

# FOUNDATIONS for Being a Synodal Church

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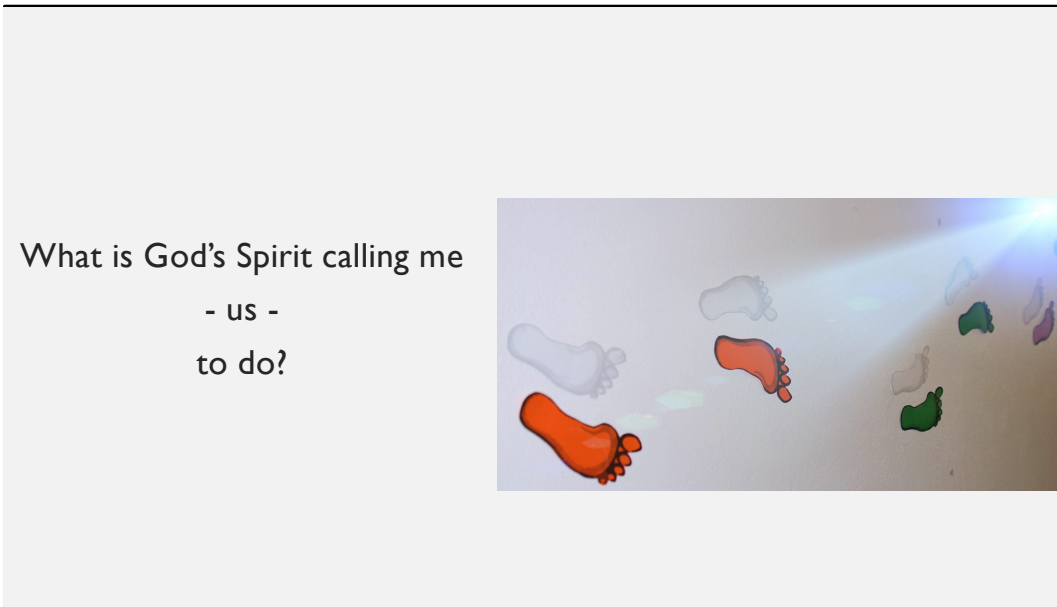
 @elissa\_rop

[onwiththesynod.wordpress.com](http://onwiththesynod.wordpress.com)

Thank you and welcome everyone



I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, the First Nations People of the land I live and work on. I acknowledge and respect their elders past, present and future.



## Introduction

The path of synodality is being revealed through a great desire of faithful Catholics for change.

I have observed how it has been the renewal groups that have mobilised time, energy and resources in response to the signs of the times.

The papacy of Francis, the revelations of abuse and clericalism, and a time of global pandemic, are heralds of an era of urgency.

An era of *emergency* for our beautiful planet. We must do something –

many things! - and we must do them together.

And so we know that *now* is the time to *be the Church God wants us to be*; the Church that our Earth needs us to be.

What does that look like? What are we to do?

Fully aware of our wounds and our shortcomings, how can we – as Church - be responsible for our Common Home, loving, inclusive, and faithful to Jesus?

What is God's Spirit calling me – calling us - to do?

This is exactly the place we need to be. Always – don't ever stop searching these questions.

(this is the question that we were asked in the preparation phase of the Australian Plenary Council and it was a wonderful gift – it really stirred people up).

A Church Beyond Clericalism...

TOPICS

Foundations for Being a Synodal Church

- as individuals
- as communities

The slide features a photograph of a young girl in white vestments sitting at a desk in a church, with a blue and yellow stained-glass window in the background. A dark teal vertical bar is on the left, and a dark teal circle with the word 'TOPICS' in white is centered over the image. To the right, a dark teal rectangular box contains the text 'Foundations for Being a Synodal Church' and a bulleted list.

Today I want to share with you the foundations for being a synodal Church. Foundations establish in our own mind who we are as thinking and acting human beings, and as community. They give us the *how* for the journey, so that the *what* can be revealed by God as we journey.

A big topic so we will make the best of our time together.

## FOUNDATIONS

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They give us the *how* for the journey, so that the *what* can be revealed by God as we journey.



This was never meant to be a lecture so I am continuing with my plan to be as plain as possible so we can connect and spark conversation.

My hope for you is that this will keep you awake tonight, and tomorrow, and grasp your heart and mind, as it has mine; proving to be a genuine and fruitful way forward as a disciple of Jesus. And as a thinking, doing, and loving human being.

