

Synodality in Estonia

This is version 15 of our input to the Synod on Synodality. Until end of March 2022 you are welcome to contribute by giving feedback. For more information, see <https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/sc/report/>

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About this document

(1) This document is what an inter-confessional group decided to say to the Synod on Synodality (hereafter *Synod*). The **authors** love the Church as she is, despite all justified criticism¹. We had three physical meetings called “sinoditalgud”² where we prayed and discussed the details of this document.

(2) We tried to listen to *all* those who care for the Church, „including those who have abandoned the practice of the faith, people from other faith traditions, people who have no religious beliefs at all.“³

(3) Many other people **contributed** to this document by giving individual feedback. Some of them were not aware of their contribution. Some contributors did nothing else besides praying for us.

(4) This work is licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Introduction

(5) The world seems quite stormy these times: war, pandemic, ransomware, climate crisis, pollution, fake news, terrorism. Humanity is facing unprecedented challenges: we need to discuss about questions that had never required world-wide consensus before. Video conferences boomed during the pandemic and considerably increased contact between cultures. And we can expect even more revolutionary changes in our social infrastructures.

(6) The Church faces the same challenges as the world. Even people who don't care about the Roman Catholic church might learn from how the biggest religious institution in the world addresses these issues.

1 General Audience 2022-02-16, <https://www.vaticannews.va/de/papst/news/2022-02/papst-franziskus-generalaudienz-kritik-josef-kirche.html>

2 A “talgu” (usually its plural form “[talgud](#)”) is a meeting where some community work is done by volunteers.

3 Vademecum 2.1

A learning process, not a battle

(7) The Synod is often seen as a “battle” between “camps” who “fight” for “their” respective “image” of the Church. Already the fundamental question of the consultation triggered strong emotions. Some participants said “The Church is *rooted* in Jesus Christ, it does not *journey*”. Others said “We *know* what is good and true, we are not *seeking* for it.” One responder⁴ said “I view the Synod as negative influence on the Catholic faith. In fact, it can even be considered as sabotage of the Catholic faith.”

(8) Who is to blame when there is a battle?⁵ We cannot solve problems by refusing to speak about them. The visible church institutions *do* have serious issues, some of which *deserve* criticism and *require* steps to be taken.

(9) Opposing positions among Christians sometimes exclude each other dramatically and there is no way to embrace them both. “No one can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). They are not specific to the Catholic church. Issues related to synodality can be observed in every denomination. “They will be divided, father against son and son against father (...)” ([Luke 12:53](#)).

(10) A “battle” indicates that we are about to learn something important. “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!” (Luke 12,49). The Synod acts as a signal that triggers an inter-confessional avalanche of events. The extent of this avalanche is not yet foreseeable.

(11) The first step in every dialogue is to agree on what we are talking about.

The teachings of the Church

(12) In this document we use the word “teaching” in its most general meaning : a **teaching** is any [document](#) in human language⁶ that teaches something.

(13) We need *teachings* in order to announce the Gospel anew in every culture and generation.

(14) The teachings of the Church have different levels of maturity and hence authority:

- The **Scriptures** are historic documents that the Church considers worth of being *preserved* and *venerated*. These include the **Bible** (venerated by all Christians), and the teachings of the **Doctors of the Church** (venerated by many Christians, but not all)⁷.
- The **official teachings** emitted by church communities are published and *maintained* by the authoring community. They are binding for the members of that community. They receive occasional updates, but evolve slowly. They can be in contradiction with those of other communities.
- The **never-ending stream of independent** teachings of varying authority published by miscellaneous communities and individual humans.

(15) The teachings of the Church are the biggest and most complex documentation library in the world, developed since more than 3000 years, with the biggest community of contributors, with document types ranging from letters, blog entries, news, homilies, prayers, songs, books, films, to dogmatic constitutions, research reports and law collections, with an audience ranging from 2 year old children to experts of every branch of science. Preserving and maintaining this documentation library is a huge and never-ending responsibility of the Church.

(16) 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 okay to eat eggs?” or “If it’s okay to eat them, isn’t it better to eat them uncooked?”). The teachings of the Church do not say “everything is okay”. There are things in this world that are not good. It would be a lie to call them good.

Human hearts

(17) When we see a way of thinking or acting that is not “as we were taught”, then we feel irritated and are tempted to say “this is wrong”⁸. In such situations it is important to enter into dialogue.

4 Private email 2022-03-03

5 Answer: the wiser one. We heard this enygmal joke from a lady who is not baptized.

6 see National Center for Biotechnology Information <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5525259/>

7 Real-life illustration in https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2022/0228_2000/

8 Some participants expressed their conviction that the Eucharist needs both forms of bread and wine.

(18) Human dialogue is always inspired by **emotions**. Emotions can be pleasant or unpleasant, but they are neither good nor bad as such. They arise when an incoming signal meets our personal **convictions**. Convictions are stored in our **hearts**⁹. Emotions are the primary reaction of our heart to an incoming signal. Human hearts grow slowly like a tree¹⁰. Every conviction deserves respect. **Emotional intelligence** is the art of reading and interpreting our own emotions and those of others with respect and prudence in order to understand what God is telling us.

