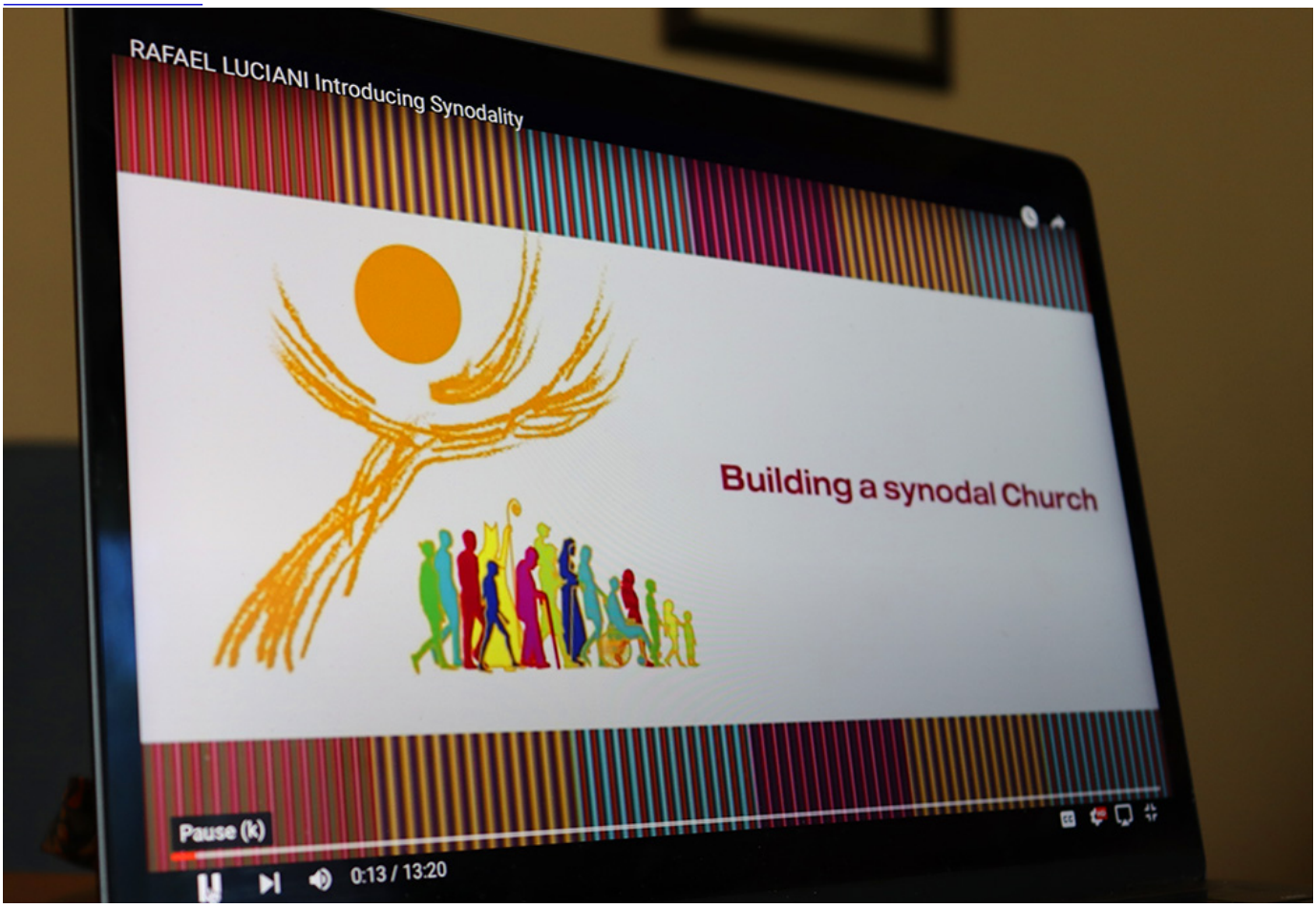
Opinion
Spirituality
Guest Voices



A video begins the introductory lecture by Rafael Luciani for the online course "Common discernment and decision making in a Synodal Church." (NCR photo/Teresa Malcolm)



by Massimo Faggioli

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @MassimoFaggioli

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

July 11, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Even though it's not a new concept in church history, synodality is a new term for most Catholics, even those who have important roles in the Catholic Church. But help is on the way.

