

International Conference: “Engaging Synodality. Intercultural Perspectives for Re-Imagining Pastoral Possibilities”.

01.-03. July 2026 – PTH-Hochschule Sankt Georgen, Frankfurt am Main

Abstracts (still to be completed):

- Key Notes (green)
- Panel Sessions (orange)
- Workshops and Discussion Groups (light blue)

WEDNESDAY, 1st July 2026 - AFTERNOON

INTRODUCTION/Framework

“Translating Doctrine into Practice: Mission as the Alpha and Omega of Synodality” - Klara A. CSISZAR (Romania-Austria)

This paper argues that contemporary processes of ecclesial transformation require Catholicity to be lived as an experiential, everyday reality rather than preserved as an abstract concept. The contribution focuses on the intersection of doctrine and life. At the center is the question: How can the essence of Catholicity—its openness, universality, and missionary calling—be rendered experientially in ways that shape and renew faith communities across diverse cultural and social contexts, inspiring rather than constraining diversity in daily life?

Central to this reflection is the conviction that mission constitutes both the origin and the fulfillment of synodality: a synodal Church continually rediscovers its mission through shared discernment, dialogue, and mutual learning, understood not as expansion or self-preservation but as a formative process for all the baptized.

In this context, Pastoral Theology is presented as a key mediating discipline that accompanies, critically reflects on, and actively shapes the dynamic reciprocity between doctrine and practice—opening spaces for innovation and participation, which will frame both the conference and the shared reflection.

OPENING
LECTURE
(EN - DE)

ORGANIZATIONAL-CHANGE-POTENTIAL OF SYNODALITY

“Interdisciplinary Contributions to the Conceptualization of Ecclesial Culture and Pastoral Conversion” - Carolina BACHER (Argentina)

Although the Final Document of the Synod on Synodality (2024) refers to different topics under the concept of ‘culture’ (transparency and accountability, evaluation, discernment, guardianship and protection, encounter), in pastoral theology we do not have sufficient reflection on the concept of ecclesial culture that may allow us to take an organic view of these dimensions and topics and, therefore, of the possible indicators of organizational change.

Therefore, this contribution will focus on presenting some approaches to culture and organizational change, establishing the possible contributions they offer to propose different hypotheses for articulating the dimensions and topics emerging from the synodal reflections, and possible models of organizational change.

“Synodal Renewal: Doubts and Hopes” – Estela PADILLA (Philippines)

Will the Synod on Synodality deliver its promise of renewal or the Church will be back to ‘business as usual’, dumped with so many synods and documents that do not really make a dent in the ordinary lives of people?

How can the Synod on Synodality rekindle our hope? Three Change Theories from the discipline of Organization Development (OD) will be used to assess the Synod ‘performance’ and see if transformation is really possible and happening as it moves in its implementation phase (2025-2028). How can an OD intervention work with pastoral processes and approaches to raise and organize hope in a time of woundedness and despair?

As a voting member of the 16th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, the speaker will give an insider perspective into a massive dream that has the possibilities of becoming a game changer.

“Making Synodality Work” - Bernhard SPIELBERG (Germany)

Synodality is not an end in itself. It has the potential to transform the culture, power structures, and capacity for learning within church organizations—shifting from “command-and-control” to forms of cooperative governance. That is why it generates so much resistance. The presentation highlights the opportunities synodality offers for a church that seeks to cultivate diversity in unity (not unity in diversity) both globally and locally. It explores what a church “hardware” looks like that is compatible with the “software” of synodality. And it asks how synodal practices can be learned and practiced.

WEDNESDAY, 1st July 2026 - EVENING

SYNODALITY IN CONTEXT OF DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTIONAL STATES

“Sinodality in Europe. From the exculturation to the inculturation of the Church in a democratic constitutional state?” - Johannes FÖRST (Germany) (EN-DE)

(EN)

With the transformation of European societies into democratic constitutional states, the Church has gradually lost support in Europe due to its hierarchical structure. The central thesis of this lecture is that the increasing exculturation of the Catholic Church (not automatically of Christianity) in Europe was primarily due to the Church's inadequate structural reception of a culture of unconditional equality for all. The speaker then discusses the question of whether the approach of a principle of synodality anchored in the structures of the Catholic Church can lead to a renewed inculturation of the Church in Europe in the future.