I. WHAT DO YOU WANT OTHER PEOPLE TO BE?

Let's get started by observing: What do you want other people to be?



## BE ATTENTIVE

I want people to listen, speak up, be seen

Story: Aus Post and Senior Mail Officers

If only they took seriously **being attentive**.





## BE INTELLIGENT

Today we have an overabundance of data. We can't (and shouldn't) stop hearing and reading all sorts of things. But we can (and should) be aware of the authority we give to sources of information.

Who do we respect and allow to inform our understanding?

For example: my children will flick their fingers on their phone and come up with a definition or some information. I will always respond "but who is telling you this is the case?" Their answer is "google".

(I insist they look at the list of results, question the source.)

I challenge them to be active with the data they are exposed to, so that ultimately they may become thoughtful citizens of society, not just passive consumers.

I consider this to be training them in the habit – thus developing the virtue - of **being intelligent**. Thus we avoid the risk of being narrow, rigid and ignorant.

Essential to being intelligent about what we allow in our minds and hearts is being attentive to what we are *not* exposed to. Am I only hearing about the issues around being a gay or trans person, about climate climate, or racism or sexism only from popular opinion, and not from those people who are directly involved? Do I not really want to know? Do I feel uncomfortable? Why?

These are great questions and there is almost an infinite number because we always have the capacity to deepen our minds and hearts.

Being intelligent is not restricted to only the super bright. We all do this, and the extent to which we do it well is not related to our IQ.

The key is to ask questions and to be open to listening to stories.



## BE REASONABLE

Let's just jump in here where the rubber really hits the road.

Why can't they/you/me *just be reasonable*?

Being reasonable is so often a big, fat failure when we observe how what we have already covered is not in play. Being attentive and intelligent through listening to our work colleagues, being open to advice and new ideas, and appreciating the importance of past present and future in our plans, is critical to being a reasonable person.

The big risks at this point are our human tendency to prefer 1) putting up the walls in defence (bunker mentality), planting our feet and refusing to budge, and 2) a culture of maintenance, where, in the words of Pope Francis, we obsess with treasures, buildings, titles and clothing, and even the liturgy itself.

“tradition is the life of those who have gone before us and who go on.  
Traditionalism is their dead memory”

<https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2022/08/pope-traditionalism-is-dead-memory-and-paganism-of-thought>

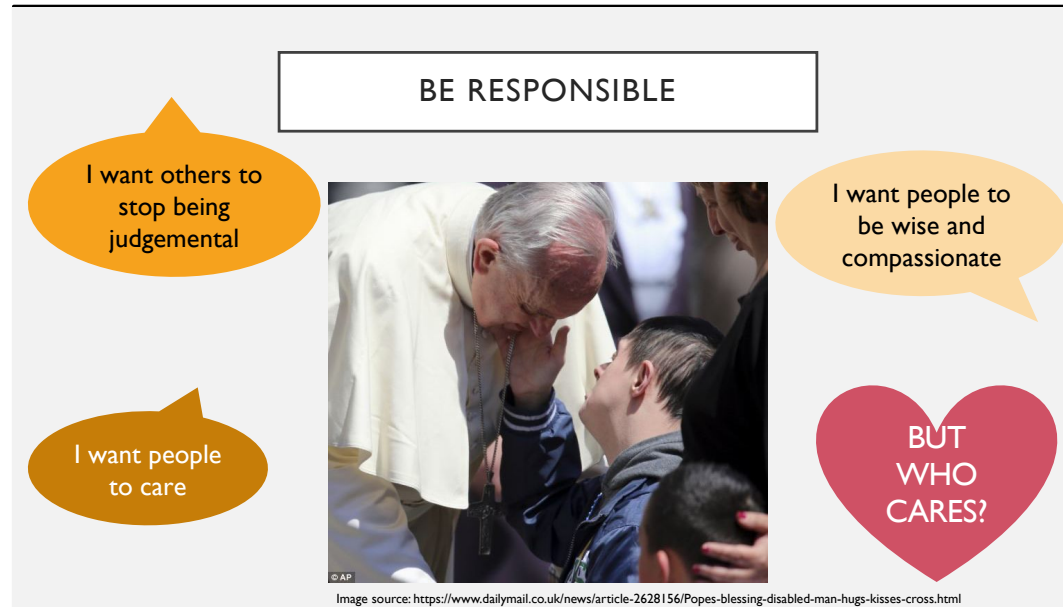
We know that this is not restricted to the Catholic Church.