Recently, a massive online course on synodality has begun: led by Rafael Luciani, a Venezuelan layman and professor at both the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Caracas and Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry. The title of the course is "Common discernment and decision making in a Synodal Church" and it is hosted on Boston College's website.

Different experts — lay and clergy, men and women — are offering a new set of videos on different topics over three weeks.

Week 1 offers some criteria that will help to assess and deepen the theology and practice of communal discernment and the building of ecclesial consensus. Week 2 focuses on decision-making in the church — one of the great challenges for a new institutional model. Week 3 offers reflections on leadership and governance in the church, and how many of the changes in the church in the third millennium depend on this.

All the lectures are completely free and will be offered in several languages: Spanish, English, Portuguese, French and Italian. People can follow the course at their own pace and watch the videos when it suits them.

The course is sponsored by several different ecclesiastical entities, including the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council, the Council of Bishops' Conferences of Europe, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, the International Union of Superiors General, the Union of Superiors General, the Confederation of Latin American Religious, the Union des Conférences Européennes de Supérieurs/es Majeurs/es, and the Conference of Jesuit Provincials in Latin America and the Caribbean.



Rafael Luciani, a member of the theological commission of the Vatican's General Secretariat of the Synod, delivers a lecture on "Introducing Synodality" for the online course "Common discernment and decision making in a Synodal Church." (NCR screenshot/YouTube/Formación Continua Boston College)

Synodality has already brought about for this project a global cooperation between bishops' conferences, religious orders, and experts.

Luciani is a member of the theological commission of the Vatican's General Secretariat of the Synod, and is known as one of the best interpreters of Pope Francis' "theology of the people." Lately, he has become one of the go-to experts on synodality and not just with his books and other publications.

There is a specific synodal way in which Luciani has offered his expertise to the global church: by assembling a group of experts from many different countries, in this course as well as in a recent important book published in Italian, Spanish and soon also in English.

Latin America features prominently in the massive online course, because of the deep experience of the churches of that continent with synodal gatherings since Vatican II, but this course is not an attempt to impose on the global church a Latin

American model. Rather, it's the attempt to use different, already existing, synodal models in different parts of the world to create a synodal spirit of ecclesial unity in a possible diversity of synodal procedures.

One of the most interesting features of this project is the cultural diversity that is present in the course, and the implicit challenge to live synodality in different cultural and ecclesial contexts. It's not just in the U.S. or in the West where Catholics must deal with highly hierarchical cultures.

Francis opened the synod on synodality last year, and it will culminate in October 2023, when hundreds of bishops will gather for three weeks in Rome to discuss the issue. The time between now and the event in Rome is decisive. Synodality is already changing the ways in which many are experiencing being church.

Advertisement

The German "Synodal Path" has offered some bold proposals for substantial change in the institutional life of the church, especially concerning ministry and the role of women. The second assembly of the Plenary Council in Australia is underway. In other countries, synodal processes are about to start.

Where national processes of synodal consultations have already produced results and national reports have been published, laypeople continually call for more co-responsibility and joint decision making in the church. Examples abound in France, in Spain, in England and Wales, and in India.

In different historical periods, the culture of decision-making in the church has been influenced by new media and technology: The printing press changing the approach to sacred texts and religious authority between the Reformation and the Council of Trent; anti-liberal political pamphlets and opinionated periodicals in the making of papalist ultramontanism leading to the First Vatican Council; the mass media, and especially television, at the Second Vatican Council.

Therefore, it is not a surprise that in the 21st century the internet is playing a role in shaping a global Catholic conversation on synodality. From Catholic voices on the web there is not only vitriol and hate.

What is surprising, in the sense of encouraging, is that this course is making experts in different academic disciplines and different members of the church meet, in a

spirit of common learning — practice from theory and theory from practice. Synodality is also about breaking old, bad habits of self-referentiality in different kinds of clericalism.

This story appears in the **Synod on Synodality** feature series. View the full series.