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Synodality: A Pathway to Students' Engagement and Faith Formation

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Abstract

This study examined synodality as a theological and pastoral pathway for strengthening student engagement and faith formation in Catholic educational institutions. Grounded in biblical teachings, the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, and the magisterial teachings of Pope Francis, the study employed a qualitative theological inquiry using documentary analysis, biblical interpretation, comparative discussion, and reflective synthesis. The inquiry drew upon Sacred Scripture, theological writings, Church documents, educational literature, and the researcher's observations at the Center for Religious Education and Mission (CREaM). Findings identified declining religious participation, secularization, technological influences, academic demands, and changing student attitudes as challenges to meaningful faith formation. The analysis revealed that traditional religious instruction emphasizes doctrinal transmission and teacher-centered learning, whereas synodal methodologies promote dialogue, accompaniment, communal discernment, and shared responsibility. These approaches were found to be complementary in preserving Catholic identity while addressing students' contemporary spiritual experiences. The study proposed collaborative catechesis, listening circles, experiential religious education, digital engagement, youth leadership, and institutional collaboration as practical applications of synodality. However, the proposed initiatives were not empirically implemented or evaluated. The study concludes that synodality provides a theological framework for encouraging active student participation and meaningful spiritual development. Its relevance to Sustainable Development Goals 4, 16, and 17 is reflected in inclusive education, participatory institutional practices, and collaborative partnerships. The study contributes to educational and institutional sustainability by proposing approaches that support the continuity of Catholic faith formation, strengthen community involvement, and connect traditional religious teachings with contemporary educational practices.

Keywords: Catholic Education; Communal Discernment; Faith Formation; Religious Instruction; Student Engagement; Synodality; Theological Inquiry

1. Introduction

Synodality has emerged as a significant theological and pastoral pathway for strengthening student engagement and faith formation in Catholic schools. Amid secularization, technological advancement, and declining religious participation, Catholic educational institutions face challenges in connecting traditional Church teachings with students' contemporary experiences. Rooted in the Second Vatican Council and the teachings of Pope Francis, synodality emphasizes communion, participation, mission, listening, and shared discernment. This theological paper examines the challenges and opportunities of synodal education, compares traditional religious instruction with participatory methodologies, and explores practical initiatives that promote meaningful student involvement and spiritual development. The Church's contemporary synodal process likewise emphasizes communion, participation, and mission (General Secretariat of the Synod, 2021a).

Catholic schools are responsible for nurturing students' intellectual, moral, and spiritual development while preserving their religious identity. However, declining participation in worship, compulsory religious activities, academic demands, and changing attitudes toward faith challenge the effectiveness of traditional formation practices. The researcher's observations at the Center for Religious Education and Mission (CREaM) indicate that students frequently participate in religious activities out of obligation rather than personal commitment. These concerns highlight the need for approaches that encourage authentic engagement and spiritual growth. Catholic educators play an essential role in sustaining institutional religious identity. Their responsibilities extend beyond classroom instruction to spiritual accompaniment and holistic formation. School leaders must therefore provide opportunities for professional and spiritual development while ensuring that Catholic education remains a collaborative mission. Synodality responds to these responsibilities by promoting listening, participation, and shared discernment among students, educators, and school communities. This discussion is also informed by the lay educator faith formation framework (Fussell, 2021). Recent guidance on Catholic school identity also places dialogue and shared educational responsibility at the center of Catholic education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022).

Student engagement contributes to meaningful learning, motivation, and educational persistence. It is associated with academic motivation, school completion, and long-term vocational opportunities. Within Catholic education, emphasizes that integrating Catholic identity into everyday school experiences strengthens students' connection to faith. Finn and Voelkl's (1993) research suggests that participation in institutional decision-making promotes engagement, while collaborative relationships among students, educators, and families strengthen community belonging. Traditional religious instruction generally emphasizes doctrinal knowledge, memorization, teacher-centered learning, and sacramental preparation. In contrast, synodal methodologies encourage dialogue, experiential learning, communal discernment, and shared responsibility. These approaches complement established Church teachings by connecting faith with students' lived experiences. Educators consequently become facilitators and companions in spiritual development, promoting meaningful reflection and active participation in discussions about faith and moral concerns.