Put simply, people often choose to value “doing what has always been done this way,” and in doing so, reject being attentive, intelligent and reasonable about the world around them.

Thus the enemy of being reasonable is so often simple inertia. Being comfortable. Being self-contained. Neglecting our reality of living in a web of relationships. Fear sits here too: particularly the fear of losing what we have gained with great cost, or what we think we deserve.

It is a form of pride; where a person assumes that they have the answers before the meeting even starts, and that their interpretation of reality is “the truth.” To

force this upon others is to injure their consciences. It can become abusive.



## BE RESPONSIBLE

I want people to stop being judgemental

Being “judgemental” is different to judging. We judge all the time. All of our being attentive, intelligent and reasonable is what prepares us to judge – whether we should take an umbrella out with us today, if I’ll meet that deadline at work, if that person is trustworthy.

What we are aiming for is a judgement that is wise and compassionate. To develop a capacity to reflect and to act as Jesus did in the Gospels. **To be**

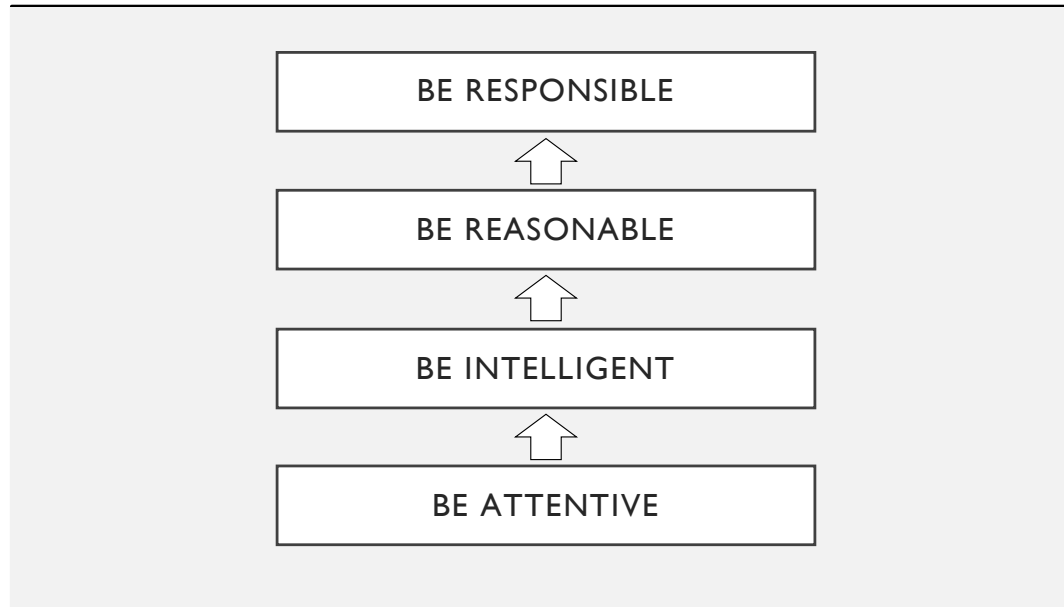
## **responsible.**

My little story here comes from Papua New Guinea when I visited a small town that was very isolated. I was privileged to speak with a missionary priest about the diocese, its people and projects. He described the massive environmental destruction being caused by mining companies who poison the great rivers that bring life to the land and people, and he explained how schools in a particular area couldn't find teachers, so the students were sent away indefinitely. The good priest was distraught. With tears in his eyes he said "*but who cares?*"

We make a dire but common mistake if we think that being responsible – having wise and just judgements – is achieved (in Biblical terms) "through the law." As if following the rules, ticking the boxes, replicating what worked in the past, and meeting arbitrary cultural expectations are the pathway. As if management roles, ordination, or any special titles can instantly produce legitimate and authentic authority.

These three words have had a huge impact on me. *But who cares?* It has impressed upon me that the most basic and obvious response of a faithful Christian to the pain around us is... I CARE.

