a synod and a council?**

In English we use both “synod” and “council” and their meanings are similar. This is because the English usage reflects the fact that the Greek *synodos* is translated into Latin as either *synodus* or *concilium*. [4]

### **What does the term council mean?**

In a secular context, the term *concilium* was used for an assembly called together by an authority. In the Old Testament God calls his people together, and this assembly is referred to as *qahal* (קהל). This Hebrew term was translated into Greek by the word *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία), which, in the New Testament, refers to the eschatological (ultimate) gathering of the God’s People in Christ Jesus. [4]

### **Is ‘synodality’ something new?**

From the very beginning, Christians had to find an answer to doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral questions as the Church grew and the world around them evolved. They did that by the ‘light of the Word of God’ and by listening to the Holy Spirit. These assemblies were convoked on all levels: diocesan, provincial, regional, patriarchal or universal, and were referred to as ‘synods’. [4]

The expressions 'synodality' and 'synodal Church' have emerged in the theological debates initiated by the Second Vatican Council. Their use has refocused the theological attention to the importance of the lived experience of local Churches and the universal Church. [5]

### **What is the theological foundation of 'synodality'?**

Ultimately synodality is a direct consequence of the common dignity and mission of all the baptised, who are called to exercise 'the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries' through an active involvement in the life of the Church [6].

The source and summit of this active involvement of the faithful resides in the Eucharist, in which the people of God assemble as one body of Christ in order to worship God according to their own ministry. This role of the individual faithful in the Eucharist, according to the tradition of the Church, should be translated into their active participation in other aspects of the Church life, including its administrative, pastoral and missionary work. [47]