EVENING
OPEN
LECTURE
(DE-EN)

(DE)

Mit dem Umbau der europäischen Gesellschaften zum demokratischen Rechtsstaat hat die Kirche aufgrund ihrer hierarchische Verfassung sukzessive an Zustimmung in Europa verloren. Die zentrale These dieses Vortrags lautet, dass die zunehmende Exkulturation der katholischen Kirche (nicht automatisch auch des Christentums) in Europa vor allem aufgrund der unzureichenden kirchlich-strukturellen Rezeption einer Kultur bedingungsloser Gleichberechtigung aller erfolgte. Der Referent diskutiert alsdann die Frage, ob der Ansatz eines auch in den Strukturen der katholischen Kirche verankerten Synodalitätsprinzips zukünftig zu einer neuerlichen Inkulturation der Kirche in Europa führen kann.

THURSDAY, 2nd July 2026 – MORNING

GOVERNANCE AND CO-RESPONSIBILITY IN A SYNODAL CHURCH

“Nothing About Me without Me: Co-Responsibility in a Synodal Church Family of God” - Fr. Stan Chu ILO (Nigeria-USA)

This paper advances a Trinitarian model of synodality that affirms every baptized person as a missionary disciple and calls for an ecclesial culture of co-responsibility encapsulated in the principle “Nothing about me without me.” Engaging Sherry Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation, it critiques persistent patterns of non-participation in the Catholic Church—especially “manipulation” and “therapy”—that marginalize laity and religious, mirror clericalism denounced by Pope Francis, and contradict the perichoretic reciprocity of the Trinity. In dialogue with African palaver traditions, the paper proposes a move toward genuine synodal participation—partnership, shared authority, and co-responsible discernment—where bishops, clergy, religious, and laity collaborate as equal agents of mission. Addressing contested issues such as episcopal authority, entrenched clericalism, and lay participation in African contexts, the study envisions a Church in which participation is empowering, dialogical, and intrinsically missionary.

MORNING
KEYNOTE
(EN)

GOVERNANCE AND CO-RESPONSIBILITY IN A SYNODAL CHURCH

“Governance and authority in a synodal church: Moving from skepticism to synergy between the ‘all’, ‘some’ and ‘one’” - **Christina KHENG (Singapore)**

This paper engages the Final Document of the Synod on Synodality, which—amid widespread disillusionment with traditional models of governance—proposes the synodal style as enabling the Church to exercise a prophetic voice in today’s world while affirming the enduring, service-oriented role of hierarchy. Addressing persistent fears that synodality undermines governance or episcopal authority, the study examines the relational, structural, and cultural conversions called for in the document, focusing concretely on how governance and authority may be exercised synodally by the “one,” the “some,” and the “all” in diverse local contexts. By analyzing practices that either foster or impede the intended synergy among these actors, the paper identifies pitfalls to avoid and constructive approaches to develop, with a view toward reimagining episcopal and ordained ministry and advancing a more missionary, synodal Church, including its structural and formational implications.

“Co-participation in Existing Ecclesial Structures” - **Ikenna OKPALEKE (Nigeria)**

While synodality emerges from ecclesiological and pastoral necessities, its implementation demands critical examination of existing legislative frameworks, particularly the 1983 Code of Canon Law. This paper investigates potential shifts and reinterpretations of current canonical norms necessitated by synodal practice. Drawing on Pope Francis’s magisterial teachings and grounded in scriptural, historical, and theological foundations of synodality, this study adopts an ecclesiological lens to examine synodal praxes across multiple levels of Church governance, from universal to local contexts. The paper compares the theological vision of a synodal Church with the practical realities of participatory structures outlined in contemporary Canon Law, identifying specific areas requiring legislative reform. By bridging ecclesiology and canonical jurisprudence, this paper moves beyond theoretical debates to engage synodality as both theological principle and practical governance model. The analysis maps concrete pathways for aligning ecclesial legislation with synodal ecclesiology, contributing to substantive rather than polemical discourse on Church reform.

“The synodal distribution of roles in the decision-making process within local churches and groupings of local churches” - **Jean O. NKE ONGONO (Cameroon)**

Although synodality is not new to the Church, the recent Synod of Bishops has breathed new life into it. To make the community's life more dynamic and involve everyone more closely and efficiently, the recent synod proposed that roles be distributed in a more synodal way in the canonical decision-making process at all levels of Church life. This brings the question of the reception and efficiency of defined doctrines and regulations at various levels of Church life to the forefront once again. The underlying question is: what are the obstacles to effectiveness? The 'novelty' proposed by the 2023/24 Plenary Assemblies of the Synod poses a real challenge to canonical norms, among other areas, at least in its initial formulation. While emphasizing the need to revitalize synodality at all levels of church life, this presentation intends to discuss the premises and limits of distributing roles in the canonical decision-making process at two levels: firstly, within each local church and secondly at supra-diocesan, supra-national and international levels.