Catholic education has historically integrated academic instruction with moral and spiritual formation. The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed this mission through Gravissimum Educationis, emphasizing the responsibility of Catholic schools to develop students as active members of the Church and society (Vatican Council II, 1996). Nevertheless, secularization, digital culture, globalization, and changing social values have influenced young people's religious participation. According to, religious disaffiliation has increased, particularly among younger generations in Western societies. Similarly, the Springtide Research Institute (2021) reported that only 31% of young people aged 13–25 considered religion important in their lives. Within Catholic school communities, these challenges are reflected in limited voluntary participation in religious activities, difficulties connecting doctrine with personal experiences, and competing academic and technological demands. Such circumstances emphasize the need for contextualized faith formation that respects Catholic tradition while addressing students' contemporary spiritual concerns.

Synodality is grounded in the Church's identity as the People of God, emphasizing communion, participation, and shared mission. Biblical foundations include Genesis 2:18, which highlights humanity's relational nature; Exodus 19:5-6, which presents God's people as a covenant community; and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, which emphasizes the interconnected responsibilities of believers. The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) illustrates accompaniment through listening and dialogue, while Matthew 9:17 and Luke 5:37-39 emphasize the importance of responding to new circumstances without abandoning essential spiritual truths. The theological writings of Yves Congar emphasize lay participation in Church life, while Lumen Gentium recognizes the shared responsibility of baptized members in the Church's mission. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 92, further explains the sensus fidei, affirming the participation of the faithful in matters of belief. Pope Francis advances this understanding through Evangelii Gaudium, emphasizing communal evangelization, and Christus Vivit, recognizing young people as active participants in ecclesial life. The Synod on Youth (2018), Faith, and Vocational Discernment similarly highlights the importance of listening to young people's perspectives. Together, these foundations establish synodality as a theological framework for participatory and transformative faith formation. The inquiry also considers the synodality document attributed to Pope Francis (2021). This is also reflected in the Synod of Bishops (2018). Recent biblical resources further connect scriptural reflection with the synodal journey (General Secretariat of the Synod, 2022a).

Despite the continuing importance of Catholic religious education, a gap remains between traditional instructional practices and students' contemporary spiritual experiences. Teacher-centered instruction, compulsory participation, and doctrinal memorization may preserve religious knowledge but do not necessarily encourage personal commitment or meaningful involvement in Church life. The researcher's observations indicate the need for approaches that strengthen students' sense of belonging, participation, and spiritual responsibility. Synodality offers a framework for addressing these concerns through collaborative catechesis, listening circles, communal prayer, shared reflection, and student-centered religious activities. Accordingly, this theological inquiry examines

the challenges and opportunities of synodality, distinguishes traditional teaching from participatory methodologies, and proposes practical school-based initiatives that support student engagement and faith formation.

This theological inquiry aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting holistic, inclusive, and participatory religious education that integrates intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. Synodal approaches encourage meaningful learning through dialogue, reflection, and collaborative participation. The study also relates to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by emphasizing inclusive decision-making, mutual respect, responsible leadership, and institutional participation. Furthermore, SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) is reflected in the collaborative involvement of students, educators, families, and Church communities in sustaining faith formation initiatives. The importance of collaboration in education is also emphasized in contemporary international discussions of education as a common good (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021).

