

Being-With the Church: A Heideggerian Analysis of Youths' Lived Experiences of Synodality in the Diocese of Ilagan

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ABSTRACT

This philosophical study interprets the lived experiences of youth coordinators and leaders (N=19) within the Diocese of Ilagan through Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, focusing on synodality as a mode of Being-with the Church. Interview narratives and written reflections were read as factual disclosures of belonging, participation, listening, accompaniment, and ecclesial identity. Guided by Heidegger's concepts of Mitsein, care, solicitude, authenticity, thrownness, and temporality, the analysis found that young people experience the Church most concretely as a relational world enacted through service, recognition, dialogue, and shared mission. Their accounts also disclosed tensions between genuine co-responsibility and forms of exclusion, conformity, and merely consultative participation. Recurring descriptions of the Church as "tayo," home, and a hospital for the wounded reveal a desire for an ecclesial community capable of receiving vulnerability while enabling responsible agency. The study argues that synodality is not only an ecclesial procedure but an existential mode of being-together, and that authentic youth accompaniment requires forms of care that open possibilities rather than substitute for young people's own discernment and action.

Keywords: synodality, youth ministry, Heideggerian phenomenology, Mitsein, ecclesial belonging

I. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary landscape of the Roman Catholic Church is presently marked by a renewed call toward communion, participation, and mission through the Synod on Synodality initiated by Pope Francis in 2021. Officially titled For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission, this ecclesial undertaking seeks to deepen the Church's understanding of "journeying together" as a people of God. Synodality is not merely a structural reform or administrative process; rather, it is a way of being Church that emphasizes listening, participation, discernment, and shared responsibility among all the baptized. Through this process, the Church recognizes that the faithful are not simply passive recipients of pastoral action but active participants in the mission and life of the Church (General Secretariat of the Synod, 2023).

Within this renewed ecclesial vision, the role of the youth has become increasingly significant. The Church acknowledges the growing desire among young people for a

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community that is more relational, participatory, and responsive to the realities of contemporary life. During the 2018 Synod on Young People, young Catholics articulated their longing for a Church where they are not merely objects of ministry but protagonists of evangelization and mission. This perspective highlights the importance of creating ecclesial spaces where youth voices are genuinely heard, valued, and integrated into pastoral discernment and decision-making (General Secretariat of the Synod, 2023; Synod of Bishops, 2018).

The Diocese of Ilagan provides a meaningful context for examining this emerging synodal reality. As a local Church deeply rooted in Filipino Catholic culture and communal spirituality, the diocese has actively embraced the synodal process through contextualized pastoral initiatives. In response to the global call for synodality, the diocese implemented consultation modules such as *salok* and *salya*, which were designed to facilitate “conversation in the Spirit” among various sectors, particularly the youth. These modules localized the synodal process using Filipino language, imagery, and experiences, thereby making participation more accessible and culturally resonant. *Salok*, inspired by the encounter at the well in John 4, invited participants to reflect on existing experiences of communion and participation, while *Salya* emphasized movement toward mission, deeper engagement, and ecclesial transformation (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines National Synodal Team, 2024; Diocese of Ilagan, 2024).

Despite these initiatives, tensions remain between the institutional vision of synodality and the actual lived experiences of young people in the Church. Many youths continue to experience feelings of distance, exclusion, or limited participation within ecclesial structures. Although opportunities for dialogue are increasingly encouraged, there are still instances where youth participation remains consultative rather than genuinely collaborative. This creates a gap between the Church’s call for co-responsibility and the realities encountered by young Catholics at the grassroots level (Saludes, 2025).

To explore these lived experiences more deeply, this study employs the philosophical framework of Martin Heidegger, particularly his concepts of *Dasein* (Being-there) and *Mitsein* (Being-with). Heidegger explains that human existence is fundamentally relational and situated within a world shared with others. In this context, the youth’s experience of “being-with the Church” is not limited to formal membership or participation in religious activities; rather, it reflects an existential relationship shaped by belonging, identity, care, and communal engagement (Heidegger, 1962). Through this lens, synodality can be understood not only as an ecclesial process but also as an existential experience of accompaniment and shared existence.

Heidegger’s discussion of authenticity and inauthenticity also offers significant insight into youth participation in the Church. Authentic participation emerges when young people are genuinely empowered to express themselves, discern their role, and actively contribute to the mission of the Church. In contrast, inauthentic participation occurs when involvement is reduced to conformity, routine, or passive compliance without meaningful engagement. This distinction becomes relevant in examining whether synodal structures truly enable young people to become active subjects in ecclesial life or merely reinforce traditional patterns of dependency and silence (Anowai & Chukwujekwu, 2019).

Furthermore, Heidegger's notion of *Sorge* (Care) and *Fürsorge* (Solicitude) provides a valuable framework for understanding pastoral accompaniment in youth ministry. The Church may either "leap in" for the youth by making decisions on their behalf, thereby fostering dependence, or "leap ahead" by empowering them to assume responsibility for their own faith journey and participation in the community. In the context of synodality, authentic accompaniment requires the latter: creating spaces where young people are trusted, listened to, and encouraged to become co-responsible members of the Church (Heidegger, 1962; Krahn, 2007).

