

**sinoditalgud**

**Our input to the Synod**

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### [Introduction](#)

(1) This is what we have to say at the [Synod on Synodality](#). “We” are the [sinoditalgutiim](#) formed by Luc Saffre in January 2022. We worked on this document between December 2021 and March 2022 in a synodal process, described [separately](#).

(2) This is the online version of our report, which is work in progress and may change at any moment. You can also dive into the [changelog](#) and consult old versions of this document.

(3) There are about 4.500 baptized Roman Catholics living in Estonia. Roman Catholics are a small group within the Christians in Estonia (300.000), which is itself a small group within the population of Estonia

(1.330.000), which is itself a tiny group of the world population (0.0168%).

(4) Rather than organizing polls and studies in order to provide a representative description of religious life in Estonia, our work focuses on a **prophetic answer** to the question “What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together’?” Already the mere process of writing this report contributed to “allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.” Our work is inspired by what the [PD](#) (no 32) says: let’s “dream and draw forth prophecies and visions”.

### **Let’s speak about problems**

(5) When evaluating how well a community does her job, it is usually more *tempting*, more *easy* and more *profitable* to see the “speck in your brother’s eye” ([Luke 6:41-42](#)) and to blame others.

(6) Also it is disturbing for the life of a community when some of its members fail to do their part because they are obstinately focus on some irrelevant issue that disturbs only them.

(7) But there are situations where [Luke 19:39-40](#) applies: “if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” If we dare to speak about problems, we don’t do this in order to tease some particular church organization. We do it because we feel co-responsible for a world-wide community of all Christians. The authors of this document declare to be motivated by their love towards the (ideal) catholic and apostolic Church.

(8) When you are a child and go shopping with your mother, and when you see that your mother has put her coat inside-out, will you let her get exposed to laughter of other people? No! Of course you will help her to turn her coat right. (This image is from [Marie-Noëlle Thabut, une vie avec la Bible](#)

(9) We believe that the Church has some disturbing but existential issues. We are relieved to see that the [Synod on Synodality](#) is going to address these issues. We are confident that the Church is led by many wise men. Without the following vision we would have nothing relevant to say at the Synod.

### **Vision: A new institution**

(10) Our report is based on a genuine real-life vision described [in Luc’s blog](#). Everything we say is inspired by the hope expressed in this vision. Here is our summary of this vision:

(11) Pope Francis will do yet another important step during his lifetime. He will appoint another person as the apostolic head of the Roman

Catholic church. This person, under authority of the Pope, will have full responsibility over the Roman Catholic church. The Pope himself will become the head of a new institution, called “Synodal Church”, which will embrace and unite all Christian denominations.

Most institutional property will remain with the Roman Catholic church, the Pope will take with him only what the Synodal Church needs to survive. I guess that this will be the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, parts of the Holy See and a few other administrations, maybe a few real estate objects. Like his patron St. Francis of Assisi when he left his parents, Pope Francis will be “naked” during a short moment.

This step is is not a schism. In the contrary, it is the only way to avoid another schism and to reconcile the Church. It is a step towards greater unity. No single faithful will get lost and no single community will be forced to change more than they are able to change. Many faithful from all denominations have been working to prepare this step for more than 70 years.

The Roman Catholic church will align her teachings little by little to the directives of the Synodal Church, step by step, as their apostolic head decides. At the same time other religious institutions, protestant and orthodox, will unite in joy with the Synodal Church and do the same. Each confession will align more or less carefully, more or less quickly, each of them as it is due. Also many of the faithful who left the visible Church during the last years will return. And even a series of corporations that have not called themselves “Christian” until now, will join this choir, discover the [Gospel](#) and align into the Synodal Church.

The Roman Catholic church will simply no longer be the “top of the tree”, it will find itself at the same level together with protestant and orthodox Christians. There will be resistance because humans are naturally resistant to change. This resistance itself is rather a confirmation than an obstacle.

## **The opposite of a schism**

(12) The foundation of the Synodal Church is the opposite of another schism: it will unite all Christians back under one institution.

(13) The Church has experienced two major schisms during her history. More than twenty human generations have passed since Reformation, more than forty generations since the Schism of 1054.

(14) Schisms are a natural side effect of growing communities. Every living being grows by cell division. Diversity of the members is not the problem of the Church. The problem is the lack of an institution that unites them all.

(15) The natural attitude of every Christian denominations when talking to her siblings is to consider her own teachings as the true ones while

those of other Christian denominations are “heresy”. We try to suppress or hide this more or less successfully, but we can never fully avoid it. It is a natural self-confidence, an attitude that is required by every community.

(16) Despite more than 70 years of effort, the [World Council of Churches](#) and other initiatives still seems to be stepping on the spot.

(17) This is because we have an architecture problem: The Pope exercises two different roles: research (“What does the Gospel mean today?”, “Where to go?”) and deployment (“How to get there?”, “How to explain this to the faithful?”). While accumulation of offices can be okay in small communities, it is unacceptable in bigger communities. To illustrate this with an image from Estonian culture: The director of a big choir must resist the temptation of standing in one of the voice groups and singing with them, she must leave the flock and gain an elevated, distanced and impartial position.