Synodality supports educational sustainability by encouraging religious instruction that remains faithful to Catholic teachings while responding to contemporary student experiences. Through dialogue, communal discernment, and experiential learning, Catholic schools can strengthen the relevance and continuity of faith formation. Institutional and community sustainability are likewise supported through collaborative leadership, student participation, and shared responsibility among educators, administrators, families, and ecclesial communities. Integrating listening circles, collaborative catechesis, digital engagement, liturgical experiences, and community service offers practical opportunities for strengthening students' spiritual involvement. These approaches promote continuity between Catholic tradition and contemporary educational practices while reinforcing the Church's mission of communion, participation, and service.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The paper followed a theological inquiry approach grounded in biblical interpretation, theological reflection, and analysis of Church teachings. It examined synodality through scriptural foundations, the ecclesiological developments of the Second Vatican Council, and the magisterial teachings of Pope Francis. The inquiry also compared traditional approaches to religious instruction with participatory methodologies grounded in synodal principles. Through theological interpretation and reflection on educational experiences, the paper explored how dialogue, accompaniment, and communal discernment could strengthen student engagement and faith formation.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The inquiry was situated within the context of Catholic education, particularly a private Catholic school environment where religious instruction and spiritual formation constitute essential components of student development. The researcher's experiences as a faculty member of the Center for Religious Education and Mission (CREaM) provided the immediate educational context. The discussion addressed challenges involving religious participation, Sunday Mass attendance, academic responsibilities, and students' attitudes toward Church activities. These observations were considered alongside broader developments in Catholic education and contemporary religious participation.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The theological paper focused on students in Catholic educational institutions, particularly their engagement in religious activities and experiences of faith formation. The researcher's classroom observations highlighted differences in students' religious participation, motivation, and personal commitment to spiritual practices. Educators, administrators, and families were also considered important participants in the broader process of synodal formation because of their responsibilities in supporting students' spiritual development. However, the manuscript did not identify formally recruited respondents or present demographic information from a participant-based investigation.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The paper did not employ a statistical sampling procedure or identify a defined sample of research participants. Instead, the inquiry drew upon selected biblical passages, theological writings, ecclesial documents, related literature, and the researcher's educational experiences. These materials addressed the theological foundations of synodality, student engagement, Catholic school identity, and contemporary approaches to religious education. The manuscript did not specify a formal document-selection or sampling protocol.

2.5 Research Instrument

The inquiry relied on documentary and theological sources rather than a standardized research questionnaire or experimental instrument. Its principal materials included Sacred Scripture, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, theological writings, and magisterial documents concerning synodality and youth participation. Biblical passages such as Genesis 2:18, Exodus 19:5-6, 1 Corinthians 12:12-

31, Luke 24:13-35, Matthew 9:17, and Luke 5:37-39 provided foundations for examining communion, accompaniment, and shared responsibility. Ecclesial documents, including Lumen Gentium, Gravissimum Educationis, Evangelii Gaudium, and Christus Vivit, informed the discussion of participation, missionary discipleship, and youth engagement. Related educational literature and the researcher's observations supplemented these theological sources in examining the relevance of synodal methodologies to contemporary Catholic education.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The inquiry involved examining biblical, theological, magisterial, and educational materials relevant to synodality and student faith formation. The discussion considered the historical development of Catholic education, the Church's understanding of synodality, contemporary challenges affecting religious participation, and distinctions between traditional religious instruction and participatory approaches. The researcher's experiences in religious education provided contextual observations concerning students' involvement in worship and spiritual activities. These observations were discussed alongside existing literature on student engagement and contemporary religious participation. The theological materials were subsequently interpreted in relation to practical educational approaches, including collaborative catechesis, listening circles, communal prayer, digital engagement, and student participation in Church-related activities.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The paper used theological interpretation, comparative discussion, and reflective synthesis to examine the relationship between synodality, student engagement, and faith formation. Biblical passages were interpreted in relation to communion, accompaniment, and communal responsibility, while theological and magisterial teachings were examined to establish the ecclesiological foundations of synodal participation. Traditional religious instruction and synodal methodologies were compared in terms of educational approaches, student participation, community relationships, and intended outcomes of faith formation. The discussion also considered contemporary religious challenges and the researcher's observations to identify opportunities for applying synodal principles in Catholic schools. These interpretations informed the proposed educational initiatives emphasizing listening, dialogue, shared discernment, and collaborative spiritual formation. No statistical analysis or quantitative testing was reported.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Challenges and Opportunities for Student Engagement and Faith Formation