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the lived experiences of the youth in the Diocese of Ilagan through a Heideggerian phenomenological lens. By exploring how young people experience participation, belonging, listening, and accompaniment within the synodal Church, the research hopes to contribute to a deeper philosophical and pastoral understanding of synodality as an existential reality. Ultimately, the study aims to illuminate how the Church may more authentically journey with the youth in building a more participatory, relational, and mission-oriented ecclesial community. Consequently, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do youth describe their experiences of belonging and participation in synodal spaces?
2. In what ways do youth experience listening, dialogue, and accompaniment within the Church?
3. How does synodality shape their understanding of Church as a communal and relational reality?

Study Framework: Synodality and Heidegger's Phenomenology of Religious Life

Before proceeding to the research questions, two conceptual fields must be established and placed in dialogue with each other. On the one hand, synodality is derived from the Greek *synodos*, which means "walking together." It denotes the mode of being Church in which all the baptized are active, co-responsible participants in the community's life, discernment, and mission. In Pope Francis' vision, synodality is structured around three movements: communion (shared belonging), participation (active co-responsibility), and mission (outward orientation). The Synod on Synodality explicitly privileges the voices of those on the margins, including youth, as bearers of the *sensus fidei*, the Spirit-guided instinct of the faithful. A synodal Church is, therefore, not a Church that merely has young members. Rather, it is a Church that walks with them, listens to them, and allows their experiences to shape its self-understanding.

Scholarship on synodality is still developing and remains weighted toward magisterial and systematic-theological reflection. The International Theological Commission (2018) describes synodality as the Church's characteristic style of living and acting as the People of God journeying together. Francis (2019) locates young people within this synodal horizon as participants in ecclesial discernment and mission, while Luciani (2022) develops synodality as a co-responsible and participatory way of proceeding. These sources establish the ecclesiological horizon, but published work specifically joining synodality, Filipino youth, and Heideggerian phenomenology remains limited. The compact literature is therefore not treated as a conventional

empirical field to be exhaustively reviewed; it marks the philosophical problem addressed here: how an emerging ecclesial form becomes disclosed in factual experience. This study responds by bringing official teaching and contemporary synodal theology into dialogue with youth narratives and Heideggerian phenomenology.

Heidegger's phenomenology of religious life, as expressed in his 1920–21 Freiburg lectures, approached early Christian texts not as theological documents but as archives of *Grunderfahrungen*, the basic experiences of human existence (Tüter, 2025). His method of *Destruktion*, stripping doctrinal content to reveal primordial existential structures, and his concept of formal indication (*formale Anzeige*), which defers meaning to its lived enactment rather than fixing it in conceptual categories, provide tools for reading the youth responses not merely as ecclesiological feedback but as disclosures of the existential conditions that make or unmake genuine synodal life. As Leng (2022) notes, Heidegger insisted that “the living structures of lived religious experience must be described and clarified in their essence, from the concrete fullness of their historical situations” (p. 1).

The methodological wager of this analysis is that Heidegger's phenomenological categories—factual life experience, thrownness (*Geworfenheit*), being-with (*Mitsein*), fallenness (*Verfallenheit*), *das Man*, Care (*Sorge*), authentic and inauthentic existence, ecstatic temporality, and anticipatory resoluteness—illuminate dimensions of the youth responses that purely sociological or ecclesiological categories cannot reach. At the same time, synodality's theological depth—its rootedness in the Trinitarian communion of persons and the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit—provides the horizon within which Heidegger's secularized structures acquire their full ecclesial significance.

These two frameworks are held in productive tension throughout this analysis: where Heidegger illuminates the existential structure, synodality provides the ecclesial telos; where synodality risks abstraction, Heidegger insists on returning to the concrete, factual, lived experience of the young person in the parish.

II. METHODS

This study employed qualitative Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology as a philosophical mode of inquiry into youth participation within the Diocese of Ilagan. Its purpose was not to produce a statistically representative description of Catholic youth or to test causal relationships, but to disclose the existential structures through which synodality is lived and understood. Nineteen youth coordinators and leaders actively involved in diocesan and parish-based ministries were selected purposively as information-rich participants because of their sustained experience of ecclesial participation, listening, service, and accompaniment. The leadership-oriented sample therefore provides situated accounts of committed youth participation rather than the full range of young Catholics in the diocese.

The interpretive material consisted of phenomenological interviews and written reflections. Semi-structured questions invited participants to narrate concrete experiences of belonging, participation, listening, accompaniment, and communal identity. Analysis moved recursively through four related moments: repeated reading of the narratives as wholes; identification of meaning units concerning how Church was

encountered and enacted; hermeneutic interpretation through Heideggerian concepts such as *Mitsein*, thrownness, *das Man*, care, authenticity, and temporality; and synthesis into thematic-existential structures supported by participant quotations. These were not treated as mechanical coding stages but as movements within the hermeneutic circle, in which an emerging interpretation of the whole was repeatedly tested against particular statements and concrete situations.

