

## SYNODALITY – INTEREST GROUP

Topic: Ecumenical Reflections on Synodality  
 Convener: Martin Madar, Xavier University  
 Moderator: Martin Madar, Xavier University  
 Presenters: Archbishop Linda Nicholls, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada (retired)  
 Susan K. Wood, Regis College, University of Toronto  
 Richard Lennan, Boston College

The Synod on Synodality concluded with its second general assembly in October 2024. Many have seen this Synod as a *kairos* in the life of the church and the most significant event in Catholicism since Vatican II (1962-1965). As with any event of such magnitude, what will be decisive is the implementation of the Synod's vision spelled out in its Final Document. It is worth noting that Pope Francis, who passed away in March 2025, decided not to write a post-synodal exhortation, but accepted the Synod's Final Document as part of his ordinary magisterium. Pope Leo XIV, who succeeded Francis, has so far indicated that he intends to continue in promoting synodality.

This session was the second round of a three-year interest group dedicated to synodality steered by Martin Madar, Jakob Rinderknecht, and Susan Reynolds. This year, the focus was on synodality from ecumenical perspectives, taking into consideration the Final Document of the Synod.

The panelists were invited based on their diverse experiences in ecumenical dialogues and their contribution to the theology of synodality. Archbishop Linda Nicholls is a retired primate of the Anglican Church of Canada. She is a member of the current Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission. Susan K. Wood serves on the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue and on the North American Roman Catholic–Orthodox Theological Consultation. In addition to serving on the Australian Anglican–Catholic Dialogue (2005-2007), Richard Lennan served as a theological advisor to the preparation of the *Light from the Southern Cross*, a 2019 document on reforming the governance of the Catholic Church in Australia, which was prepared using a synodal process.

The session started with each panelist giving short opening remarks. Archbishop Nicholls reflected on synodality in light of the recent experience of Canadian Anglicans with synods. She first explained how the synods function and how they are organized as physical gatherings of the elected or appointed clergy and laity. She cautioned against idealism regarding synods, making a point that synods rarely live up to the lofty theology of synodality. She stressed that many of the concerns of Catholics as they were expressed in various reports of the synodal process overlap with the concerns of Anglicans in Canada. She shared that one of the areas of the current discussion in the Anglican Church of Canada is the way in which a final discernment is reached. The key question is whether the votes of bishops should have more weight than the votes of the lower clergy and laity.

Susan Wood reflected on communal decision-making processes across ecumenical differences. After some preliminary comments regarding the practice of discernment,

the focus of her remarks was on how the synodal processes of the Society of Friends (Quakers) differ from those of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She argued that the former is closer to the spirit of the Synod on Synodality, while there are also lessons to be learned from the latter.

Richard Lennan reflected on the challenge of the Synod's Final Document to Catholic understandings and practices of ecumenism. He first identified some trends in Catholic responses to ecumenism in the second half of the twentieth century, honing in on how history has shaped Catholic perceptions of ecumenism, as well as the reality of a very mixed reception of ecumenical texts and initiatives. He then addressed how the Synod's document offers a new context and identified some differences between the Synod's approach and more familiar ecumenical emphases.

After these presentations, the session continued with a conversation among the panelists and concluded with an energetic discussion between members of the audience and the presenters. The questions dealing with the role of pastoral conversion and of formation in a truly synodal church received the most attention.

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