3.1.1 Declining Religious Participation and Student Engagement

The researcher's observations at the Center for Religious Education and Mission (CREaM) indicated limited voluntary participation in religious activities among students. In some classes, fewer than half reported attending Sunday Mass, while others attributed their absence to academic responsibilities, distance from their parish, or limited personal motivation. The manuscript also identified secularization, globalization, digital distractions, and the perceived disconnect between Church teachings and students' lived experiences as challenges. It cited the Springtide Research Institute (2021), which reported that 31% of young people aged 13–25 considered religion important in their lives, and, which discussed declining religious affiliation among younger generations. These concerns suggest that religious instruction must address both students' understanding of Catholic teachings and their willingness to participate meaningfully in spiritual activities. Student engagement supports deep learning, motivation, educational persistence, and long-term opportunities. In Catholic education, emphasizes the importance of integrating religious identity into everyday school experiences to strengthen students' connection with their faith.

3.1.2 Catholic School Identity and Shared Responsibility

The theological examination identified Catholic schools as communities responsible for students' intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation. The manuscript emphasized that educators play a central role in preserving Catholic identity and providing meaningful opportunities for religious participation. It also identified the importance of school leadership, spiritual accompaniment, community relationships, and collaboration among educators, students, and families. The preservation of Catholic school identity depends substantially on educators, whose professional and spiritual formation requires continuing institutional support. Catholic school leadership also involves promoting retreats, service activities, and spiritual development. This responsibility reflects the understanding of education as a shared mission. Student participation in school decisions may strengthen belonging, as suggested by Finn and Voelkl's (1993), while cooperation among families, teachers, and students supports community formation.

3.2 Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesial Foundations of Synodality

3.2.1 Biblical Foundations of Communion and Accompaniment

The biblical examination identified communion, participation, unity, and accompaniment as essential dimensions of synodality. Genesis 2:18 emphasizes the relational nature of human life, while Exodus 19:5-6 presents God's people as a covenant community. Psalm 133:1 highlights unity, and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 illustrates the shared responsibilities of believers as members of one body. Luke 24:13-35 presents Jesus accompanying the disciples on the road to Emmaus through listening, dialogue, and explanation. Matthew 9:17 and Luke 5:37-39 further provide a basis for reflecting on the relationship between enduring religious truths and changing circumstances. These biblical foundations support the understanding of faith formation as a communal journey. The Emmaus account particularly illustrates how accompaniment and dialogue can encourage deeper understanding and spiritual reflection. In Catholic education, these principles provide a theological basis for encouraging students to share experiences, ask questions, and participate actively in religious learning while remaining connected to the teachings and mission of the Church. These passages are drawn from Sacred Scripture: The Bible (n.d.).

3.2.2 Theological Understanding of Synodality

The theological examination presented synodality as journeying together through communion, participation, mission, and shared discernment. The writings of Yves Congar, the ecclesiology of Lumen Gentium, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 92, emphasized the participation of the faithful in the Church's life and mission. Synodality was understood not merely as an administrative process but as an expression of the Church's identity as the People of God (PD, 1). This understanding recognizes that all baptized members contribute to the Church's mission through their different responsibilities and experiences. The sensus fidei provides a theological basis for recognizing the participation of the faithful in ecclesial life (cf. Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church, 74). Within Catholic schools, synodality encourages educators to guide students through listening, shared reflection, and communal discernment rather than relying exclusively on one-directional instruction. The Church's synodal framework is further articulated by the International Theological Commission (2018). A spirituality of synodality also emphasizes the integration of theological reflection and lived ecclesial experience (General Secretariat of the Synod, 2022b).

