

Diocese of Limerick

Synodal Process: Mission 2025

Delegate Send-off Gathering

“We will begin a spiritual experience of journeying together to renew and deepen our own commitment to our faith, and to redefine our evangelical mission in society today in order to serve it with humility” Bishop Brendan Leahy

Radisson Blu Hotel, Ennis Road, Limerick

31st January 2015

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A Synodal Journey

Context

The diocese of Limerick has begun a synodal process, the first in Ireland in over 50 years, which will lead to the convening of a three day assembly in 2016 .

Over the previous months and years efforts have been made to generate dialogue through “listenings”. More recently 320 delegates from the sixty parishes and thirty additional communities have been recruited to represent their various constituencies in the broad consultation that is the Synod.

To prepare and equip delegates for their mission, a programme of formation has been established. The first session took place in November on the nature, purpose and contingencies of a Synod in today’s context. In the words of Fr. Philibert, the conference leader “the Synod should help us name the unusable past and to aim for the necessary future”.

A Historic Opportunity

Given recent history and the fact that synods have been absent in Ireland, one could seriously ask, why now? In addressing this issue, it is possible to perceive a convergence of trends, which provide Catholic Christians in the diocese of Limerick an opportunity to affirm their faith in new ways.

This invitation may seem counter intuitive in Ireland today, where the institutional Church is still reeling from setbacks to its image and credibility. In fact moving ahead, accepting the challenges, acknowledging the wounds and errors, and having faith in the guidance of the Holy Spirit is not only a strategy, but the way our faith proceeds. For Bishop Leahy, the Synod really asks the question, “what kind of a Church do we want to be in 10 years or so, what face will we have for others”?

A Process

Rather than viewing the Synod as an event, it should be understood as a process of renewal, the seeds of which are being planted in and by those already involved in putting it together. The process is really about developing and deepening individual and collective consciousness of, and engagement to, a renewed and redefined understanding of how our diocese will live its mission here in Limerick in the 10 years ahead.

The Importance of Relationship

The very basis of our faith is a Divine loving relationship between The Father, the Son, transmitted through the Holy Spirit. The Gospels, through Jesus, invite us to enter a personal relationship with God, which has a transformational effect on how we view and interact with others. The quality of relationship among delegates and with all those they encounter is as important, even more important, to the evangelical mission, as whatever else may emerge in the process. Because it is through the door of our relationship that the Spirit enters into the world around us. The quality of our relationships is inspired by the Gospel’s challenge to “love one another as I have loved you”; it is that quality that should define us as Christian community.

Desired outcomes of the Synodal process

- New charisms have emerged and existing ones are confirmed.
- It has been a transformational experience in how we engage our faith
- New connections have been created within our church constituencies and with the broader eco-system we are a part of.

Conditions for Success:

- At all phases of work we seek inspiration and guidance from the Holy Spirit.
- People take ownership of the process: goals, and commitments.
- Participants are truly engaged: enthusiasm, spontaneity.
- Leadership is behind the process with the role of empowerment of others.
- The process is transparent and accessible (people can follow it as it proceeds.)
- Simple but effective tools are provided for dealing with complexity.
- Adequate communication sustains those who are engaged, and draws others into the process.
- We develop the ability to work across differences.
- It is normal to encounter resistance (if there is none, then very likely there is no perceived change): leaders at all levels must be prepared to deal with it.

Some key ideas:

- The delegates' mission is to create the conditions for **fruitful emergence** of new possibilities, new ideas, new relationships, and new ways of bringing people together in accomplishing our evangelical mission here in our diocese.
- The Synodal process opens the way to **a more inclusive perspective** of church and mission, including groups that are at the margins of parish life and society (i.e. prison groups, hospitals, neighbourhoods in transition etc.)
- The process is not linear. When guided by the spirit, many initiatives can take place simultaneously because there is a **shared understanding** of the mission and purpose.
- Encouraging a large number of initiatives requires some coordination and interactive communication. It is important that delegates **remain connected** during the process. Regular sharing of learning and stories in face to face meetings are also moments of emergence. Collaborative digital platforms can also be used to keep information flowing back and forth.
- The synodal process can be likened to a "**snail shell**": a spiral winding from the inside-out, gathering momentum as it opens out.