(18) The Gospel can never be in contradiction with pure science (see also biased science). We have scientific evidence that people in other confessions witness salvation through the Gospel. We cannot consider them any longer as heresy. The teachings about the Gospel that have been developed by other denominations cannot be ignored. We must learn from each other. Loving our neighbour means to give those teachings the same careful consideration as our own teachings.

(19) In case of conflict we cannot apply lynch justice. We need a superior authority. This superior authority cannot be one of the siblings. A referee cannot participate in the game.

(20) The Synodal Church must be a new legal person, and its work must be at a “higher” level, more spiritual, closer to the Christ, less bound and burdened with earthen worries.

(21) According to theory of papal succession, only the Pope can make this step. True ecumene will happen only when we fix the issue of the Pope’s cumulated offices.

## **Comments about the vision**

(22) Our vision suggests a step that has been waiting at least since the Second Vatican Council. It describes a fundamental change in the *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church. This step seems so simple and obvious that the only surprising thing is that we did not see it earlier. We feel like the two disciples in Emmaus we exclaim “Did not our hearts burn within us?” ([Luke 24:32](#))

(23) The Synodal Church will have two main goals:

(24) Her institutional goal is to ensure the [apostolic succession of the Pope](#). The related administrations of the Roman Catholic church will move together with the Pope and become part of the Synodal Church.

(25) Her operational goal is to explain the Gospel to everybody. She will develop and maintain *master teachings* that are used as *directives* for the different concrete churches. These master teachings are dynamic because our understanding of the real world is dynamic. These master teachings focus on the question “What does the Gospel *ideally* mean in the real world today?” and deliberately ignore the question “How to *practically* forward these teachings to the faithful of a given community?”, which is delegated to the concrete churches. She will help the concrete churches to align their existing teachings to those of the Synodal Church.

(26) While the foundation of a new institution is basically “just an administrative shift of power” in the executive floor of the Church, there are more important consequences that will influence daily life of many people. These will be the actual challenge.

(27) The Synodal Church won't force any concrete church institution to follow her teachings. She won't be “a kingdom of the visible world”. She won't have executive power. Her teachings will be [directives](#) to the concrete church institutions and to every faithful, which these are invited to “either follow or criticize” as long as there is no consensus. Finding a consensus on every topic is important, but not urgent and not always immediately possible.

(28) The Synodal Church will also develop and publish rules, to which she will adhere herself as a legal person.

## **Progressive versus conservative**

(29) Many aspects of the consultation project showed that the Church in Estonia and in the world is experiencing a controversial battle between two “camps”. There are two fundamentally opposing views about how the Church should “live and operate”. Certain parts of these views do exclude each other, there is no way to embrace both. Jesus refers to such situations when he says “No one can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13), or “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!” (Luke 12,49)

(30) The Synod on Synodality gives us hope that we can change this battle into a dialogue. It is going to make a few things clear.

(31) Often the two camps are labelled “traditional” or “conservative” versus “liberal” or “progressive”. But trying to cut reality into two halves (dichotomy of a [controversial question](#)) would be a naive simplification. Nobody is fully on one side. You can be labelled “liberal” without perceiving faith as individual choice. You can be labelled “progressive” and still be very conservative in many regards.

(32) Because the problem is more complex than a simple [dichotomy](#), some call it a [paradigm shift](#).

(33) We can also call it a [metamorphosis](#): Synodality as a butterfly that emerges from its [pupa](#) state within a few hours after long weeks of invisible activity.

(34) We cannot solve a problem by refusing that it exists. The first step in every dialogue is to agree on what we are talking about.

(35) The neologism “synodality” seems to have been a signal for this metamorphosis of the Church. Synodality reminds the expression “Unity in Diversity”, a prominent principle of the Bahá’í Faith, which also has become the Motto of the European Union. Synodality also reminds the code of conduct and the Conflict of interest policies of the Wikimedia Foundation, or the Ubuntu philosophy (“A collection of values and practices that people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings”).

### **One Gospel, many teachings**

(36) There are many teachings about the Gospel, many theological schools, many ways of understanding and summarizing the Bible. Some of them are classified as Roman Catholic, others as Orthodox, others as Protestant. They constantly grow, evolve, influence each other. They sometimes give opposing answers to concrete questions. No single [faithful](#) can claim to understand them all.

(37) Each teaching bears temptations to [sin](#) (to harm others). A teaching, however well intended, can turn out to be wrong or misleading. A major job of the Synodal Church will be to constantly evaluate and judge every teaching document by issuing her approval or withdrawing it.

Humans have right to mercy, institutions don't. (“Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.” [Luke 17:2](#))

(38) A teaching is just a collection of words in some human language. There are many good teachings about the Gospel, but the Gospel is more than any teaching, it is a divine message. It is revealed to us in much more than teachings: in nature, in the thankful smile of a poor, in a personal experience of success or failure. But also in rites, sacraments, and other non-verbal signs that deserve regulation and formal approval.

(39) The central visible result of her activity will be a single Internet website with (1) authoritative teachings maintained by the SC herself and (2) a huge database of documents produced by other entities, together with their approval state.

## Dialogue in the digital age

(40) Humanity in the digital age is experiencing an unprecedented challenge: we need to find ways to dialogue about questions that had never required a world-wide consensus as long as real-life contact between cultures was rather exceptional. Video conferences have become normal during the COVID pandemic. This is just a recent and probably not the last revolutionary change in our social infrastructure.

