

The *Evangelii Gaudium* Center course on synodality

Synodality as a lifestyle

Maria do Sameiro Freitas

“It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” This now famous phrase of Pope Francis marking the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops also elicits a larger question: ‘How can we help the People of God to embark along this path?’.

Among the challenges to this are the simple questions of what is synodality and how to identify ways that can enable us to live it in this new phase of the Church's life? Several formation initiatives have arisen in recent years, both at the academic and pastoral levels, with the aim of promoting needed changes of mentality in this current change of epoch in which we find ourselves today.

One such initiative is a course offered by Sophia University Institute's *Evangelii Gaudium Center (CEG)*¹, a center dedicated to formation, research and study in light of the “new chapter of evangelization” to which the Church is called. Strongly encouraged and supported by the General Secretariat of the Synod, the CEG developed a three-year course dedicated to formation for synodality.

The course began in January of this year and opened with an inaugural lecture by Card. Mario Grech, secretary general of the Synod. The online course, open to people of all vocations, aims to bring together spiritual experience with the theological and human sciences and pastoral care. Each year is composed of four comprehensive modules all related to the synodal path and with a participatory methodology and an option for in-person participation at Sofia University Institute during the fourth module.

The first academic year focused on: Ecclesiology, Biblical Roots, Christian Community and the Synodal Challenge. The 248 students enrolled came from 60 countries worldwide, and included priests, a bishop, sisters, committed lay people (including several in charge of the synodal process at their respective diocesan level or episcopal conference), and even non-Catholics. Each three-hour session was divided into a lecture component, group discussions and dialogue between faculty and participants. In the groups, the focus was first on personal and then community reflection, using online tools and technologies. Each three-hour session thus becomes a moment of interaction between cultures, ecclesial situations and diverse sensitivities.

Although all material remained accessible on the course platform, some Asian students still preferred to follow everything live, choosing to remain awake and online into the hours of early morning in their respective countries. The response to the course has been overall very positive. One participant wrote: "Every lesson I followed was a blessing and a grace, very

useful for reflecting and entering deeply into the style of community discernment that, with patience and perseverance, we try to build in relationships among us and with our parish priest in the region. We thus feel committed to being an outward-focused Church, creating more and more opportunities to meet families and people who do not habitually participate in community and parish life. [...]."

In 2023 - 2024, as the Synod Assembly begins, topic modules will include: Diversity of ministry but unity of mission; places and methods of participation; and Missionary discipleship in favor of universal fraternity. Registration opens in early July and courses take place between November 2023 and May 2024. For more information, see the link below.

¹ Sophia University Institute (Loppiano, Italy).

<https://www.sophiauniversity.org/en/centro-evangelii-gaudium/> .