Overview of Gathering

- 10:00 a.m. Welcome and Opening Prayer**
- 10:15 a.m. Presentation** (Fr. Éamonn Fitzgibbon)
- 10:20a.m. Input by Bishop Brendan Leahy**
- 10:30 a.m. Presentation and work agenda** (Christopher Schoch)
- 10:40 a.m. First Delegate Task: “Check in”**
Work in Circles with shared leadership roles.
- 11:55 a.m. Inspiration 1: Bearing the Mission.**
- 12:15 p.m. Lunch**
- 1:15 p.m. Report back and discussion on Task 1.**
- 2:00 p.m. The Dynamics of Renewal** (C Schoch)
- 2:30 p.m. Delegate Task 2: Hunting in familiar Places.**
Work in Sub- Circles and full Circles
- 3:30 p.m. Shared learnings.**
- 3:45 p.m. Break**
- 4:00 p.m. Delegate Task 3:**
Viewing the world around us.
- 4:45 p.m. Shared learnings.**
- 4:55 p.m. Next steps** (É.F.)
- 5:00 p.m. Concluding Prayer.**

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Shared Leadership Roles

Each Circle manages its own dialogues, flipcharts, use of time and reports .Here are useful roles for self-managing this work. You can divide the roles and rotate them so as many people as possible can experience them at least once.

Discussion Leader	Ensures that all who wish to speak can be heard within the time available. Keeps group on track to finish on time.
Recorder	Writes what group produces on flip chart using speakers words. Asks people to restate long ideas briefly.
Reporter	Reports back to large group in time allotted.
Time Keeper	Keeps group aware of time left. Monitors reports, and signals time remaining to reporter.

First Delegate Task: Check-in

Reports will be ready for posting no later than 11:30 a.m.

Objectives : **From delegates perspective share understanding of the synod and their role in the process.**

- Tasks:
1. In your group assign shared leadership roles (see previous page.) *3 minutes.*
 2. Working individually each delegate lists on a separate sheet his or her hopes and fears concerning the role of delegate: form two columns one for hopes the other for fears. *6 minutes.*
 3. Each delegate will then(1) briefly present himself or herself to the Circle (2) share the object or symbol they have brought (3) share their hopes and fears concerning their roles. *30 minutes*
 4. When presentations are finished the circle will then identify up to five **shared hopes**, and up to five **shared fears** and choose the three most significant in each category: you may also identify one or two **fainter signals** that didn't make the list. Write your final choices clearly at least four inches tall on flip chart. *20 minutes*
 5. The reporter and recorder will then cut out each one of the selected hopes, fears, and "fainter signals" statements and post them on the **The Gatherings Board**- with help from others in their group.