(41) The art of dialogue is the art of finding a consensus in conflicts. The result of dialogue is always a compromise, a *modus vivendi* to which all partners can agree. If one of them does not fully consent, the result won't be durable.

(42) Some examples of these questions are “How to protect our nation against attempts of another nation to gain governmental authority over us?” “How to balance the profit gained by industry and its risk of having harmful effects?” “Who decides what is harmful?” “Who decides which questions need an immediate decision and which decisions can wait?” “Who decides which decision in some controversial question is good and true?”

(43) Science cannot answer these questions because science is just a tool that helps us to observe reality and the effect of our decisions. But it does not choose between good and evil. It is ethically neutral and as such opportunistic: it serves those who use it.

(44) Each step towards the global village shows us more clearly: it was an illusion to believe that an “invisible hand” can lead us to peace. The United Nations as the world government needs an independent and reliable advisory body on ethical questions.

## Presynodal convictions about the Church

(45) In this section we collect statements about the Church that we perceive as “presynodal conceptions” about the Church. We classified them using the 10 nuclei and tried to give them a “synodal answer”. We acknowledge that many of them express *convictions*, i.e. are unlikely to change during the lifetime of a person. See [Human hearts and the Church](#).

### **1. Companions on the journey – In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road.**

“We must hold together to protect our community against the world.” → We must hold together to celebrate the Gospel and make it shine to the world.

“We must protect the Gospel against getting spoiled by satanic teachings.” → The Gospel is bigger than any human teaching, nothing can ever make it fade.



“We must keep a distance from those who refuse the Gospel.” → We must explain the Gospel to those who did not yet understand it.

## **2. Listening – Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice.**

“Don’t listen to what makes us believe something else than the truth. Listening to lies causes you to believe them in the end.” → Listen to every voice, especially the unpleasant ones can help you to learn.

“Fighting for the truth means to not leave any lie unanswered.” → Avoid listening only in order to find arguments against “their” opinion and to explain once more “our” opinion.

“Replying clearly to a wrong opinion can need patience and is an act of love. Failing to reply encourages the other to remain in their mistake.” → Loving your enemies means listening to their opinion with your heart wide open.

## **3. Speaking out – All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity.**

“We must not speak out everything without worrying about how the enemy might use our words against us. Diplomacy is the art of saying the truth without offending the enemy.” → We will learn the art of speaking boldly where needed. When our brother sins, we will explain him what disturbs us even if he might feel offended. Hurting can be the opposite of harming. Of course every unpleasant message needs special prudence.

“Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.” (Mt 7:6) → Respect that not every faithful is ready to understand every teaching.

4. Celebration – “Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.

“The Holy Mass fosters our identity and grows our faith. We must not let modernistic tendencies tell us how to celebrate.” → Many rites developed by many cultures are a way of celebrating the Gospel. We will embrace them and learn from each other.

5. Sharing responsibility for our common mission – Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate.

“A lay person must not instruct other people regarding faith questions; teaching should be done by a priest.” → The Gospel propagates mostly through our lives, through what we say and do to other people.

6. Dialogue in Church and society – Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding.

“We must not waste our energy trying to understand people who refuse to accept the truth.” → Before we can explain the Gospel to somebody, we need to understand their worries and fears and convictions.

“Beware of the ‘stench effect’: constantly living in a faithless environment makes you indifferent to the stench. You can lose your faith when you are constantly surrounded by people who don’t believe.” → Nothing can ever come between us and the love of God revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

7. Ecumenism – The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey.

“The purpose of ecumenism is to open a door to other confessions so that lost faithful can turn back to the Roman Catholic church.” → We will learn from each other and share what we have learned during our different history.

“During Holy Mass we welcome non-Catholic visitors and expect them to follow the rules.” → Every rite is open for visitors and we help them to understand what is going on.

8. Authority and participation – A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church.

“The Church needs a clear hierarchy. Whenever humans do something together, it must be clear who is the boss. The boss is responsible in the end.” → An apostolic leader is like a choir director: he does not produce a single sound, but he is the most important actor of the choir.

“Co-responsibility is counter-productive and creates chaos. If you are not the boss, then you must obey, not criticize. That’s called discipline.” → Your boss is your brother. If you feel that he is wrong, you must speak to him: first confidentially, then with a witness and if needed before the community.

“Participation means communism. History shows that communism has failed. It is not a sustainable way for living together.” → ...

9. Discerning and deciding – In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community.

“Common decisions must be the result of a well-organized democratic process. We cannot allow corrupt leaders who do what they want, even if they call it discernment.” → ...

10. Forming ourselves in synodality – Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning.

“The Church must align to Jesus Christ alone, not to a multicultural mix of ideologies.” → ...

“The mission of the Church is to teach others, not to learn from others.” → “Teaching requires learning. While the Church teaches what she has learned so far, we must never forget that her learning continues. The Church must not claim to teach the only valid teaching about God.”

## More presynodal convictions about the Church

(46) A series of traditional expressions used for explaining the Gospel need clarification because they tend to get misunderstood, which leads to disorder.