GOVERNANCE AND CO-RESPONSIBILITY IN A SYNODAL CHURCH

Learning from Organizational Development: Synodality as a Practice of Shared Responsibility – Luisa EISELE (Germany) (DE)

Dieser Workshop nähert sich der Synodalität aus der Perspektive der Organisationsentwicklung und konzentriert sich auf das Lernen aus nicht-kirchlichen Kontexten. Anhand von Beispielen aus dem Bereich des organisationalen Lernens, der partizipativen Governance und des Veränderungsmanagements außerhalb der Kirche untersucht der Workshop, was synodale Prozesse von etablierten Praktiken der Partizipation, des Konfliktmanagements und der geteilten Verantwortung lernen können. Das Ziel besteht nicht darin, Modelle direkt zu übertragen, sondern darüber nachzudenken, welche Prinzipien und Praktiken auf synodale Kontexte übertragbar sind.

*Reconciling Synodality. Healing Communion – Elías LÓPEZ SJ (Spain) (EN-online)*WORKSHOPS
AND
DISCUSSION-
GROUPS
(EN-DE)

This workshop will present, in an interactive format, the “Reconciling Synodality” project, which seeks to transform internal polarizations and conflicts within the Church. This is achieved through a methodology that combines spiritual discernment with tools from the social sciences, helping communities and leaders to live out synodality in concrete ways and to build a culture of peace from within. To this end, communities are guided through three interconnected movements, which are not linear but rather a spiral of deepening: co-creating a safe space, re-cognizing the conflict, and discerning reconciliation.

Synodality and Mission: Reimagining the Prophetic Life of (African) Women Religious – Sr. Mary Joan Iwenofu, IHM (Kenya) (EN)

Women religious, especially African ones, embody a prophetic resilience that speaks with powerfully to both local communities and the global Church. Rooted in inculturated spirituality, communal witness, and justice-driven mission, their lives expose the limits of synodality when it remains confined within patriarchal structures. This paper argues that the credibility of synodality worldwide depends on recognizing women religious as co-responsible agents of transformation. Drawing on African proverbs, oral traditions, and global ecclesial debates, the presentation reimagines synodality as a universal praxis of justice, hospitality, and prophetic courage. It asks directly: can the Church’s mission be authentic without the full voice of women religious at its heart?

THURSDAY, 2nd July 2026 – AFTERNOON

SYNODALITY IN CONTEXT - INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

“Synodality, Contextuality and Interculturality” - Fr. Markus Luber SJ (Germany)

AFTERNOON
KEYNOTE
(EN)

This paper develops an intercultural account of synodality by critiquing theological concepts of culture that essentialize identities while neglecting material conditions and power relations. Against approaches that manage difference through stable particularisms, it draws on Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s notion of “friction,” emphasizing that global connections emerge through conflictual, asymmetrical, and productive interactions. Synodality thus appears not as harmonious consensus but as a process shaped by tension and translation. As a constructive proposal, the paper engages the universalism of Hans Joas, in which universality arises relationally through historical experience, enabling a dialogical realization of shared norms across difference.

SYNODALITY IN CONTEXT - INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

To get some impressions on how synodality has been experienced in different cultural contexts, in this panel session four local experiences will be presented and reflected from the perspective of pastoral- and intercultural-theologies:

*The Italian Synodal Path 2021-2025: Challenges and Open Questions of a Synodal Process at the National Level – **Francesco ZACCARIA (Italy)***

The Italian Synodal Path engaged more than two hundred dioceses in a four-year journey that, while connected to the universal Synod on Synodality, developed its own programs, structures, and procedures. Involving around 500,000 participants through parishes and groups, it fostered dialogue and discernment at local and national levels, while also encountering slowness, skepticism, and internal resistance. The process culminated in the Third Synodal Assembly in October 2025, which approved a Synthesis Document containing 124 proposals submitted to the Episcopal Conference for final discernment. This paper offers a practical-theological reflection on the strengths, unresolved issues, and future challenges of this national synodal experience.