(19) A successful dialogue requires all participants to be aware that diving into other people's convictions does not mean to give up your own convictions. Overcoming an unpleasant emotion does not mean that you stop feeling it. God "will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#))

Section 1 : What does „synodal“ mean?

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, 'journeys together'.

A neologism

(20) While the word "synod" has been widely used since ancient times to designate an ecclesiastical council, the adjective "synodal" (together with its derived noun "synodality") is a [neologism](#). It has the same parents as „synod“ (both words come from Greek *συν* together and *ὁδός* way, journey), but saying „The Church is synodal“ does obviously not mean that the Church functions only in synods. This neologism emerged during the pontificate of Pope Francis. He spoke about it during a speech in 2015¹¹. It was later¹² described as "the decision to journey together" that was „at the heart of the work of renewal the Council Vatican II was encouraging“, as the specific organization model („*modus vivendi et operandi*“) of the Church.

(21) Linguistic consideration: we suggest to translate "synodality" to Estonian as "sünodaalsus", not "sinodaalsus", in analogy to "sünonüüm", "sünaps", "sümfoonia" or "sünergia", in order to express the fact that it is a neologism.

(22) Synodality reminds the expression "[Unity in Diversity](#)", a principle of the [Bahá'í Faith](#) that has become the [Motto of the European Union](#). Synodality also reminds the [Ubuntu philosophy](#) or the [Code of conduct and conflict of interest policies](#) of the [Wikimedia Foundation](#).

A definition

(23) We suggest the following definition: **Synodality** is journeying together as a community. Where **journeying** means: We are on our way, we are not yet there. We know that we don't know everything. And where **together means**: We cannot exclude anybody. In case of conflict we need to discuss until we find a consensus. Finding a consensus is not always immediately possible and not always urgent.

Who are we?

(24) A **Christian** is anybody who professes belief in the Gospel and is confirmed as doing so by being baptized¹³. The **Gospel** is the divine message brought to humanity through Jesus Christ.¹⁴

(25) Who is part of the Church? Who is a „true“ (or „saved“) Christian? God's final decision may surprise both the righteous and those excluded ([Matthew 25:31-46](#)). You recognize a prophet from

9 The word „heart“ has a different definition when surgeons speak about their work than when lovers speak about their emotions.

10 Annosa arbor non transplantatur – [Walter of Châtillon](#) (12th century)

11 Pope Francis, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html

12 Synodality in the life and mission of the Church (2 March 2018).

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html

13 There is no juridical definition of "Christian", "Gospel" and "baptized". Most Christian denominations provide their own definitions. "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).

14 We have no more detailed definition of the Gospel. Some sources name it a "teaching", others a "proclamation" or "revelation". Some sources try to mention its basic elements ("redemption", "Kingdom of God", "salvation", ...) but fail to consent on which of them is most important.

his fruits ([Matthew 7:16](#)). The (visible) fruit of our (invisible) faith is our behaviour. The fruits of a teaching are the *convictions* it cultivates in our hearts and the *behaviour* motivated by these convictions.

(26) There are people who don't call themselves "Christian", but who act in harmony with the Gospel. They work for the Kingdom of God. We can consider them as indirectly inspired because "the one who is not against us is for us" ([Mark 9:38-40](#)).

(27) The temptation of anybody who follows some religion is to believe themselves superior to the one who just follows their "uncultivated" convictions. Compare the prayers of the Pharisee and the tax collector in [Luke 18:9-14](#).

(28) If „love your neighbour and even your enemy“ applies to communities as well as to individual humans, we must learn to learn from each other.¹⁵

(29) A synodal Church includes even those who choose to exclude some. Intolerable behaviour must be met with love, which is patient and kind, bears, believes and hopes all things, and is not arrogant, rude, irritable or resentful. ([1 Corinthians 13](#))

Which Gospel?

(30) If you ask a Christian to tell you the Gospel in 60 seconds, you will get a different answer each time you ask. That's normal because the Gospel as a divine message is beyond human reason. Here are two quite different summaries.

<p>1) God is holy. That means: he's perfect. And sin cannot live with Him.</p> <p>2) On the other hand, Man is sinful. I've lied and you've lied. I've stolen and you've stolen. I had fits of rage and you had fits of rage.</p> <p>3) The problem : If God is holy, and sin cannot live with him, but man is sinful, then we cannot live with him. We are cut off from God. Not only in this life, but when we die, we remain cut off from God for eternity in a place called hell.</p> <p>4) The solution: But this is not what God wants for us. So he sent His son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sin. While Jesus was hanging on the cross, God put all our sin on him, so that when Jesus died, all our sins were paid for. And God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day.</p> <p>5) The response: If we admit that we are sinners, and believe that Jesus paid for our sin on the cross, then we will be saved.</p>	<p>We are almost constantly busy with asking: Am I good enough? Am I loved? Does my life make sense? The Gospel says: yes, you are good enough, you are loved, your life does make sense. God made the world such that the good always wins over the evil. God loves every single human <i>unconditionally</i>, like parents who love their children regardless of whether they deserve it or not. Your mistakes and weaknesses are no obstacle to God's love, though of course they can disturb you or others. And God loves each other human as much as you. God is constantly helping you to get better, though you do not always grasp every detail of his plan. It's enough to just believe this. We can't fully understand it, it is a life-long learning process, but we can only cultivate it so that it becomes the first answer of our heart when something unpleasant happens. If you manage to believe this, you are <i>sustainably happy</i> every day of your life, even when facing your own death.¹⁶</p>
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To announce or to proclaim?