(47) “The teachings of the Church are eternal and immutable.” → “The teachings of the Church need constant revision and update”

(48) “The Church teaches the truth” → “The Church teaches what we assume to be true”

(49) “No salvation *outside the Church*” → “No salvation *without the Gospel*”

(50) “‘Christ Saviour’ means that you are lost if you do not repent from your sins and decide to follow Jesus.” → “Christ Saviour” means that Jesus saved humanity from the idea that God accounts our sins. See [Sins](#)

(51) To follow Jesus means to follow the Gospel. There are people who follow the Gospel without using the Bible as a [Holy Scripture](#).

## What Synodality means

(52) It is good to have a name for an important topic. But what does “synodality” mean in practice? The big task of the Synod is to develop clear answers to this question.

(53) Here is our list of suggestions:

- Synodality means to be *together* (we can’t refuse anybody who wants to join or to stay) and *on our way* (i.e. we know that we don’t know the truth).
- Synodality means to cultivate true and fully open-minded **dialogue**.
- Synodality means to be **as transparent as possible**. The [Church](#) must announce and explain the Gospel to everybody and in public space. The Church must publicly document her own functioning in a transparent way. The children of the light don’t act in the dark.
- Synodality means to listen to **all members of the Church**. This means to listen to every [faithful](#), including people from other confessions, even queer people.
- Synodality means to practice **apostolic governance and teamwork** in an *open, systematic and documented* way. Church fails where it is done in a *hidden, unsystematic or undocumented* way.

## The church teachings need a review

(54) Encouraged by our vision, which fixes the *institutional* issue of the Pope’s cumulated offices, we dare to speak about an *operational* issue of

the Church, which is especially visible in Estonia but becomes increasingly visible in other countries:

(55) The main job of the Church, which is to announce the Gospel, is not well done in Estonia.

(56) Estonians don't only have the reputation of being the least religious country in the world, they are even *proud* of it. This deserves some thoughts. Many people of good will in Estonia refuse to even ask about the Gospel. A democratic result is that our government refuses to actively cultivate faith in the Gospel. As a result, many people in Estonia have no chance to hear about the Gospel. And since we believe that there is no salvation without the Gospel, we are profoundly worried about the salvation of our nation.

(57) The situation itself has complex causes. We can blame our history, or “those who throw the child out with the bathwater”. But it is also because we fail to explain the Gospel in an understandable language. We have a collective guilt of not doing our job very well.

(58) Estonians are a sceptical and unforgiving people. When you tell them something that is in contradiction with plain common sense, they simply turn away and will distrust you for the rest of their life. Each time the Church is seen “wearing her coat inside-out” (compare [Let's speak about problems](#)), people of good will turn away from her and from Jesus. The Church in Estonia happens to say things that are in contradiction with common sense because she has issues in her understanding of the Gospel. She lacks directives from a superior instance. The vision of the Synodal Church inspires our hope that these issues may get fixed.

(59) Here are some real-life examples where people who believe in the Gospel came to the conclusion that a church teaching is in contradiction with common sense.

(60) We perceive it as a shame that people get excluded from our communion when they dare to “try another time” after their marriage failed, or when they dare to live as a same-sex couple.

(61) It is a shame that we remain silent when Non-Christian organizations do our work. We are called to actively express our thankfulness and distribute “Thank you” badges (pronounce a [benediction](#) or award a “certificate of approval”) to organizations who do our work. See also [Non-Christians doing our work](#).

(62) We often focus on internal questions and fail to realize that our primary job is to bring the Gospel to those who didn't yet hear it.

(63) We still cultivate the belief that our faith is “private sphere”. This belief is a natural consequence of our history, but we are called to overcome it.

(64) We still follow obsolete faith teachings that ignore at least 50 years of human scientific evolution.

## How to teach the Gospel

(65) The mission of the Church is to “announce” the [Gospel](#) to “all peoples”, to every group and class of humans. That’s why the main operational activity of the Synodal Church will be to publish and maintain reliable teachings about the Gospel.

(66) You cannot announce something without formulating your knowledge about it. But what is knowledge?

(67) Individual knowledge, also called faith, is the sum of beliefs you rely on, the result of what you have learned during your personal history. It is stored in your [heart](#). Your [faith](#) tells you in every concrete situation, spontaneously and without further reflection, whether a given choice is “good” or “bad”. It says this with a varying degree of conviction, ranging from “vague feeling” to “doubtless belief”. This choice happens unconsciously and independently of how skilful you are for explaining it to others using words.

(68) Community knowledge is similar, but with a fundamental difference: it isn’t stored in your heart. It is stored somewhere else. It needs a medium. Every collection of teachings maintained by a community is such a medium. Every community is defined by its teachings. Teachings are the heart of every community, they are also the heart of the Church.

(69) The Church has developed a rich treasure of teachings about the Gospel during her long history. The teachings of the Church are probably the biggest and most complex documentation library in the world, collected during more than 3000 years, with document types ranging from blog entries, news, homilies, prayers, songs, books, films, to dogmatic constitutions, research reports or law collections, with audiences ranging from 2 year old children to experts of every branch of science, with the biggest community of contributors. Maintaining this documentation library is a huge and never-ending task.

(70) Meanwhile humanity has entered the digital era. If already the discovery of book printing 500 years ago caused revolutionary changes to the way of teaching the Gospel, how could we assume that the digital era would be less revolutionary for our work? How is it possible that a few private corporations manage to provide a billion of humans individually, day by day, with teachings that these humans crave to read, although much of this information is useless or even harmful to them or others (see 86-90)? And at the same time the teachings of the Gospel produced by the Church are followed –boldly spoken– by some insiders?