*Synodality and Sea-Routes: The Philippine Church Sailing On! – **Estela PADILLA (Philippines)***

How does an idea transform into a national movement? Using the metaphor of 'sailing', I would like to share about the synodal journey of the Philippine Church across our islands, especially as we sail on towards synodal implementation at the national level. Decided to leave the shore and lead the journey, the local churches are navigating the 'rough and silent waters' of rigid structures and narrow mental frameworks to clear the way towards 'new lands' and the 'widening horizons' of a synodal way of living faith through participatory processes, integral structures and mission-oriented formation.

*Synodality: Attitude or Structure? Results of the Evaluation Study on the Synodal Path in Germany – **Katharina Karl & Markus Dumberger (Germany)***

The Synodal Path in Germany initiated a major reform process within the Catholic Church between 2019 and 2023, aimed at evangelization and at addressing the causes of the abuse and trust crisis. To evaluate the learning experiences of this process and further develop the understanding and practice of synodality, an evaluation study is being conducted by the Chair of Pastoral Theology at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt on behalf of the Synodal Committee. This contribution presents selected results of the ongoing survey and discusses their implications for the formation of a synodal Church in Germany.

*Synodality as Palaver: The African Church and New Pathways to Being Church in the Contemporary World – **Ikenna U. OKAFOR (Nigeria)***

The three-year Synod on Synodality, which involved an unprecedented number of participants, particularly among the laity, emphasized the co-responsibility of all members of the Church. This paper examines how the Church in Africa has responded to the call to implement the Synod's Final Document, focusing on the African concept of *palaver* as a key to understanding the synodal ecclesial lifestyle. It explores how palaver fosters a new ecclesial habitus marked by just, harmonious, and fraternal participation, and considers what the universal Church can learn from this tradition in addressing contemporary theological and pastoral challenges during the ongoing implementation of the Synod.

PANEL
SESSION
(EN)

PRELIMINARY SUMMING-UP

“What do we mean by synodality, and what competencies are needed to make it come to life?” – **Catalina CERDA-PLANAS (EN – DE)**

(EN)

This workshop is planned as a stopover in the conference program and aims to provide a space to collect the fruits of what has been shared, discussed and learned together during the first two days. The workshop will focus on summarizing, in a participatory way, what can be understood by “synodality” based on the former presentations and group sharing.

Moreover, the workshop will also propose the following question to be discussed: what competencies (attitudes, skills, knowledge) would be necessary to bring the project of a synodal Church to life? Answering this question is a key task to foster pastoral life and adequately plan synodal formation of the different ecclesial actors.

Depending on the participants language background, the workshop is planned to be offered both in English and in German.

WORKSHOP

(DE)

Dieser Workshop ist als Zwischenstation im Konferenzprogramm geplant und soll einen Raum bieten, um die Früchte dessen zu sammeln, was in den ersten beiden Tagen geteilt, diskutiert und gemeinsam gelernt wurde. Der Workshop konzentriert sich darauf, auf partizipative Weise zusammenzufassen, was unter „Synodalität“ auf der Grundlage der vorangegangenen Präsentationen und des Austauschs in den Gruppen verstanden werden kann.

Darüber hinaus wird der Workshop auch die folgende Frage zur Diskussion stellen: Welche Kompetenzen (Einstellungen, Fähigkeiten, Kenntnisse) wären notwendig, um das Projekt einer synodalen Kirche zum Leben zu erwecken? Die Beantwortung dieser Frage ist eine zentrale Aufgabe, um das pastorale Leben zu fördern und die synodale Ausbildung der verschiedenen kirchlichen Akteure angemessen zu planen.

Je nach sprachlichem Hintergrund der Teilnehmenden ist geplant, den Workshop sowohl auf Englisch als auch auf Deutsch anzubieten.

FRIDAY, 3rd July 2026 - MORNING

SYNODALITY IN COMMUNITY PASTORAL LIFE

Stories from Pastoral Practice. Synodal Listening as an Essential Theological and Organizational Risk for the Church – Peter FRÜHMORGEN (Germany)

This paper critically examines the predominantly internal ecclesiological focus of the Final Document of the 2024 Synod and argues for a pastoral-theological reorientation that overcomes the inside–outside dualism of Church reflection. Drawing on Pope Francis’s emphasis on the poor and marginalized as privileged theological interlocutors, it proposes a synodal practice rooted in attentive listening to concrete human life stories marked by suffering, hope, ambiguity, and faith. Rather than prioritizing structural or legal reforms alone, the paper advances a narrative approach that places lived experience at the center of theological epistemology. Conceptualizing the Church as a “storytelling organization,” it highlights the risks and transformative potential of integrating diverse and ambivalent narratives into ecclesial life. Such a pastoral perspective, it concludes, is essential for fostering a genuinely synodal Church whose identity and mission emerge from sustained engagement with everyday human realities.