We then ask "what does being responsible mean in this situation?". Try it



## BE AUTHENTIC

This structure describes how we operate, how we are made – as thinking, doing, and loving human beings. When we tune into our cognitive processes - that which leads us to do and to love, and to not do and not love – then we can intentionally develop a more authentic self.

If you ask how can I be my best self? This is what it looks like. We can work on observing ourselves being attentive (etc) or missing the mark. It is a

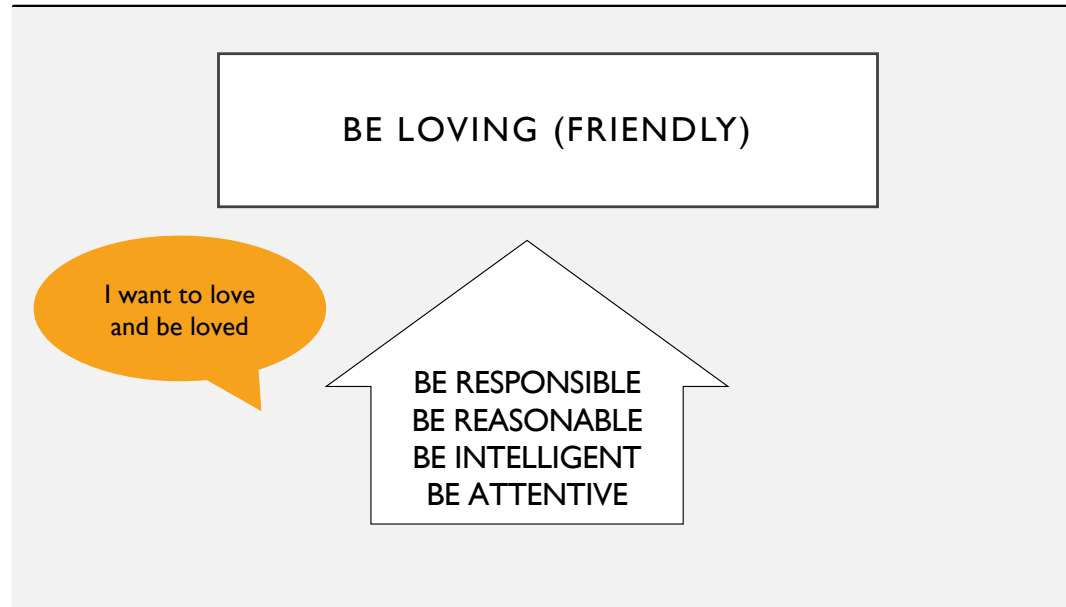


process that we can practise and grow into.

But, we must always attend to each stage. We cannot skip all this hard work and achieve wisdom and compassion without conversion. I find it invaluable to ask myself “is what I’m asking of my colleagues or family reasonable? Am I being responsible, and what do I think that looks like in *this* situation?”

We cannot love with the compassion Jesus did without listening and seeing and touching the people around us. The Gospel stories even reveal how Jesus was stretched when he met and conversed with other people, such as the Samaritan woman at the well.

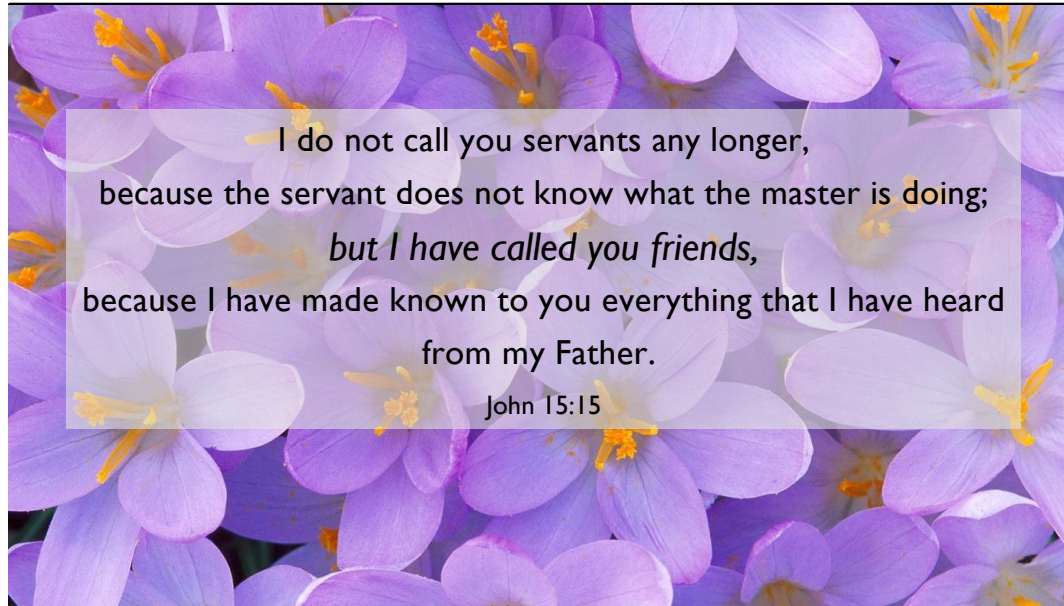
We can read these stories and see how Jesus perfected this process of being authentic. Peak authenticity is therefore not raw power or lording it over others, but self-sacrifice unto death.