(71) Every teaching includes answers to moral questions. No teaching can be ethically neutral. Even a teaching about how to cook an egg assumes certain choices regarding moral questions (e.g. “Is it good to eat eggs?” or “If it’s okay to eat them, isn’t it better to eat them uncooked?”). The Gospel does not say “everything is okay”. There are

things in this world that are not good. The Gospel is a moral message and gives answers to ethical questions. It tells us what is good and what isn't.

(72) Every teaching is meant to be reliable. That's why teachings exist. A teaching makes no sense when nobody relies on it. But what can we teach reliably about the Gospel if we assume that God is beyond human knowledge? Or more shortly: how to explain the unexplainable?

(73) The Bible is a first answer to this question. It is recognized as a historic text by all scholars of all religions, and as such a milestone in human history. The Church is the community of those who use the Bible as their Holy Scripture, as the immutable base of their teachings.

(74) But the Bible is a very fundamental document. It can give contradicting answers to certain concrete questions of the visible world, which evolves constantly. It can get interpreted in different ways, leading to different sets of teachings. Each church institution has its own set of teachings. While parts of these teachings are in harmony with each other, some of them differ considerably among the church institutions. Which confirms that God is beyond human knowledge.

(75) Teachings evolve constantly. Teachings are neither eternal nor immutable. The Gospel is eternal, the Bible is immutable, but teachings aren't. The teachings of the Church need constant maintenance because they are our interpretation of the Gospel for now and here.

(76) The ultimate goal of every teaching is to be true, i.e. that it reflects reality without distorting it. We trust that our teachings are the truest teachings in the visible world, but we must keep in mind that no teaching about God can be perfect or definitive. Ideally our teachings are in harmony with God's plan, but it would be an illusion to claim that they are perfect.

(77) A rule of thumb: As long as one member of the Church disagrees with a teaching, this teaching can't be fully true.

(78) A corollary: Publishing a teaching and then discovering that it needs to be reviewed is an integral part of our learning process. We are on a journey, we do not stand still.

(79) Teachings cannot contradict science. When some new discovery brings scientific evidence that a given teaching is suboptimal or even wrong, the the teaching needs to get updated. "The tree is known by its fruit" (Mt 12:33)

(80) An important feature of every teaching is to be clear. The current teachings of the Roman Catholic church are impressive but not very clear. You need years of education before you can claim to understand them more or less.

(81) Another important feature of every teaching is to be accessible. Every human must be able to access them without paying a license fee and without being distracted by commercial advertisements.

### **Tell me the gospel in 60 seconds**

(82) The Synodal Church will publish an authoritative “executive summary” of the Gospel that can be used by a [faithful](#) to check their own understanding and for explaining it in a reasonable to an interested human of the 21st century.

(83) Here is our attempt for such a text. See [Tell me the Gospel in 60 seconds](#).

### **About rules**

(84) Rules are a special form of teachings. Rules are different from teachings about the Gospel in that they speak about the [visible world](#). Unlike teachings, rules bind us to follow them in a legally measurable way. Declaring that you follow a rule makes you legally responsible in the visible world. Rules can be used in documents that legally bind two business partners.

(85) Besides teachings about the Gospel, the Synodal Church will also develop and publish rules, to which she will adhere herself as a legal person.

(86) The Roman Catholic church has her rules. Some of them need a major update in order to formulate them using modern civil law language and to avoid misunderstandings that can lead to [sin](#).

### **Apostolic governance**

(87) The Church has always been apostolic.

(88) The basic idea behind [apostolic governance](#) is that an individual person gets *appointed* to do a given job. This is inspired by Jesus who appoints very diverse people (fishermen, tax collectors, ...) or the prophet Samuel who appoints Saul and later David as the kings of Israel ([1 Samuel 9](#) and [1 Samuel 16](#)).

Any appointed person can herself appoint other persons to help her with her job. The Pope is the top-level appointer and gets appointed by the procedure of papal succession (which, by the way, reminds me that of the Dalai Lama).

(89) The rules of the Synodal Church will define the concept of apostolic governance, which embraces democracy and monarchy and as such can be an answer to issues of these government forms. This has the potential to eventually lead to a new social and economic system called synodalism, as an alternative to capitalism, communism and socialism.

(90) These rules will cover transparency and privacy. They will define the roles of workers and contributors in the Church (priests, teachers, inspectors, healers, prophets, ...). They will explain the value of celibate persons for the community.

(91) These rules will enforce privacy of relations with natural persons, including e.g. the duty to confessional secret. On the other hand these rules will refuse any right on privacy to organizations. All agreements of a synodal organization with other organizations will be accessible to the public. See also Public money, public agreements.

## **Consensus**

(92) One of the differences between apostolic governance and (classical) democratic government is that when a minority of the community says “something is wrong”, the community needs to listen. Synodality seeks consensus, not majority.

(93) There are topics that need time. As long as there is no consensus about some controversial question, synodality means that the institution remains impartial and suggests possible compromises. Silencing down minority opinions in controversial discussions is not the synodal way of finding sustainable peace.