(31) The English translation of the fundamental question of the Synod¹⁷ says to "announce" rather than "proclaim" the Gospel.¹⁸ 'Preach' is used in English translations of the Bible twice as often as 'proclaim'. 'Announce' isn't used at all in English translations of the Scriptures, although it is used in the English language mass.

15 Are there scientific studies that compare different denominations regarding the number of testimonies of salvation through the Gospel? And how would such studies define what means „salvation“?

16 <https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/talks/gospel60/>

17 <https://sinod.katoliku.ee/en/2/#the-fundamental-question>

18 We experienced their difference in a real-life situation where a participant made an announcement and we then asked him to say the same as a proclamation. We unfortunately didn't record the scene.

(32) An announcement is more inviting, while a proclamation is more urging, intrusive, invasive. We summarized their difference¹⁹ as follows:

to announce to publish, to make known, to disclose, to explain

to proclaim : to describe excitedly, verbosely and candidly

(33) Is it possible that Jesus calls us to *announce* the Gospel rather than *proclaiming* it? Linguistic speculations about historic texts won't give us the answer, we need the help of the Holy Spirit. An old lady answered "The Church should neither announce nor proclaim the Gospel, you should simply tell it from mouth to mouth."²⁰

Section 2 : The Church in Estonia

How is this 'journeying together' happening today in your local Church?

A young nation

(34) Estonia became an independent nation only 104 years ago, and this period was furthermore interrupted by 50 years of foreign occupation. Their old history taught Estonians²¹ to be careful, shy and diplomatic, but also sly, witty and smart. They cannot show off with a long experience in living and operating as a nation. But they are eager and quick to learn.

Freedom of religion

(35) The Christians in Estonia do quite well because Estonians are open-minded, they don't get angry when their neighbour has a different *modus vivendi*. Freedom of religion is warranted by constitution. Christians in Estonia are allowed to celebrate and worship whatever they want. *As long as they remain in their private domain.*

(36) All Christian denominations in Estonia are represented by the *Estonian Council of Churches*. The *Estonian Evangelical Alliance* unites Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists and Pentecostal institutions²². The general climate is cooperative. "We are continuously looking for ways to better understand, trust and mutually assist each other to proclaim a common Gospel message to all of Estonia."²³

A Church in the underground

(37) Estonians love to say that they are **the least religious people** in the world. This slogan is both true and false depending on your definition of the word „religious“. If a democratic political system is a religion²⁴, then Estonians are *very* religious. What they refuse are institutional teachings about the invisible world, which increases their openness for all kind of loosely defined ideologies. They are culturally averse to any evangelism that reminds soviet propaganda. They trust in private corporations, which they consider independent and therefore more trustworthy than governments.

(38) Most Estonians **refuse** to consider the Church as a trustworthy dialogue partner. The mere mentioning of words like "Jesus" or "Church" can block further dialogue. When the social ministry called to care for bullied children, immigrants, ethnic minorities and handicapped people, it thought that Christians as people having "religious convictions" fit well to the picture.²⁵

(39) Most Estonians **don't differentiate** between the denominations. „Church“ means „everybody who happens to speak about Jesus“. Christian denominations in Estonia are inextricably united by the facts. The behaviour of one of them reflects to all others.

(40) Some theologians in Estonia try to get rid of this image. Toomas Jürgestein explains that "every teacher is always also a learner: these two go together" and that "teaching always includes

19 Inspired by <https://wikidiff.com> and other language authorities

20 Kirik ei peaks evangeeliumit "kuulutama" vaid "edasi rääkima". Nii nagu sellisel vestlusel, mida me pregu teeme.

21 You may replace "Estonians" with "humans" in most of the remaining text.

22 http://ekn.ee/sisu.php?lehe_id=5, <http://www.allianss.ee/2021/12/15/eea-pohikiri-2021/>

23 <http://www.allianss.ee/dokumendid-2/koik-kirikud-kuulutavad-uhist-evangeeliumi-kogu-estimaal/>

24 See Martti Kalda, Demokraatia kui usund (based on "The World Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations" by Ninian Smart. <https://kolleegium.ee/oktoober-2021/martti-kalda-demokraatia-kui-usund-elame-kriisis-kus-on-paasetee/>)

25 See <https://belglane.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2020/0131/>

learning.²⁶ But we are still often tempted to “escape into a pure teaching” and forget that “faith must prove itself and grow in contact with reality”.²⁷

(41) Most **schools**²⁸ in Estonia teach a picture of the Church that is obsolete by at least 500 years²⁹. Announcements made by political parties, private companies or religious communities are not allowed in schools.

(42) **Sexual education** in Estonia aligns with the directives of the European Union. Estonian law permits abortion during the first six weeks of pregnancy. Most Estonians consider this a wise solution, which minimizes harm and suffering. Most Estonians agree that **queer people** should not hide their particular sexual orientation or identity. There are of course controversial opinions regarding their rights in society. Church institutions teach that homosexuality is a sin³⁰, and only a few individual scholars³¹ differ from this teaching.