Inspiration 1

“Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.” Mt 11:29-30*

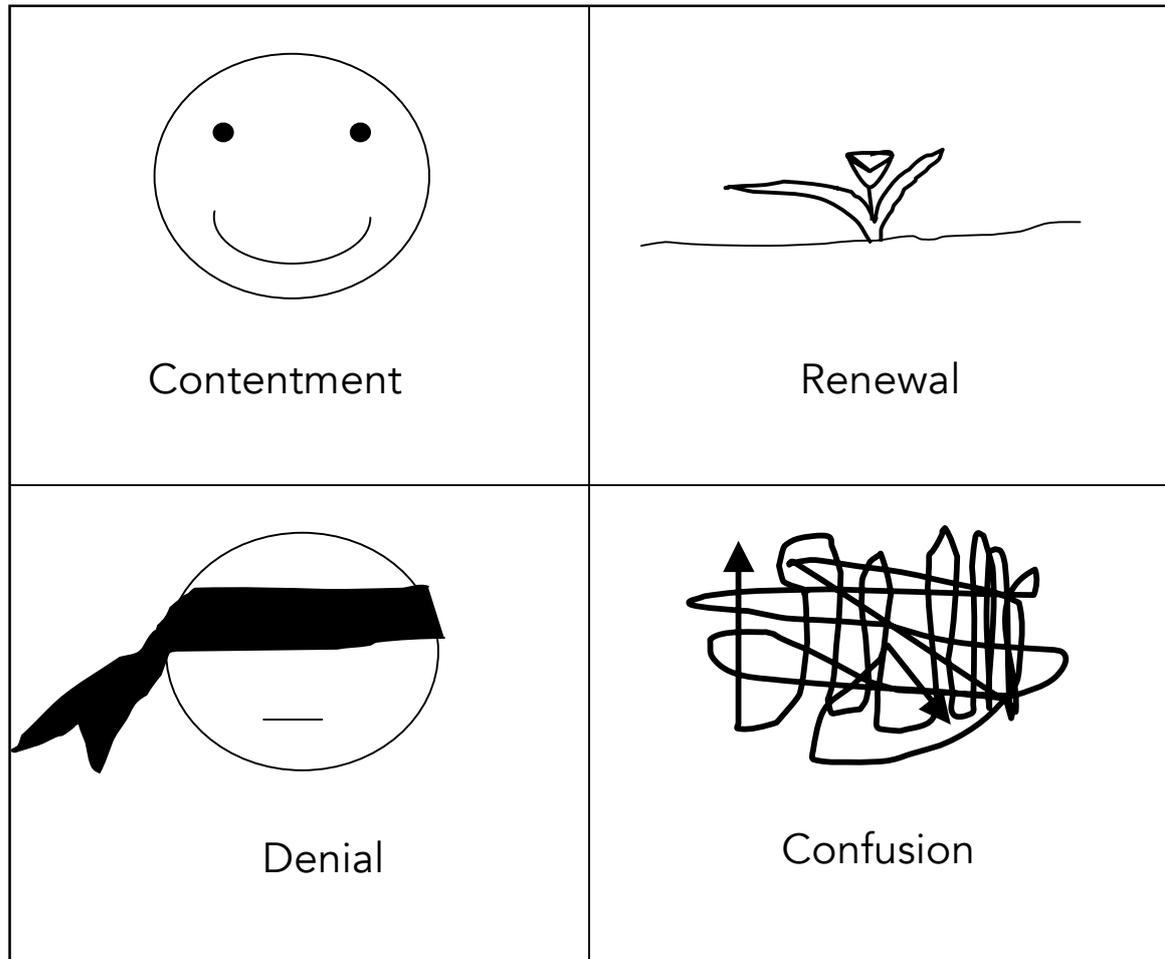
How do Christ’s words speak to me in terms of my role as a delegate?

As I let the Spirit open me to the particular meaning of those words, what do I need to unload to take on His burden?

Use the space below to jot down what Christ’s words have inspired in you, you may then mutually share them with a person you choose in your circle.

The Dynamics of Renewal

Four Room Apartment (Claes Janssen)



Janssen's Theory is that each of us, both as individuals and as groups, is in a constant state of adaptation to life's inevitable changes. In a way it defines how we react to our environment, which is complex and has multiple dimensions -cultural, economical, environmental, political, and spiritual (to which our purpose is central).

The four rooms identify four distinct places, or attitudes that translate how we subjectively react to what is going on in the world.

Contentment is a genuine impression of being in a good place. We are gaining satisfaction from goals we have achieved that have rewarded our efforts. We would like to remain in this place, and feel we have reasonable expectations to do so.

Denial is an attitude or place we come to when we are not facing up to realities that challenge us - our habits, models, and beliefs . By the way none of us will admit we are in this place, it is only when we are able to step away that we become aware of our own denial.

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Confusion is the place that we have been avoiding, because it may be more challenging than we are psychologically equipped to face. Not understanding, or feeling confused are rarely comforting for our self-image. Such feelings can send us to retreat back to the room of denial which, in spite of its more negative effects, does give us the comfort of familiarity.

Renewal we can go to renewal when we have overcome our fears, faced whatever is challenging us, and discovered new and meaningful paths for whatever is most important to us to renew. It is an exhilarating place to be, because in choosing new goals and directions we find a renewed and revitalised sense of purpose and mission that can release boundless energy.

As Janssen points out the path from contentment to renewal is not linear- everyone would like to avoid the grumpiness of denial and the fright of confusion, but it is impossible. Recalling institutions we may have known, the 4 Room Model seems pretty appropriate: IBM, Wall Street, the British Empire, the Soviet Union. Can it be applied to Church?

When I showed the model to a Biblical Scholar friend of mine, he was able to see the path of Christ's ministry.

Contentment

The disciples experienced transformational change with Jesus who brought hope and fulfilment to their aspirations. For most of His ministry, they expected Him to lead them out of bondage to Rome and they grew increasingly comfortable in His presence (even competing for his esteem). They saw that His power was growing and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem served as confirmation that His time, and theirs, had come.