(94) There are things we cannot change, and we need to accept these things. It would be a waste of energy to continuously quarrel and complain about them. And of course it is not always easy to discern the things we can change from those we can't. If you are really the only one to see a problem, you need to humbly ask yourself whether your inner voice is right, whether that problem is really important enough and whether you really have the duty to disturb the community process with your concerns right now. One of the important functions of celebrating is to offer a spiritual place where “the rule” says to everybody: “shut up now!” If we fail to obey this rule, we spoil the celebration. One benefit of art of celebrating is to cultivate our detachment skills. On the other hand, if you comply with the majority against your inner voice and just because you are too lazy or shy or arrogant to talk about the problem, then you sweep the dirt under the carpet. The problem will remain and eventually grow. Synodality means to cultivate a humble and patient form of perseverance.

(95) Apostolic governance is more than pure democracy, which can lead to lazy compromises, resignation, despair, loss of motivation and attitudes called “work-to-rule”. It is also more than monarchy, which can lead to idolatry, elitism and nationalism.

## **Sexual assault**

(96) (not sure whether we have something to say here...)



(97) The work of a pastor comes together with the risk of accidents caused by human sexuality and the intimate nature of the job as a spiritual advisor. When a professional football player is diagnosed with osteoporosis, he cannot work on the field any more, but he can continue to work in the same organization, e.g. as an administrator.

## Sacraments

This section needs revision. See [Friday, January 28, 2022 \(17:09\)](#).

(98) The Synodal Church won't define sacraments. Her directives will use modern civil legal language to define concepts like "membership" (entering and leaving the organization), and generic "job descriptions" (priest, pastor, teacher, inspector, etc).

(99) You become member of the Synodal Church by declaring that you believe in the Gospel as taught by the Synodal Church. The SC encourages its members to also be member of some concrete church (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, ...) where they attend community life and receive sacraments.

(100) The Roman Catholic church does not currently provide procedures to revoke life-long sacraments like baptism, marriage, priesthood. This is in conflict with modern legislation, which requires each contract a way to end it. Therefore it will be in conflict with the rules of the SC. But that's not a problem: the RC will simply know that she is invited to align her rules with the new directives "as soon as possible", step by step. The head of the catholic church has full authority to decide how much time they need. If it takes generations, let it take.

(101) The Synodal Church will also define concepts like [marriage](#) (a contract between two humans) and [oikos](#). The concrete church institutions may potentially add their own conditions. For example the Roman Catholic catholic church might add that a marriage must be heterosexual.

## The Church is a content publisher

(102) Juridically spoken, the teachings of the Synodal Church are [published content](#) and a fruit of our human work. Its authors have a right and duty to protect their work from getting used in a wrong way.

(103) On the other hand, our teachings are a gift of the Holy Spirit. They are intended to be freely available to everybody. Therefore we cannot refuse to anybody to right to use them. Using them includes modifying them.

(104) There will be a **Synodal Licence** that formulates these principles. This licence will be developed by the Creative Commons and adds another option ("Synodal"), which adds a condition: you must clearly report how your derived work is related to its sources and whether or not

you have their approval. You are not allowed to use the reputation of a name without explicit approval.

(105) The Synodal Church will learn from existing organizations like the Free Software Foundation, Creative Commons or the Wikimedia Foundation, who have done important work about how to manage knowledge as a public resource in a way that aligns with the Gospel. These organizations fundamentally differ from organizations who consider published content as a private property.

(106) The Synodal Church will use concepts and technologies developed by these movements for publishing and maintaining complex documentation systems. An example of such a technology is the one used by Wikipedia. Note that Wikipedia has different requirements because it is an encyclopedia, not an authoritative teaching.

### **Examples of some teachings**

(107) Inspired by the vision, we went yet another step further and imagined how the teachings of the Synodal Church might look like if a group of [faithful](#) would sit down and rewrite them all “from scratch”.

### **Sins**

(108) For example, let’s imagine a clear and short authoritative definition of what the word [sin](#) means for a Christian:

A [sin](#) is a choice that causes harm to somebody.

(109) Christians dare to speak about sins because we believe that God forgives them even before we realize or repent them. Your sins may cause you trouble in the [visible world](#), but they cannot separate you from God’s love nor from communion in the Church. This is one of the central messages of the [Gospel](#). It is especially visible in Luke 15:11–32 (the [Parable of the Prodigal Son](#)) where the father had been waiting for the return of his son already *before* the son had shown repentance.

(110) This way of speaking about sins is relatively new and not yet fully integrated into the hearts of the members of the church. It became possible after the Second Vatican Council. It enables the Church to confess her own collective sins. ([List of apologies made by Pope John Paul II, Vatikan: „Gebührende Aufmerksamkeit für Münchner Gutachten“](#))

(111) This applies to our own sins as well as to those of other people. Our own sins are the only ones we can –sometimes– change directly, but they are difficult to see. The individual sins of other people are basically not our business, but speaking about them –in an appropriate way– is an act of love because our mirror is often the only way to help other people realize their own sin.

(112) The [collective sins](#) of our communities and of humanity as a whole are our business as much as we are co-responsible. Unlike individual sins, collective sins cannot be avoided by single person.