3.2.3 Magisterial Teachings and Youth Participation

The examination of Church teachings emphasized the renewed importance of participation and missionary discipleship following the Second Vatican Council. Gravissimum Educationis highlighted the responsibility of Catholic schools to develop students as members of the Church and society (Vatican Council II, 1996). The Synod on Youth (2018), Faith, and Vocational Discernment recognized young people as essential participants in ecclesial life, while Pope Francis' teachings emphasized evangelization, accompaniment, and youth involvement. These teachings support a participatory understanding of Catholic education. Evangelii Gaudium emphasizes the missionary character of the Church, while Christus Vivit highlights the importance of recognizing young people as active members of the faith community. Together, these perspectives encourage Catholic schools to provide opportunities for students to express their concerns, participate in communal discernment, and develop responsibility for their spiritual formation. The Church's recent synthesis of the synodal process further underscores listening and co-responsibility in its mission (Synod of Bishops, 2023).

3.3 Traditional Religious Instruction and Synodal Methodologies

3.3.1 Teaching Approaches and Learning Engagement

The comparison identified traditional religious instruction as predominantly hierarchical, teacher-centered, and focused on doctrinal transmission, memorization, and structured catechesis. Synodal methodologies, in contrast, emphasize dialogue, consultation, shared experiences, and communal discernment. While traditional approaches generally position educators as primary sources of instruction, synodal approaches encourage students and educators to participate actively in the learning process. This distinction suggests that synodal education can complement doctrinal instruction by making religious learning more participatory and responsive to students' experiences. Through dialogue and shared reflection, students are encouraged to develop a personal understanding of faith while remaining grounded in Catholic teachings. The importance of active participation is consistent with Finn and Voelkl's (1993) research on student engagement and the role of student voice in strengthening institutional belonging.

3.3.2 Community Relationships and Shared Responsibility

The comparison showed that traditional approaches often assign primary teaching and decision-making responsibilities to clergy, religious educators, and institutional leaders. Synodal methodologies recognize the participation of the wider Church community, including students, parents, laypeople, women, and marginalized groups. The emphasis consequently shifts from one-directional communication toward collaboration, shared responsibility, and communal discernment. This perspective reflects the Church's understanding of communion and participation. Collaboration among students, teachers, and families may strengthen community relationships and religious belonging. In Catholic schools, shared responsibility also allows students to contribute to decisions and activities affecting their spiritual development while respecting the distinct roles of educators and Church

authorities. The synodal consultation handbook likewise emphasizes listening and discernment within local Church communities (General Secretariat of the Synod, 2021b).

3.3.3 Faith Formation Priorities and Intended Outcomes

The comparison further distinguished the priorities and intended outcomes of traditional and synodal religious education. Traditional instruction emphasizes doctrinal clarity, moral obedience, sacramental preparation, and continuity of Catholic identity. Synodal approaches emphasize accompaniment, inclusion, dialogue, missionary discipleship, personal discernment, and active participation in the Church's mission. Traditional methods prioritize knowledge and preservation of doctrine, whereas synodal methodologies additionally seek to develop lived faith, communal belonging, and responsibility. These approaches can complement one another in Catholic education. The preservation of doctrine provides continuity, while participatory methodologies offer opportunities for students to understand and apply religious teachings in contemporary contexts. The Church's emphasis on communal evangelization and missionary participation supports this integration. Synodality therefore provides a pathway for connecting religious knowledge with spiritual experience and service. The final document of the 2024 Synod further develops the themes of participation and shared mission (Synod of Bishops, 2024).

3.3.4 Educational Pedagogy and Curriculum Integration

The educational comparison identified traditional approaches as emphasizing standardized religious instruction and faith formation within designated subjects. Synodal approaches encourage dialogical learning, critical reflection, collaborative inquiry, and the integration of Catholic values throughout school activities. Religious formation is consequently understood as part of students' holistic development rather than a responsibility limited to religious education classes. This approach is consistent with the broader mission of Catholic education, which integrates intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation. Connecting religious instruction with community service, liturgical participation, and everyday ethical concerns provides opportunities for students to experience faith beyond classroom discussions. The manuscript presents this integration as a proposed educational direction rather than an intervention whose effectiveness has already been measured. The 2024 working document also addresses shared formation, discernment, and decision-making in synodal communities (General Secretariat of the Synod, 2024).