(43) Many Estonians know that Christians follow the **ten commandments**, but have never heard about the **beatitudes**. While the Old Testament is commonly known even by people who refuse to follow it, the New Testament is much less visible in public life.

(44) Many Estonians imagine the Church as what Daniel Vaarik³² labelled a “**truth institution**”: “Truth institutions were obscenely convinced that they are always right. They never acknowledged any mistake, because this would have meant that they are no longer a *truth* institution. They were slow and introvert. For they feared to make mistakes or to admit them. That’s also why they spoke using the complicated Truth Language. But despite their convulsive efforts, people often misunderstood them.”

(45) Christians in Estonia learn about their church mainly through the media and discussions on Facebook. A small “elite” participate in catechesis or seminars. Many Christians have some independent publisher³³ as their preferred source of information. Very few Christians in Estonia read Vatican News.

(46) Many Christians in Estonia remind rather the Pharisees than the apostles in their fervent fight for traditional moral values.

A people longing for God

(47) Estonians have a deep respect and interest for traditions and moral values. They understand the beauty of ancient rites. They love both the visible and the invisible aspects of reality, and skilfully use poetic language, music, images or sculptures for describing it.

(48) Estonians have

(49) Many Estonians look with a reverent and sometimes amazed respect at consecrated people of the Catholic church who decided to live a celibate life as a testimony that life is more than economic success or having children.

(50) Estonians are constantly seeking what is good and true. They understand the need of a common code of conduct for living in sustainable peace. They long for true ethical values beyond those defined by plain law.

26 Kirjutamisest ja õpetamisest. Intervjuu [Toomas Jürgensteiniga](https://kjt.ee/2022/01/kirjutamisest-ja-opetamisest-intervjuu-toomas-jurgensteiniga). <https://kjt.ee/2022/01/kirjutamisest-ja-opetamisest-intervjuu-toomas-jurgensteiniga>

27 Papst em. Benedikt: „Lehre muss sich in und aus Glauben entwickeln“, <https://www.vaticannews.va/de/vatikan/news/2021-07/emeritiert-papst-benedikt-lehre-entwickelt-glaube-entweltlichung.html>

28 Except for the few explicitly Christian schools: <http://www.kristlik.edu.ee/kool/>

29 See https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2022/0220_2000/

30 See e.g. <http://ekn.ee/inc.lakitus.php?id=308>

31 See e.g. Jaan Lahe & Urmas Nõmmik ([https://usuteadus.ee/wp-content/uploads/2011%20\(62\)/Nommik-Lahe.pdf](https://usuteadus.ee/wp-content/uploads/2011%20(62)/Nommik-Lahe.pdf)), Imbi Arro (<https://kjt.ee/2018/02/jumal-armastab-sind-aga/>), Toomas Jürgenstein (<https://www.sotsid.ee/toomas-jurgenstein-jumalatoestused-ja-kooseluseadus/>).

32 Daniel Vaarik, Asutaja piinad. Tõe asemel koostöö. <https://www.levila.ee/tekstid/asutaja-piinad/asutaja-piinad-toe-aseemel-koostoo> : “Tõeasutused olid ropult veendunud, et neil on alati õigus. Nad polnud nõus vigu tunnistama, sest vea tunnistamine tähendaks ju, et nad pole enam TÕEasutused. Nad olid üsna aeglased ja kinnised. Ikka samal põhjusel, et nad kartsid vigu teha või siis neid välja näidata. Sestap rääkisid nad ka keerulises Tõe Keeles. Hoolimata nende kramplikest pingutustest saadi neist asutustest aga pidevalt valesti aru! (...)”

33 Appendix (A-7) gives some examples of independent publishers read in Estonia.

(51) Being *ignored* by a people that longs for God is a tougher verdict against the Church than being repressed by some authoritarian regime. Christians who grew up in more religious countries witness that Estonia is for their faith rather a *desert* than a *battlefield*.

(52) But we don't worry about the Church. The Church can survive without Estonia. Our worry is: can a nation survive when it ignores the Gospel?

A people without the Gospel

(53) Here are some worrying observations. Keep in mind that the following is an attempt to paint a contrasted black-and-white picture about topics that are beyond what is measurable.

(54) Estonians are careful not to hurt other people by asking too intimate questions that point right into the heart. They are masters in hiding their heart from others and from themselves. They don't *want* to know what is inside because it might turn out to be ugly. They are open-minded but not open-hearted.

(55) Estonians don't say when they disagree with you. Criticizing is considered impolite, destructive and offending. They are themselves sensitive to being criticized and hence afraid to hurt others when criticizing them.

(56) Estonians are not good in making compromises. They take it or leave it. They don't negotiate. To give in is considered a sign of weakness.

(57) Estonians are not good in co-responsible partnership. When three Estonians are together, they have at least four opinions and will never come to an end. They believe in disciplined hierarchies where the boss tells the employee what to do. Being free means that you can choose your boss.

(58) Estonians are humble and love to stay in the background.

(59) Estonians are good in struggle for life. They believe that the winner deserves it all. The loser is to blame for their weakness or laziness or stupidity. You get happy when you are "tubli". "Tee tööd ja näe vaeva, siis tuleb armastus ka."