Lived Synodality’ as a Pastoral Style for Safeguarding – Nora NONTERAH (Ghana)

This article explores how the principles of synodality, when rooted in the lived reality of faith communities, can shape effective safeguarding practices, especially for minors and vulnerable adults. The study contends that synodality must extend beyond formal assemblies and rituals of dialogue to become a pastoral style embodied in daily life and action. Methodologically, it employs theological-ethical reflection on synodality in dialogue with the Church’s historical failures and ongoing challenges in safeguarding. The analysis highlights how values such as shared responsibility, mutual listening, and co-responsibility provide an ethical framework for confronting past failures and cultivating a culture of care. The article argues that lived synodality can enable faith communities to create safe spaces, foster accountability, and strengthen pastoral responses to vulnerability. It concludes that embedding synodality in concrete pastoral practice is not only consistent with the Church’s mission but is also vital for ensuring the protection and dignity of children and vulnerable adults.

An Ecology of Knowledge for Synodality (Synodal Formation in the Local Church) – Ernesto PALAFOX (Mexico)

This paper explores how synodality can be effectively taught and embodied in parish pastoral settings by clarifying the meaning of synodal formation. It argues that synodality is best learned through “learning by doing,” where participatory practices function as formative processes. The study proposes an educational framework based on an ecology of knowledge that is open to popular and contextual methodologies. It suggests that difficulties in the reception of synodality often stem from pedagogical models grounded in mono-knowledge and uniform approaches. By contrast, an ecology of knowledge integrates diverse forms of knowing and fosters sustainable interaction among heterogeneous perspectives, enabling deeper understanding and more effective reception of synodality, and supporting inclusive learning environments in which diversity is recognized as a constitutive dimension of ecclesial life.

PANEL
SESSION
(EN)

SYNODALITY IN COMMUNITY PASTORAL LIFE

Discussion Group: *Multilingual Faith Experience for a Transformative Synodality*
– **Francis Vincent ANTHONY (India)** (EN-Online)

This discussion-group paper approaches synodality from pastoral and intercultural perspectives by focusing on the multilingual character of Christian faith experience. It traces the diachronic multilingualism of Christianity—from Aramaic and Hebrew through Greek, Latin, and later European languages—and highlights its role in the inculturation and transformation of faith. At the same time, it addresses the challenge of synchronic multilingualism in today’s “glocal” Christian communities, where diverse linguistic contexts shape contemporary faith experience. Viewing language as a central cultural medium for perceiving self, world, and the Transcendent, it invites discussion on how multilingual practices, dynamic translation, and bottom-up linguistic processes can enrich synodal discernment, foster creativity, and support a more inclusive and intercultural development of Christian faith.

Workshop: *Conversation in the Spirit* – **Christina KHENG (Singapore)** (EN)

Conversation in the Spirit has been a key feature of the Synod on Synodality. This method, comprising three rounds of prayerful and deep listening and sharing, has enabled many groups to make the transition from “I” to “We”, thus arriving at a greater level of collective insight as well as a clearer reception of what God’s Spirit is revealing. The method promotes a spirituality of synodality and is particularly helpful for communal discernment. This workshop will provide basic training in Conversation in the Spirit through experiential and interactive activities.

Discussion Group: *Mission im digitalen Raum* – **Sophia OMOKANYE (Germany)**
(DE)

Die Diskussionsgruppe „Mission digital“ greift das Konferenzthema „Re-Imagining Pastoral Possibilities“ aus der Perspektive digitaler Mission auf und konzentriert sich auf Praktiken der Glaubenskommunikation in digitalen Räumen. Ausgehend von der Frage, wie digitale Glaubenskommunikation theologische Landschaften und kirchliche Strukturen prägen, teilen die Teilnehmenden Erfahrungen und reflektieren Herausforderungen. „Digital“ wird dabei nicht nur als Werkzeug, sondern als kultureller Raum verstanden, der beeinflusst, wie Glaube kommuniziert und gelebt wird. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit gilt sozialen Medien, Podcasts, Videoplattformen und Online-Dokumentationen.

WORKSHOPS
AND
DISCUSSION-
GROUPS
(EN-DE)