Denial

The denial phase of the disciples is clearly demonstrated at the Last Supper, when Christ announced plainly that He would be betrayed by one of them, and be offered up to His enemies. They could not believe His mentioning of future suffering. Peter even dramatically denies any attachment to Jesus.

Confusion

The disciples were thrown into a profound state of confusion, as witnessed by the Emmaus travellers. They remained in a state of confusion following the crucifixion, and only gradually came to believe in His resurrection, without fully understanding the implications. But they did stay together as the resurrected Christ engaged them to integrate the meaning of His death and resurrection, and understand His mission.

Renewal

It was only with Pentecost that the Holy Spirit was fully and decisively manifest to the group of 72 disciples who experienced the zeal of renewal that enabled them to bring the Good News to all corners of the earth. It is the event that marks the birth of the Church- which is the raised mystical Body of Jesus.

So if the path to renewal does indeed take us through these four distinct stages, what discernment can we look for at each stage?

Discerning Inquiry

1. For those in the “Room of Contentment” we might inquire along these lines to help them express their accomplishments and identify the enabling forces at work for them:
 - What and who contributes to their vitality?
 - What are the most important aspects of their achievements to themselves, the parish, and the community as a whole?
 - What they are doing to make their achievements sustainable for the future?
2. For those in the “Room of Denial” we can try to ascertain how deeply they are installed in that room- some will be nearer the door than others:
 - How comfortable they really are with the present situation.
 - Describe a time when everything was going “as intended”- what were the conditions then?
 - Ask if they think it would be possible today to bring together those conditions.
3. For those in the “Room of Confusion” we can acknowledge their courage and adopt another strategy:
 - Discover what their questions are about the mission of the Church.
 - Find out what they think the Church needs to pay attention to today.
 - Ask who they think needs to work together to define how to meet these needs?
 - Find ways of bringing those people together.
4. For those in the “Room of Renewal” we can acknowledge the freshness and get them to share their learnings and vision.
 - Find out about what they are happiest about.
 - Have them describe their vision of the future.
 - Ask what obstacles they had to overcome, are confronting?
 - Discover how they might like to better share their experience or have more support.

2nd Delegate Task: Hunting and Gathering in Familiar Places

Reports will be ready for posting no later than

Objectives : - View parishes or communities as living systems.
- Define strategies of discernment for people at different stages of renewal.

Tasks: ***You have 40 minutes to complete this task***

1. In Sub-Circles: study the model on the following page which provides an example of a living human system. When you have studied it and are sufficiently comfortable, use the blank page, on the next page to create your own representation of your parish or constituency as a living system.

Identify each group or ministry in your parish or constituency. The center circle is reserved for whoever fills the coordinating function. Your circles may be large or small to reflect the number of people involved.

Now show the connections between these units: you can show an outgoing arrow to services or contributions to beneficiaries or incoming arrows to show resources or energy received. You may also identify beneficiaries or suppliers of resources that are out in the greater community either ecclesiastic or not.