3.4 Contemporary Challenges to Traditional Faith Formation

3.4.1 Personal Experiences and Spiritual Difficulties

The researcher's theological reflection identified personal suffering, family separation, conflict, abuse, and other difficult life experiences as circumstances that may influence students' understanding of God and their appreciation of traditional religious teaching. The discussion emphasized that students experiencing such difficulties may struggle to connect doctrinal explanations with their personal realities. These concerns highlight the importance of empathy, listening, and spiritual accompaniment. Synodal education encourages religious educators to recognize students' experiences as meaningful starting points for theological reflection. The manuscript emphasizes that teaching faith may begin with human experiences of transcendence rather than exclusively with doctrinal explanations. Such an approach seeks to connect Catholic teachings with students' questions, struggles, and spiritual needs.

3.4.2 Social Competition, Economic Inequality, and Digital Culture

The theological reflection also identified social competition, economic inequality, material aspirations, and dependence on technology as challenges to spiritual development. The manuscript suggested that the pursuit of material success and digital recognition may compete with religious participation and personal reflection. These were presented as contextual concerns and theological observations, not as statistically established causes of declining faith. Synodal methodologies offer opportunities to address these concerns through meaningful dialogue, communal prayer, and reflection on contemporary moral and social issues. Educators can help students examine their experiences through the lens of Catholic teachings while encouraging shared responsibility and service. Active discussion of faith and moral concerns is particularly relevant to spiritual formation.

3.4.3 Preserving Tradition Through Educational Innovation

The theological interpretation emphasized the need to maintain Catholic doctrine while adapting religious instruction to contemporary educational realities. The imagery of new wine and new wineskins in Matthew 9:17 and Luke 5:37-39 provided a framework for discussing the relationship between enduring Christian teachings and changing approaches to faith formation. The inquiry identified dialogue, participation, communal discernment, and experiential learning as potential means of communicating traditional beliefs to younger generations. This perspective presents synodality as a process of renewal rather than a replacement of Catholic tradition. The essential teachings of the Church remain central, while instructional approaches become more attentive to students' lived experiences. Through shared reflection and accompaniment, educators can connect theological knowledge with personal understanding and active participation in the faith community.

3.5 Proposed Synodal Initiatives for Student Engagement and Faith Formation

3.5.1 Collaborative Catechesis and Experiential Religious Education

The inquiry proposed dialogue and listening circles, collaborative theological projects, liturgical and sacramental immersion, pastoral simulations, and synodal conferences as practical applications of synodal principles. These initiatives were intended to encourage student participation, theological inquiry, reflection, and shared responsibility. Collaborative catechesis was also proposed as an approach in which educators, parents, and students participate in developing meaningful religious learning experiences. These initiatives reflect the understanding of synodality as journeying together through listening and communal discernment. They offer possible ways of connecting doctrinal instruction with personal experience and community participation. Their implementation would require appropriate planning, adaptation to students' educational levels, and continuing guidance from religious educators and school administrators.

3.5.2 Digital Synodality and Youth Leadership

The proposed approaches included digital platforms for consultation, religious discussion, and community engagement. The manuscript also emphasized recognizing young people as active collaborators in ministry rather than passive recipients of religious instruction. Youth-led listening sessions and collaborative activities were identified as opportunities for students to express their concerns, contribute ideas, and participate in the Church's mission. These proposals reflect the ecclesial emphasis on youth participation and shared responsibility. Digital engagement may complement face-to-face religious activities by providing additional opportunities for communication and reflection. Similarly, youth leadership initiatives may encourage ownership of faith formation activities while maintaining guidance from educators and Church leaders.