(60) Estonians don't believe that Good forgives their mistakes. „When an Estonian knows that they have made a mistake, even when everybody else forgives them, they will never forgive it to themselves until the end of their life.“³⁴

(61) Do Estonians have peace of heart? Which soft skills required for sustainable peace of heart? Could the Church help Estonians to learn them?

(62) Should we change „*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*“ into „*No salvation without the Gospel*“?

Who is to blame?

(63) This situation has complex causes. Estonia's history is certainly one of them. Another cause is certainly “a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and a prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles”³⁵.

(64) It is easy to blame others, but let us rather look at our own sin ([Matthew 7:3-5](#)). Who is responsible when the pupil fails to hear what the teacher says – the teacher or the pupil? If the job of the Church is to announce the Gospel, then she is obviously not doing this job very well in Estonia.

Mother wearing her coat inside-out

(65) How can we dare to criticize our beloved mother Church? The following image encouraged us to dive into this: 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.³⁶

34 https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2022/0220_2316/

35 Apostolic journey of his Holiness Pope Francis to the United Arab Emirates (3-5 February 2019). A document on human fraternity for world peace and living together https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html

36 Marie-Noëlle Thabut, une vie avec la Bible. <https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Catholicisme/France/Marie-Noelle-Thabut-vie-Bible-2018-12-23-1200991349>

(66) Estonians are reasonable and realistic people. When you tell them something that is in contradiction with what they know to be true, they simply turn away and stop listening to you. Each time the Church is seen “wearing her coat inside-out”, people of good will turn away from the Church – and from Jesus. Representatives of [New Atheism](#) don’t criticize the *ideal* Church, they criticize some part of the church that they saw wearing her coat inside-out.

(67) The Church happens to say things that are in contradiction with common sense. For example, it is difficult to explain to Estonians

- why God asks us to trust in a book rather than trusting our hearts
- why God requires priests to be male and divorced parents to never marry again,
- why God forgives your sins but requires you to lead a “morally upright” life

(68) The Church is sometimes still reluctant to clearly say that the Gospel itself remains an axiom, a mystery of faith, which we cannot and do not want to prove. The Church has been seen mistakenly as the guardian of the Gospel who is responsible for protecting it. The Gospel needs no guardian. The message of [Dei Verbum](#), which explains that Jesus sheds a new light on the role of Scripture for our faith and that the Gospel is more than the Bible, is not well known in Estonia.

(69) Many Estonians, both followers and refusers of the Church, believe that the Church sees the Bible as a “magic” book that gives “clear” instructions for “getting into Heaven”. The Gospel has nothing **magical**. Christian faith is about right relationship to **reality**, not an idolatry of something “supernatural”.³⁷

(70) The word “[supernatural](#)” emerged in the medieval period and did not exist in the ancient world. It should be used with care because it is [jargon](#) and can get misinterpreted as “magic”. God does not tweak the laws of nature. To believe in anything that is against [scientific evidence](#) would be [superstition](#).

(71) The Church in Estonia has a rather clerical image. “Speaking about faith must be reserved to priests and professional teachers” or “I am not wiser than books”.

(72) Getting baptized is often seen in Estonia as an “administrative step” in order “to get to heaven” after your death, with no need for [spiritual growth](#). “Luterlased on mõnus kirik, sest nad jätavad sind rahul”.

(73) The Church in Estonia is often seen as the major preserver of ancient buildings and cultural heritage.

(74) The most important issues of the Church in Estonia today are unclear or contradicting teachings and untransparent governance.

Opposing positions

(75) A growing number of Christians in Estonia disagrees with the idea that the Bible expresses **positions**. All statements in the following table are inspired from the Bible; despite this they can cause fundamentally opposing positions in a given situation.

God is just and punishes a sinful life.	God is merciful and forgives our mistakes.
We are well-organized and obedient.	We are creative and co-responsible. “We must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29)
We speak carefully and with reverence.	We speak openly and without fear.
We make no compromises.	We are embracing, inclusive.
We are strong because we hope in God.	We hope in God despite our weakness.
Our teachings are founded and true.	Our teachings are inspired and open-minded.
The Bible is self-explaining. Our job is to proclaim the Bible.	The Bible isn’t perfect and it says so itself. ³⁸ Our job is to explain the Bible.
God protects us from evil.	God protects the poor and weak from the rich and

³⁷ Benson Saler. Supernatural as a Western Category. 1977. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/640071>

³⁸ Zack Hunt, The Bible Isn’t Perfect And It Says So Itself. 2013-05-31 blog post <https://www.redletterchristians.org/the-bible-isnt-perfect-and-it-says-so-itself-innerancy/>

	strong.
No salvation outside of the Church. Only the baptized can be saved. The Gospel calls us to follow the Church.	No salvation without the community of all Christians. The Gospel calls us to love our neighbour. There are unbaptized people who follow the <i>Gospel</i> and do the will of God (Matthew 7:21)
„He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets“ (Isaiah 42:2). Live hidden to live happily ³⁹ .	„You are the light of the world“ (Matthew 5:14), “If these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:40)
Speak openly against immorality. ⁴⁰	Do not to look for evil in others, but good. ⁴¹

Section 3 : Suggestions

What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together?’