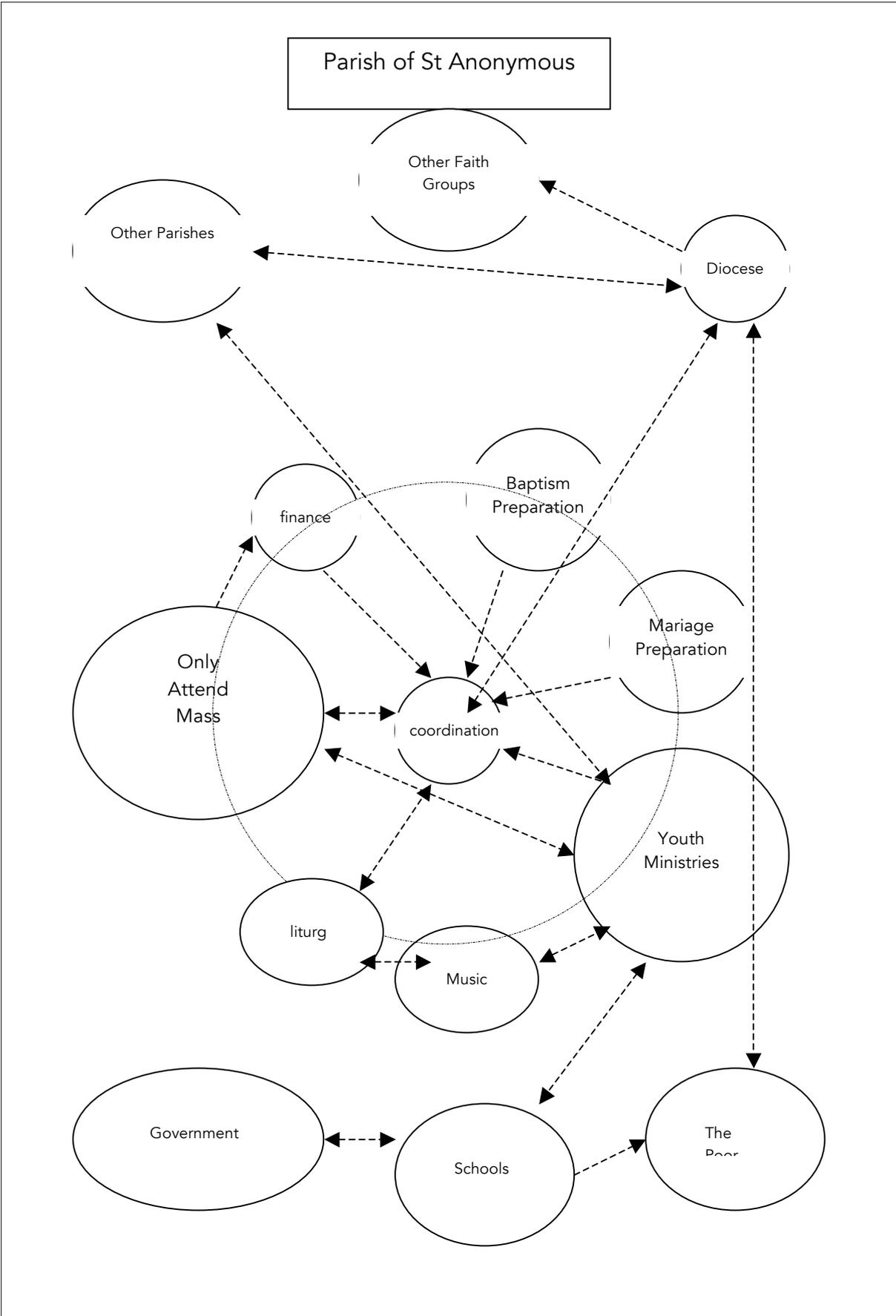
If you have time identify groups that may be in the rooms of renewal, confusion, denial, or contentment- you can use a simple code to identify them.

You have 20 minutes to complete this task

2. In Full Circle assign shared leadership roles and each Sub-Circle will report back report back key learnings.

Note up to five significant learnings on flip chart so that they can be read off to whole gathering.

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3rd Delegate Task: Viewing the World around Us

Reports will be ready for posting no later than

Objectives : Become more aware of the relationship between how we view others and how they see us.
Open ourselves to seeing how the Holy Spirit is at work in the world at large.

Tasks: ***You have 30 minutes to complete this task***

1) Assign shared leadership roles

First task:

Brainstorm onto flip charts specific signs that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world at large (Limerick, Ireland, Europe, elsewhere, everywhere.)

Second task:

As a Circle agree on up to four ways to engage, as delegates, with the pockets of hope and opportunity identified on the brain stormed list.

Key Concepts and Principles

Hunter Gatherers

Before humans became sedentary (growing crops, and grazing cattle) they lived in nomadic societies searching constantly for nourishment, water sources and safety in a chaotic world full of danger. If they had few tools, they did use to the fullest what we now call collective intelligence. According to anthropologists, when they arrived in a new setting the group (we would probably refer to them as tribes) would fan out into the unknown territory. In a new environment, their senses were highly sensitized to new phenomenon, much as we are when we visit a new place- except that their survival depended on making accurate interpretations of what they observed.

Interpretation, the sense making process, took place at the end of the day, when the entire group would gather and each member (including children old enough to speak) would report back what he or she observed both familiar and unfamiliar. In this way each individual bit of information could be pieced together in a collective representation of the environment that was more complete and accurate than what any single member could produce.

Two thoughts are important to retain from their experience:

- In sedentary societies, new patterns are often not noticed by members of that society, who only seem to notice the patterns they expect, even when those patterns have changed incrementally.
- In modern society we tend to delegate the observing function to experts and the sense making functions to leaders. However the complexity and fast moving nature of today's world suggests the hunter gatherer approach may be more appropriate, given the time it takes for information to be collected by experts and received at the top.