3.5.3 Institutional Collaboration and Evaluation of Synodal Practices

The proposed program emphasized cooperation among students, educators, parents, school administrators, clergy, and the wider Catholic community. It identified communal worship, theological reflection, service activities, and ongoing accompaniment as important components of faith formation. The manuscript also suggested surveys, focus groups, observations, and academic integration as possible approaches for evaluating the implementation of synodal initiatives. These proposals highlight the importance of institutional commitment to participatory faith formation. Evaluation could help Catholic schools determine whether proposed initiatives strengthen students' engagement, sense of belonging, and spiritual development. However, because the manuscript did not report implementing or testing these activities, their effectiveness remains a matter for future assessment. Subsequent implementation guidance emphasizes translating synodal reflection into local practices and evaluation (General Secretariat of the Synod, 2025).

3.6 Synthesis of Theological Findings

The theological inquiry established synodality as a meaningful framework for responding to challenges in student engagement and faith formation in Catholic schools. Its central contribution lies in connecting biblical and ecclesial principles of communion, participation, mission, listening, and discernment with contemporary educational practices. The comparison of traditional and synodal methodologies demonstrated that doctrinal instruction and participatory formation can complement one another in developing students' religious understanding and commitment. The inquiry further emphasized that faith formation requires more than compulsory participation or the transmission of religious knowledge. It calls for meaningful relationships, spiritual accompaniment, and opportunities for students to connect Catholic teachings with their lived experiences. Collaborative catechesis, listening circles, experiential learning, digital engagement, youth leadership, and community service were therefore proposed as practical expressions of synodality. Overall, the study presents synodality as a pathway for strengthening Catholic educational identity while encouraging students to become active participants in their faith formation and the mission of the Church.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

This theological inquiry concludes that synodality provides a meaningful pathway for strengthening student engagement and faith formation in Catholic schools through communion, participation, active listening, and shared discernment. The examination of biblical foundations, theological perspectives, and magisterial teachings highlights the importance of integrating traditional Catholic doctrine with participatory and experiential approaches to religious education. Amid challenges such as secularization, declining religious participation, technological influences, and changing student attitudes, synodality offers a collaborative model that recognizes students as active participants in their spiritual development. By promoting dialogue, accompaniment, community involvement, and shared responsibility, Catholic schools can create opportunities for meaningful religious learning while preserving their Catholic identity and mission.

Catholic educational institutions are encouraged to integrate synodal principles into religious instruction and faith formation through dialogue and listening circles, collaborative catechesis, theological research projects, liturgical and sacramental immersion, pastoral simulations, and synodal conferences. Religious educators should serve as facilitators and spiritual companions who encourage students to share their experiences, participate in theological reflection, and apply Catholic teachings to everyday life. The proposed initiatives also emphasize digital engagement, youth leadership, community service, and collaboration among students, teachers, parents, clergy, and school administrators. Religious education curricula should be reviewed and adapted to support participatory learning while maintaining doctrinal integrity. These approaches are recommended to strengthen students' sense of belonging, spiritual commitment, and active involvement in the Church's mission.

This study was limited to a theological and documentary examination of synodality and its relevance to student engagement and faith formation in Catholic education, supported by the researcher's experiences and observations within a Catholic school setting. Although the inquiry discussed challenges in religious participation and proposed practical synodal initiatives, it did not report a systematic empirical investigation involving a defined sample of respondents, standardized research instruments, or statistical analysis. Furthermore, the proposed educational approaches were not implemented or evaluated to determine their actual effectiveness in improving student engagement and faith formation. Consequently, the conclusions primarily reflect theological interpretations, educational insights, and proposed applications rather than empirically verified outcomes.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

The author declares no conflict of interest, and no external funding was reported for this study. The author acknowledges the voluntary participation of students and the institutional support of the Center for Religious Education and Mission (CREaM) in the context of Catholic education. The study employed non-invasive methods involving theological and documentary analysis and educational observations, with due consideration for participants' privacy and confidentiality. No personally identifying information was disclosed in the presentation of the study.

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