Step 1 : Introduce “master teachings”

(76) We recommend to develop **master teachings**, a consistent documentation library that explains in [plain language](#) what the Gospel means in the visible world of our time. These master teachings would serve as **directives** to the church institutions. No denomination should be excluded. The church institutions would not have to abandon their teachings or “replace them” by “ecumenical” or “diluted” teachings. Their own teachings may remain more specific than the master teachings. For example, if the master teaching would allow for female priests, Catholic women who feel the call to be priest can choose to either review their wish or to change to another denomination.

(77) Particular teachings of the different church communities are texts formulated in human language at a given time. They are always those of the community that publishes them. The first commandment is to love God and to not venerate any other idol. Saying that God is the Lord and that His name is hallowed means that no human teaching can claim to be absolutely true or to have authority over others.

(78) Any teaching whose author is alive can require amendments and updates, sometimes even [backward incompatible changes](#), when it turns out to be wrong, misleading or harmful. Publishing teachings and then stopping to maintain them can promote disorder. Even the different translations of the Bible evolve. “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)

(79) The historical teachings, including the Bible and [dogms](#) are contextual, i.e. were written as an answer to a given historic situation. Master teachings don’t update historic teachings, but must comment on them and might even call for their [deprecation](#) when the historical context has changed.

Step 2 : Introduce a platform for dialogue

(80) Many authors, ranging from independent bloggers to renowned communities, contribute to the teachings of the Church when they write about the Gospel on their websites. It is their human right to express their opinions. Nothing that has been published can be made undone. This is why no organization can have the power to censure what is being said.

(81) Rather than controlling published content of individual contributors, the Church should use the Internet more actively and develop an open standard to reliably manage comments about teachings so that every reader can see what the Church has to say about a particular teaching.

(82) For the end users, this system could be a browser plug-in that tells them for every page they are viewing information of style “This content is approved by X and contested by Y”. End users could

39 „vivons cachés pour vivre heureux“ is the final verse of a fable by French author Florian around 1750.

https://fr.wiktionary.org/wiki/pour_vivre_heureux_vivons_cach%C3%A9s

40 <https://www.thebiblejourney.org/the-bible-journey/18-letters-from-james-jude-peter35508/peter-speaks-out-against-immorality/>

41 Angelus 2022-02-07. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-02/pope-at-angelus-strive-to-see-clearly-and-speak-charitably.html>

also have an option to explicitly request a review for a given teaching for which no comment has been published so far.

Step 3 : Increase work with language regulators

(83) The Scriptures are full of poetical and paradoxical language because the mysteries of the faith are beyond human language.

(84) But living and operating together as humans needs communication. Communication needs a human language. **Human language** is based on **vocabulary**. A **vocabulary** is a set of definitions. A **definition** is a name that has been assigned to a **concept** (it gives a **meaning** to a name). God does not assign names to concepts, he leaves that job to us ([Genesis 2:19](#)). Vocabulary definitions are human-made, not divine.

(85) A good definition provides a clear, concrete, complete, correct, coherent and concise⁴² **description** of its meaning. It must be concise because all participants of a dialogue need to be able to remember it. Using unclear, vague, incomplete or incoherent definitions can promote disorder.

(86) The Church should increase contributions to the work of language regulators. The [Institute of the Estonian Language](#) is the **language authority** that regulates and maintains the vocabulary for the Estonian language. Wikipedia is the place that unites the work of all language authorities.

Step 4 : Assume our political role

(87) The political role of the Church is to provide orientation to those who govern the visible world. Rather than discussing about the differences between a marriage and a *de facto* union, whether celibate life is better than living in a same-sex couple⁴³ or whether an egg cell that has just been caught by a sperm is already a human being, let us focus on problems that cause visible harm and suffering to large groups of humans or to the Earth as our common home.

(88) [Fratelli Tutti](#) points out that the big problems of humanity have to do with money and industry. Law systems that allow corporations to make profit by causing harm are sinful. We have a common guilt because our civilization created these laws. God asks us to govern the world ([Genesis 1:26](#)). Money and the “[invisible hand](#)” cannot do this job for us because they are just tools and infrastructures, which can be used for good or for evil purposes.

(89) Private corporations have legal approval of our government to make profit by cultivating things that are harmful to the humans or to our planet.

- Media industry benefits when people get excited and speak hatefully or tell lies.
- Medical industry benefits when sexual or cosmetic fantasies cause harmful wishes.
- Entertainment, technology and food industry benefits when people get addicted.
- Mass weapon industry benefits when governments get into fight

(90) The Church must help governments to identify harmful laws and to imagine innovative ways to change them. This is especially important when a required change is against the interest of private corporations that are more powerful than their national government.

(91) We suggest that the Church develops her competence as the most independent and trustworthy service provider to those who rule the *visible world*.

Conclusion

(currently just some ideas to be meditated)

(92) There is something central to say about power and authority in the tradition of [Philippians 2](#), and Christian leadership in any Christian church. Our leaders and patterns of authority in a ‘sünadaalne kirik’ should be sacraments of him ‘who humbled himself and took the form of a servant’. In no church is this more dramatically represented than when the Holy Father washes the

42 7C of communication see e.g. <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/seven-cs-of-effective-communication.htm>

43 As seen in *Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

feet of the poor and the refugees on Holy Thursday. Naturally, this drama is more emphatic precisely because of the quasi-monarchic nature of papal authority. Ultimately, however the mandatum of Christ was that we should 'wash one another's feet'. And we all have a long way to go before we live out that part of his new commandment.