We can take inspiration from our hunter gatherer friends, who without knowing it were in fact **discerning** their way through unknown territory, guided by the Holy Spirit in ways we can only guess. Therefore do we also not need to sharpen our observation, be on the lookout for new, perhaps more subtle developments, connect our bits and pieces together, and let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit?

Fruitful Emergence

Without knowing it, many hunter-gatherer societies were already practising what the Santa Fe Institute¹ calls emergent strategy. Their theory is based on the study of atomic fields from which sudden and unexpected outcomes emerge. Applying that knowledge from physics to the field of human interaction, a certain number of conditions have been defined for producing non-linear innovative change in turbulent environments.

Briefly here are the conditions for emergence change:

- A large enough gathering of agents to be representative of the **diversity** of the system they are a part of (a company, a parish, a town, diocese, a country, an alliance of countries, or the whole world.);
- A high level of **density** in the exchange of views and information among agents (ideally each will have at least one interaction with the others- be it verbal, or non-verbal, or electronic).
- Only as much infra-structure as is required to allow for **free flow of information** (rules, facilitation, structure, tools etc.)
- A shared and **compelling reason** to meet and interact- a project, a common interest, a shared mission) that requires input from a lot of people.
- A safe working environment (respect for the individual ,absence of coercion, trust, physical safety)

Now you may notice that these conditions are morally neutral. One could create them to realise any project or mission, which is why I have added one that the physicists in New Mexico do not mention:

- **The presence of the Holy Spirit.**

It is when this last condition is in place that fruitful emergence can occur. Saint Paul has given us the signs of such fruitfulness: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That presence will be all the more powerful if we invoke it and welcome it into the process.²

Dialogue and Active Listening

Dialogue is often confused with different forms of exchange. True Dialogue takes place when each participant respects the boundaries that define a person's uniqueness. These boundaries are a complex combination of genetics, learned behavior, personal traits and talents that define each of us.

Dialogue occurs when we set aside rhetoric which seeks to persuade, defend or rebut an idea. Instead we seek understanding and validation of each person's point of view. The dynamics of dialogue can be summarize the once popular book title

¹ A research centre in New Mexico, initially dedicated to peaceful applications for atomic research.

² Galatians 5:22-23

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“I’m OK-You’re OK”,³ which promotes the idea that for as much as we can be allies, friends, members of the same community or family, each one of us is still unavoidably distinct. This is how God has made us, and may explain why each of our lives is precious to Him and to His design for the world.

Accepting this distinctiveness also means learning how to accept, and welcome different ideas or feelings even, when taken out of context, they may bring us discomfort. The first need is to establish a context in which respect for each party’s “otherness”⁴ can be experienced as positive.

For genuine dialogue to occur there must be active listening. This means that I not only accept the other person’s point of view, I welcome it. This welcoming attitude can be expressed by non-verbal signs that we all know how to recognize. Adolescents are keen observers, and will often interpret our intentions judging from our eye contact or other non-verbal cues. Each of us has an intuitive sense of being listened to.

Active listening requires not only supporting the other person’s space of expression, but actively seeking to understand the meaning behind the words. This can involve techniques such as re-formulation, or open questions, however genuine active listening is sometimes best expressed through respectful silence.

Finally it may be simpler to define some typical postures that are **not** active listening:

- Defensive listening: this is a common debating posture. The politician listens for the fact or idea that he can rebut, and prepares his rebuttal even before his adversary finishes speaking.
- Judgmental listening: remember the adolescent reacting to the idea that his parents know him or her so well, they don’t need to listen to what he or she is trying to say. This type of listening can plague couples who have been married more than 10 years, as well as members of the same religious community.

Here is a set of simple guidelines for discernment, dialogue and active listening⁵:

- I accept the person as other.
- I welcome genuine expression of his or her otherness.
- I make room for ideas or feelings I do not necessarily share.
- I allow myself to feel compassion for the other.
- I thank God for creating this person as other.

³ A book written by Eric Berne, founder of Transactional Analysis, a model for human behavior.

⁴ A translation of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas term *alterité*.

⁵ These guidelines were defined by Sister Agnès Schoch, who is a member of the Benedictine community of Notre Dame de Veniere in France.

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