### **Abortion**

(113) The Synodal Church will have a shift of focus in her work against child abandonment and abortion. Traditional approaches for avoiding unwanted pregnancies are based on some form of culpability. But history shows that no law and no faith culture, however strict, can avoid unwanted pregnancies completely. Parents happen to get pregnant by accident.

(114) The Synodal Church will move the action responsibility from the mother to the community. Instead of saying „pro life“ or „pro choice“, it is going to say „pro care“. Questions like “Who is guilty?”, “Who pays the bill?” or “How to avoid unwanted pregnancies?” are to be regulated by each nation, while the Church asks “How to save both the child and its parents?” It will teach that every pregnant woman must have the option to renounce from her maternal responsibility without feeling guilty for her choice. The community must give her moral, social and economical protection during the remaining phase of her pregnancy. After having given birth to the child, this woman is free from any maternal duty towards her child.

(115) The Synodal Church will say clearly that the question of when exactly an embryo can be considered a human is controversial. Rather than giving a doctrinal answer, it will help each faithful to find peace of heart by giving advice on reliability and trustworthiness of the different sources of information.

### **Queer people**

(116) The controversial dialogue about the rights of homosexual and queer people are especially interesting for synodality because the topic itself is rather simple (compared e.g. to the Covid discussions) and touches a rather small minority. And at the same time it is a very hot topic in Estonia. Why does this dialogue so easily turn into a battle? Where is the sin?

(117) After many centuries of research we can now assume with scientific evidence that homosexuality does not harm anybody. Therefore we cannot any longer consider it a sin. It is just an extraordinary sexual orientation. It has been considered a sin for historic reasons. The fact that it was considered a sin by biblical authors says as much about God’s plan as the fact that slavery wasn’t.

(118) If homosexuality is not the sin, where is the sin? Can it be that speaking about it is a sin? Indeed sexuality is a topic that should always be handled with prudence. On the other hand, initiating a controversial

dialogue in a decent way is a normal step of our learning process. Raising the topic cannot be a sin. Neither can our difficulties to find consensus be considered a sin because our personal convictions about sexuality are deep in our hearts, in the lower layers of our consciousness. A human's opinion about sexuality are unlikely to change during his or her lifetime. So it is normal that this discussion needs more than a few generations

## Two new sins

(119) If speaking –even emotionnally– about topics like abortion or homosexuality is not the sin, where is the sin? Fratelli Tutti started to point out that the sin has to do with money and industry. Many news industries make money from people who get excited and speak hatefully. Some medical industries make money from harmful wishes caused by new types of desires, e.g. sexual or cosmetic fantasies. Many entertainment, technology and food industries make money by cultivating desires that are harmful to the consumer or to the Earth.

(120) But we cannot say that industry or money as such are sins: they are a neutral infrastructure, which can be used to do good or to do evil. We start to understand that the sins are certain law systems that allow corporations to make money this way.

(121) The Synodal Church will be the first church institution to declare two established law systems as [collective sins](#).

(122) We all are guilty because our civilization created these laws. The Synodal Church will condemn these law systems as the most important collective sins, from which we must repent urgently because they cause so harm that the Earth as our common home is in danger. Repenting from these sins will be difficult because they have deep roots and because much wealth depends on them.

(123) The first of these collective sins is **granting unlimited profit** while demanding only limited responsibility for the risks. This idea is rooted in limited liability law, which was first enacted by the state of New York in 1811. It causes the strong to become even stronger, and the weak to become even weaker. It leads to screaming injustices and causes harm to many creatures. The modern world is built on two centuries of industrialisation, much of which was built by equity finance, which relies on the idea limited liability. Limited liability corporations are the key to industrial capitalism (economist.com, Wikipedia).

(124) The second of these collective sins is **preventing others from using published knowledge**. By published knowledge we refer to publications formulated as text, picture, sound, movie, software source code or any other media. It covers publications of any investment size, ranging from spontaneous postings in an Internet forum to books, songs, movies, scientific reports or patents. The established copyright system

mixes up the (legitimate) right to get identified and honoured for your work of creating these public resources and the (illegitimate) right to control their usage. It creates a social and economic system that benefits some strong actors while causing harm to most people by limiting their liberty. It causes social disorder. It leads owners of proprietary knowledge to use malicious strategies in order to increase their power.

(125) The idea that published knowledge should be considered a public resource are not new. Already in 1985 Richard M. Stallman designated intellectual property as a seductive mirage. Another software developer, Eric S. Raymond did similar work. Both remained focused on software, and both also caused controversial battles on unrelated topics. In 2010 Lawrence Lessig extended the idea to all forms of published content. Both failed to consider the Church as their ally, and the Church failed to realize their work as important.

(126) The Synodal Church will collaborate with [Creative Commons](#), to define a new [license option](#) that obliges the publisher of a derived work to specify the institution that “approves” their work. She will develop her own *approval system*, an [imprimatur](#) suitable for the digital era. She will advise legislations to regulate the usage of filtering systems and develop the human right to be warned about or even protected against unwanted information.

(127) For example the [Catholic Answers](#) website publishes well-written information that leaves the impression of representing the teachings of the Roman Catholic church. But it doesn't. It is run by a group of private persons and its spirit and message differs fundamentally from those of the Vatican. This is an example of reputation theft. Hence this website promotes disorder because there are people in Estonia who believe that “Catholic Answers” represents the true church more accurately than websites run by the Vatican under authority of the Pope.