(93) The Pope should be a good shepherd. Church seeks authority, not power. Authority means that the sheep trust you. Power means that they have no choice. Heart-based faith versus doctrine-based faith: we hear the Gospel in our heart, we feel our hearts burning from an unpronounceable hope, and then we discover that the Scriptures reflect this hope in an unexplainable way. That's heart-based faith. But saying that we receive the Gospel by hearing the Scriptures and deciding to follow some teaching would be doctrine-based faith.

(94) Any visible church institution unavoidably gathers power and wealth: humans *want* to give back when they receive something. Wealthy people *want* to make donations, they *want* to support this institution that helped them to hear the Gospel and to find salvation. But how difficult is it for a rich to get into Heaven!

Appendices

This section contains statements for which we agreed to not agree upon whether they are important.

(A-1) Some definitions

(95) Because we are a diverse group with different backgrounds, we tried to formulate in [plain language](#) some basic definitions that are acceptable to each of us.

(96) A statement is **true** when it reflects *reality* in a given context. **Reality** is what remains true and real even if we fail to *know* or *believe* it. To **believe** something means to assume its *truth* without asking for a proof. To **know** something means to assume its truth because you consider it as proven. A **conviction** is a written or unwritten rule you assume to be true. Everybody, including people who refuse religious teachings, have a number of convictions they cannot prove. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” ([John 20:29](#))

(97) The **individual faith** of a human is his or her collection of convictions. It is a seemingly immutable part of your personality that you cannot change at will. But it evolves and changes continuously as long as you live. It is the current result of your life-long learning process. It is influenced by the culture and family you happen to live in, by your personal history, your individual skills and weaknesses, your thinking patterns, your metabolism and the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit. There are no two humans whose faiths are fully identical.

(98) The **common faith** ([sensus fidei](#)) of a community is the stored knowledge of her past and present members. It is the result of more than an individual human lifetime. While *individual faith* is stored in our *hearts*, common faith is mostly stored in **teachings**⁴⁴.

(99) A **religion** is a system of teachings based on beliefs about the **invisible world**, i.e. the part of reality that is not measurable using the [scientific method](#). Science answers questions about the **visible world**, God gave us brains and we developed science to answer them.

(100) The Gospel is more than the *Bible* : we can hear it also in nature, in the thankful smile of the poor or in a personal experience of success or failure. We live *through* it, *in* it and *with* it, we discover, observe and witness its truth. We experience the Gospel and sometimes Christ the incarnate Word in our own life and find that the teachings of the Church correctly express this experience.

(101) The **Church** is the body of all Christians. It has been inspired by Jesus Christ as part of his plan for humanity. There is currently no single legal entity that represents the whole Church.

(102) The expression **Word of God** is sometimes used as a synonym for the *Bible*, sometimes as a synonym for the *Gospel*. Which causes confusion. At least since Second Vatican Council the Catholic church tries to avoid saying “Word of God” when they mean “Bible”.⁴⁵

(A-2) Independent content publishers

(103) A list of content publishers that people in Estonia consult about the Gospel and the Church. The selection is not representative.

(104) The [Wikimedia Foundation](#) is “the nonprofit that hosts Wikipedia and our other free knowledge projects”. It wants “to make it easier for everyone to share what they know“ and invites us to imagine “a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge”.

⁴⁴ We use „teachings“ in a very general meaning, which includes any freely available published content. traditions,

⁴⁵ Dei Verbum, excerpts from no 9-10: “It is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. (...) Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church. (...) The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church. It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”)

https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html

(105) The [Catholic University of America](#) is a [private research university](#) in [Washington, D.C.](#), a [pontifical university](#) of the [Catholic Church](#) in the United States and the only institution of higher education founded by [U.S. Catholic bishops](#).

(106) National Catholic Reporter (NCR) is “an independent voice in Catholic journalism, accountable to an accomplished lay board of directors rather than a bishop or head of a religious order. It is a voice for the marginalized, including women, LGBTQ communities, refugees and immigrants.” <https://www.ncronline.org/false/about-us>

(107) [Catholic Answers](#) (founded in 1979 by [Karl Keating](#)) claims to be “the world’s largest database of answers about the beliefs and practices of the Catholic faith” and “a media ministry that answers questions about what the Church really teaches”, it helps to “learn more about Catholicism through articles, books, videos and more” and claims to be “the largest organization of our kind.”

(108) The [Wijngaards Institute](#) (founded in 1983 by laicized priest and theologian Dr [John Wijngaards](#)) claims to be “one of the leading independent think tanks promoting gender equality, evidence-based sexual ethics, democratic governance and accountability in the Catholic Church.”

(109) [Stiftung Weltethos](#) (founded in 1990 by Swiss Catholic priest and theologian [Hans Küng](#)) Foundation for a Global Ethic. [Eugen Drewermann](#) is a German church critic, theologian, peace activist and former Catholic priest. The [We Are Church](#) movement “advocates changing the teachings and the structures of responsibility and authority of the Catholic Church. It originated in German-speaking Austria, Germany and South Tyrol in 1995 under the title *Wir sind Kirche* and was organized as an international association in 1996.”