## BE LOVING (FRIENDLY)

And here is where we want to be: (click) Being in love with each other, all Creation and our Creator.

I find it helpful when clever people – like Kathleen Williams, Sister of Mercy – explain that being in love is being friendly.



I do not call you servants any longer,  
because the servant does not know what the master is doing;  
*but I have called you friends,*  
because I have made known to you everything that I have heard  
from my Father.

John 15:15

Jesus tells us, his disciples, to join him in friendship – to join him in being fully alive, mature, and authentic:

*I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.*

SYNODALITY = COMMITMENT TO CONVERSION

- “synod” = journey together
- “if today you hear God’s voice, harden not your hearts”
- Open minds and open hearts (open to God, each other and our world)
- “be holy, for I your God am holy”
- *Gaudete et Exsultate* - being authentic



With this light, we ask again What is Synodality?...

Is it doing this process well? Being authentic?

The answer is “commitment to conversion” without which we cannot develop authenticity. Let’s briefly connect with what that means:

- “synod” = journey together
- “if today you hear God’s voice, harden not your hearts”
- Open minds and open hearts (open to God, each other and our world)
- “be holy, for I your God am holy”

- (Gaudete et Exsultate, being authentic)

PLEASE TAKE 4 MINUTES  
TO PAUSE  
& WRITE  
ANY INSIGHTS OR QUESTIONS

## 2. COMMUNION OF COMMUNIONS

- communal, communion and community share the same Latin root *commuñālis* (common)
- How do we foster a communion of communions?
- Authentic community
  - Commits to a culture of conversion
  - Ongoing renewal, critical assessment
  - ★ ➤ Processes that promote friendship

Welcome back.

(This next section is very brief)

What does “communion” mean? What does it mean to you?

*Communion* has the same Latin root as *community*.

Therefore, when we examine the question *How to foster a communion of communions?* it is useful (and reasonable!) to use the foundational language of community.

We want to build a culture that commits to authenticity (not necessarily achieving it all the time!) but committed to ongoing renewal and processes that promote friendship. *This is not secondary to our mission!!* In fact, it is central to evangelisation! An internal task and external.

## AUTHENTIC & SYNODAL PROCESSES

- Pope Francis: hospitality – encounter – dialogue
- Synod on Synodality: participation – communion – mission
- Mercy International Reflection Process
- Being a sacramental people:
  - baptismal;
  - confirmed in the Holy Spirit;
  - healing;
  - forgiving and reconciling;
  - committing in service to communion;
  - Eucharistic

Processes can only be authentic and synodal to the extent that the people involved are open to being authentic and synodal (even just a little bit, such as being open to listening to one other person).

- Pope Francis: hospitality – encounter – dialogue
- Synod on Synodality: participation – communion – mission (synod logo)
- MIRP as a process (point to the website, promoting justice and informed action)
- Being a sacramental people:
  - baptismal;
  - confirmed in the Holy Spirit (we have authority, we are sent);
  - healing;
  - forgiving and reconciling;
  - committing in service and communion (Holy Orders & marriage)
  - Eucharistic (thanksgiving, joy and inclusion)



## SMALL GROUPS

- Does this process resonate with you?
- How do you feel about this?
- What words would you associate with being authentic?
  - For example: conscience? wisdom? compassion?

## SOURCES & RESOURCES

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- Mercy International Reflection Process
- Use your search engine and find videos, website, reports, etc
- Guide Book: <https://www.mercyworld.org/library/mercy-international-reflection-process-guide-book/>

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