



Advancing *Pastoral de Conjunto*: Working Across Ministerial Boundaries

A fruitful synodal process happens with **collaboration, creativity, and curiosity**. The Synod [Preparatory Document](#) encourages “fraternity and social friendships” to develop as part of the journey. One of the biblical images to describe synodality that Pope Francis uses in his apostolic exhortation [Christus Vivit](#) to describe synodality is that of the “caravan” that accompanied the Holy Family to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover (cf. Lk 2:41-52). Jesus “was there, mingling with the others, joking with other young people, listening to the adults tell stories and sharing their joys and sorrows of the group” which “evokes a larger ‘community on a journey; of which the Holy Family is a part.’” ([Christus Vivit](#) 29). The pilgrim caravan, then, is a wonderful metaphor for synodality, which is ultimately deeply communal, always moving, highly participatory, and mission driven.

The “caravan” also reminds us that our journey must involve more than one person, one ministry, or one perspective; it advances a spirit of *pastoral de conjunto*, or “communion in mission.” This methodology of ministry, with its roots in the Latin American Catholic community, is an inclusive pastoral approach, where participants enthusiastically work across the ministerial and ecclesial boundaries that often “silo” or divide efforts. By adopting a *pastoral de conjunto* methodology, local communities can bring more people around their initiatives and dialogue for Synod 2021-2023.

To achieve this, more people must be invited to collaborate in the work, since the synodal process ensures that no one is excluded. The Synod impacts every area of the life of the Church, so any and every ministry should be included: evangelization, catechesis, social justice, vocations, marriage and family, youth and young adults, consecrated life, stewardship, lay ecclesial ministry, charitable works, worship and liturgy, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, priesthood, Catholic education, finance, communications, human dignity and life, sacramental preparation, the diaconate, and so much more.

When considering how to advance *pastoral de conjunto* in the Synod journey, here are some ideas that can help leaders and facilitators ensure that as many people are as included as possible:

- **Identify** all the ministerial communities and initiatives that bring people together within your local context (parish, campus, mission, diocese/eparchy, apostolate, etc.).
- **Invite** the leaders and active participants in those ministerial communities to the table, treating them as co-responsible partners in the work of the synodal process (rather than inviting them to a table where

they are still subservient to a dominant party in the community).

- **Language is key:** if you are tasked with the leadership of the synodal process, use invitational language such as “Would you be open to working together and learning from one another as we plan the synodal experience as a united community of faith?”
- **Consider who is missing** within your peripheral vision in the ministerial landscape. What are the organizations, ministries, councils, and committees within your local context that you do not engage or interact on a regular basis? Who are the leaders that have a different outlook, perspective, culture, language, generation, or experience of Church than you?
 - **Patient, personal, one-on-one, and potentially repeated invitations** are essential for those groups or people who may not know you, as trust and familiarity will need to be established. It is also important to keep trying, even if initial invitations fall short.
- **Collaborate from the beginning.** It is important to not make synodal plans before other ministerial groupings join the planning conversations, as it can give the impression that the invited individuals or groups are late to the process or that the efforts are giving preferential treatment to those “in the know” or a particular demographic or group. Like a caravan, it is key that everyone in the community embark on the journey at the same time.

- **Respect each other.** When bringing more people to the table, there are likely going to be differences of opinion and experiences of tension. Conflict can be healthy if respect is established among team members. Even if perspectives are diverse, it is critical that a culture of respect permeate the process. This is ideally done in a spirit of prayer and sacred silence.

There are other elements for working across ministerial boundaries, but what is most important is moving from simply communicating or cooperating to *collaborating* and *building a cohesive community*. By doing this, we are better equipped for synodal dialogue, as our “caravan” is broader and more inclusive, and hopefully, become a more fruitful Catholic community.



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