(110) The Journal “[Christian Psychology Around the World](#)” is published since 2011 as an online bilingual Journal. The authors of articles and comments are psychologists, psychotherapists and scientists from different countries of the world. It is published by the European Movement for Christian Anthropology, Psychology and Psychotherapy (EMCAPP) in cooperation with the IGNIS-Akademie für Christliche Psychologie.

(111) [Patheos.com](#) engages “in the global dialogue about religion and spirituality” and helps to “explore and experience the world’s beliefs”. It is for “people looking for credible and balanced information about religion” and “brings together faith communities, academics, and the broader public” to offer “insight, inspiration, and stimulating discussion”.

(112) [PsychologyToday.com](#) is “the world’s largest portal to psychotherapy; it includes free access to hundreds of thousands of professionals. While Psychology Today has expanded its mission and reach across decades and continents, we never cease to delight in satisfying humans’ innate curiosity about our favorite subject: Ourselves.”

(A-3) What is a synodal Church?

(113) A synodal Church knows where it has come from and treasures the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament as a library created by individuals and faithful communities. The revelation given to Moses and the prophets is to be taken as it has been passed on to us.

(114) A synodal Church also cherishes all the teachings that have been evolved since then to unite those unavoidable differences of emphasis and the paradoxes that occur when human beings try to express their faith in God in words that are designed to be provable by science, logic and the best of human intelligence.

(115) A synodal Church knows where it is going to and prays that the kingdom of God will come, and God's will may be done. Just as Christian people may differ in the way that they remember where they are coming from, so too they may differ in how they envision the living out of the commandment of Jesus to love their neighbour and even their enemy as themselves. However they know that if God's reign on earth is to align with God's reign in heaven, they must look towards God, and fix their prayerful attention on his love, so that the divine love will cast out their fear and unforgiveness and patiently sanctify them.

(116) A synodal Church knows that when it is feeling defeated, disempowered and under threat, it will find transforming power in the victorious death of Jesus Christ, who is the human face of God, and also in the prophecy of Isaiah that anticipated and explains his self-sacrifice.

(117) A synodal Church knows that everything is a gift from God, and so, when it is inward-looking and backward-looking and talking only to itself, it will not behave as if it knows all the answers for all time. The synodal Church will be joined on its journey, by a stranger, whom, at first, it will not recognise. Jesus himself had taught that whoever feeds the hungry, refreshes the thirsty, visits the sick or the prisoner, will have met Jesus himself as he gives the gift of his risen presence to them. It is not that the stranger we meet on the journey just might turn out to be Jesus risen: he always is. In such a way, does the ordinary follower of Jesus meet him risen and glorified.

(118) A synodal Church will discover that forgiveness is not just a grace that Jesus asks us to give to one another, but also his gift of grace to us, as he walks beside us, even when we are walking in the wrong direction. Far from valuing the infallibility of the Church, he comes along beside us and loves us in our fallibility and refuses to be defeated by our mistakes. He shows the power of his risen life by coming especially to those who had betrayed and deserted him, and pardoning them, and he continues to do so.

(119) A synodal Church is a Church that is on the move and is accompanied by the risen Christ made known in a beloved stranger (Luke 24:13-35). A synodal Church will discover Jesus speaking through each stranger, warming their hearts, needing their attention, their care and their hospitality and such a Church will invite such a beloved stranger into their homes and lives, and call on him for prayer and blessing, as if himself is the host.

(120) A synodal Church will then find that, at the very moment when he breaks bread, and opens eyes, the risen Jesus is no longer seen, but his disappearing causes no troubling of the Church's heart. It is as if Jesus is calling the Church to behave as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, as a Church that has 'come of age'. As long as the Church recognises Jesus risen in the stranger, Jesus will be present in the Church.

(121) A synodal Church wishes that every human should believe in the gospel by its own free volition and refuse any form of power or violence to enforce this wish.

(122) In conclusion, a synodal Church is one that walks in the faithful expectation that the risen Christ will honour his promise to walk alongside, listen, break open the scriptures and break bread; namely the stranger who becomes the sacred host. To use the illustration of the mother who puts on her coat inside-out, a synodal Church will show her faithfulness, by displaying her vulnerability to the outsider, if she dares to.

(A-4) About apostolic governance

(123) The Church has always been **apostolic** and can be proud of this *modus vivendi et operandi*, which deserves better documentation using modern law language. Apostolic governance embraces democracy and monarchy and as such can be an answer to issues of these government forms. It might be useful also for organizations that aren't religious.

(124) The basic idea behind **apostolic governance** is that a single individual person (not a group) gets *appointed* to do a given job. Any appointed person can herself appoint other persons to help her with that job, becoming their **apostolic leader**. The Pope is the top-level leader and gets appointed by the special procedure of papal succession.

(125) Human beings respond to 'personal' leadership in a different way than we do to 'committee rule'. This is one of the reasons why 'rule from Brussels' triggered Brexit. God, as Christians know him is personal, a Trinity of relationship. The monarchic style of rule from the Vatican retains this personal motif, even though the tiara was given away and the *sedes gestatoria* is gathering dust in the crypt. Even powerful symbols like the pope washing the feet of refugees impact our imaginations precisely because of the power that the pope is symbolically laying aside at that moment.