(128) Another example is the Taizé community who has the problem of artists who inadvertently publish derived work that harms the spirit of the original work. The *approval system* opens a possibility for publishing unapproved derivatives without harming the reputation of the original because consumers are warned that the new content is not approved by the Taizé community.

## **[How to recognize a faithful?](#)**

You recognize a tree by its fruit. ([Luke 6:43-46](#))

The [Gospel](#) calls us to **love reality as it is, and love each of our fellow humans as they are.** ([Mark 12:28-34](#)). See also [Special note to those who wonder why I ask](#).

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” ([John 13:35](#))

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven”.  
([Matthew 7:21](#))

## **Celebrating together**

(129) Liturgy and rites play an important part when teaching the Gospel because the Gospel is a divine message, far more than any teaching can express. On the other hand, teaching the Gospel is more important than insisting on a given rite or liturgical form. How can we celebrate together, united in diversity?

(130) The Synodal Church will foster a diversity of rites that respects and unites the existing traditions. She will provide a system of approvals that relates different rites to each other and helps the faithful to choose what suits them best.

(131) Changes in rites and liturgy are especially difficult and dangerous because a small detail can seem “wrong” and trigger allergic reactions. Identifying such details is difficult because human hearts aren’t flexible. Once you are used to some detail, you are reluctant to change.

(132) Compare for example a Catholic Mass with a service in a Baptist community. Look at the discussion about the Old Mass. Compare the mainstream opinion about homosexuality in Denmark with that in Nigeria. Consider the emotions of Lutherans, Baptists or Orthodox people about Catholic rites and teachings. Consider the emotions of people who grew up without any religion when they got in contact with Christian rites.

(133) Rites and liturgy are a very “traditionalistic” domain because “experimenting” can cause harm, and recovering from harm caused by experiments in liturgy is even more difficult than changing something.

(134) The Synodal Church will teach clearly that the Bible does not give clear instructions regarding whether female priests are possible or not. But it will also point out that a concrete church can have her rules for historical reasons.

## **Non-religious faithful**

(135) There are individual persons and organizations (governments and political parties, non-profit groups) who engage for peace, healthcare, charity, human rights, climate justice or free knowledge. They don’t actively use the Bible as a tool of inspiration and hence their language is not biblical, but their mission is in harmony with the Gospel. They work for the Kingdom of God and are a visible fruit of the Holy Spirit. ([Luke 9:49-50](#)) An illustration and an idea for a next step is in [Non-Christians doing our work](#).

(136) The Synodal Church emphasises the importance of religious rites and practices, but will not require them. This will open the door to such

organizations who can adhere to our rules and receive our approval even though they do not read the Bible directly as their source of inspiration. We consider them as “indirectly inspired”.

## **Human hearts and the Church**

(137) A considerable number of convinced Christians in Estonia seem to feel irritated or even threatened by the ideas about Synodality presented in this report.

(138) When we see a way of celebrating or understanding that is not “as we were taught”, then we feel irritated and are tempted to say “this is wrong”.

(139) Such feelings are caused by our convictions. Convictions are part of our hearts. Human hearts are not elastic. Our convictions are based on our personal history. We cannot rewrite our personal history. More than this, our convictions are designed by nature to not subdue to our reason. Every conviction deserves respect. This is why we must handle every emotion with respect and prudence.

(140) The teachings of the Church are the synthesis of our convictions.

(141) Every change in a teaching causes fear. It is the job of the Church to discern which fears are “good” and which are bad (or useless). The Gospel calls us to overcome bad and useless fears.

(142) Overcoming a fear does not mean that you personally must stop feeling or experiencing it. Fears are based on our convictions, which we cannot change by our will. Even when we sometimes wish we could. God never calls us to do something that we are not able to do.

(143) We cannot change our convictions, but the Church can change her teachings by making conscious synodal decisions. The Church is an organization, not a human being. Organizations have no emotions. Overcoming bad and useless fears means to adapt our teachings as needed. Teachings are more flexible than human hearts. This is why teachings must change first while human hearts will follow later. Refusing to update a teaching that needs to be updated would increase disorder.

(144) No human will ever be free from all fears. We have inherited these fears since the day we left Paradise. But by cultivating the Gospel, the risen Christ can little by little make himself at home in our heart and help us to evolve out of Hell into Heaven.

(145) Believing in the Synodal Church then means to decide at least in the conscious part of your mind: “Even if I won’t get rid of these particular fears during my lifetime, I will decide to not teach them to our children.” Mark 9:14-29 calls us to cry out with the father of the muted child: “I want to believe! Help my unbelief!”

## Glossary

apostle

An appointed individual who received authorization and responsibility to to a particular job.

apostolic governance

A style of governing based on [apostles](#) who are seen rather as servants than as masters.

discernment

A synodal method used to summarize the opinion of a community.

It relies on our belief that the [Holy Spirit](#) helps us to “sort the wheat from the chaff” and “intuitively” select what is important.

faithful

Anybody who cares about their [faith](#) and believes in the [Gospel](#). See also [Who is “faithful”?](#).

faithless

Anybody who does not care about their [faith](#).

Gospel

The message brought to humanity through [Jesus Christ](#).

## Unclassified chunks

(146) The SC will develop, publish and maintain advice on political questions.