The researcher acknowledges his active involvement in youth ministry and ecclesial leadership within the Diocese of Ilagan. This insider position provided contextual familiarity while also creating the risk that prior pastoral expectations might be imposed on the narratives. Reflexive attention was therefore directed to the distinction between participants' descriptions and the researcher's philosophical interpretation. Participant quotations functioned as textual warrants for the analysis, and accounts of exclusion, invalidation, ambivalence, and withdrawal were retained alongside affirmative experiences so that synodality would not be interpreted through pastoral ideals alone.

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and voluntarily consented to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected through the use of respondent codes, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Youth Experiences of Belonging and Participation in Synodal Spaces

a. Synodal Belonging as Factual Life Experience

Heidegger's foundational claim is that genuine philosophical, and, by extension, genuine theological, inquiry must begin not with abstract doctrine but with *faktische Lebenserfahrung* (factual life experience): the concrete, embodied, practically engaged existence of human beings in their world (Leng, 2022). He identified three relational axes constituting the life-world: the *Umwelt* (surrounding world of tools and tasks), the *Mitwelt* (communal world of shared life with others), and the *Selbstwelt* (self-world of identity and self-interpretation). Crucially, these three are not independent domains but mutually constitutive: one's self-understanding is always already shaped by the communal world one inhabits, and that communal world is itself enacted through concrete engagement with the surrounding world of tasks and practices (Leng, 2022).

The youth respondents describe belonging in precisely this triadic structure – and their accounts reveal that synodal belonging, at the factual level, is enacted through the body, through service, and through being-recognized within a communal world, not primarily through assent to doctrine or attendance at liturgy.

Respondent 3's account is paradigmatic: "I am able to serve God. I am incredibly happy because I used to be part of the choir. And now, I am a lector and youth leader in the Church." Belonging here is enacted through the surrounding world of liturgical practice (choir, lectorship) and consolidated through the communal world of peer recognition: "My fellow young people made me feel that they regarded me as a younger sibling, an older sister, a sibling, and, above all, a fellow traveler with Christ." The self-

world—the respondent’s identity as a member of the Body of Christ—is constituted through this double enactment. This is what Heidegger called the *enactment sense* (*vollzugssinn*): the “how” of inhabiting a shared world, which is irreducible to any “what” of doctrinal content (Leng, 2022).

Respondents 6, 11, 12, and 16 describe structurally identical experiences: belonging is felt through active service, and service simultaneously constitutes both one’s communal standing and one’s self-understanding. Respondent 12 articulates this with particular clarity: “I am happy because it has become part of my life, and I proudly proclaim to the whole world that I am a person of faith.” The Church is not experienced as an institution one joins but as a world one inhabits through enactment: a genuinely factual, synodal form of participation.

What is theologically significant here, read through both Heidegger and synodality, is that these youth are not describing passive membership but *co-responsible participation*, exactly what synodality envisions. Their belonging is not granted from above but co-constituted from within the shared life of the community.

b. Thrownness and the Unearned Quality of Ecclesial Existence

Heidegger’s concept of *geworfenheit* (thrownness) names the condition of finding oneself always already situated in a world one did not choose: with a particular history, a particular body, a particular communal context (Tüter, 2025). *Dasein* does not first exist and then enter a world; it finds itself thrown into one. This concept illuminates a dimension of the youth responses that is rarely thematized in synodal discourse: the young person enters the Church not through free choice but through birth, baptism, family, and cultural situation, and this unearned situatedness shapes the entire experience of belonging.

Respondent 1 names this dimension directly: “I experienced the feeling of being part of the family, the family that is not always perfect but truly blessed and united by God.” The family metaphor is not accidental: it names precisely the structure of thrownness: one does not choose one’s family, yet it constitutes the primary world of meaning and belonging. The Church as family is experienced as both gift and burden, both home and site of woundedness. The respondent does not idealize the community but acknowledges its *cor inquietum* quality: “I felt happiness, joy, peace and pain as some of my brothers and sisters have told many hurtful words.” This is Augustine’s restless heart transposed into ecclesial community: the wound of finitude at the heart of belonging, which Heidegger would recognize as the null basis of thrownness: one is always already embedded in a community whose failures one shares but did not author (Tüter, 2025).

Respondent 7’s account makes the weight of thrownness most explicit: “As a young person who is part of the Church, I am happy to belong to it. However, I have also felt hesitant to attend church because some of the other young people sometimes ignore me or act unfriendly toward me.” The shame (*hiya*) named here is not primarily a moral category but an ontological one—the experience of a self that has been rendered invisible by the communal world it was thrown into. Being ignored or treated coldly by peers is not merely unfriendly behavior; in Heideggerian terms, it is a failure of *Mitsein* (being-

with) that leaves the thrown *Dasein* without the communal mirrors through which self-understanding becomes possible. This respondent's consequent silence—"I simply remain quiet and listen"—is the response of a *Dasein* that has found its communal world inhospitable to self-disclosure.

For synodality, this is a critical finding: the thrown quality of ecclesial existence means that youth arrive in parish communities already shaped by histories, family dynamics, social anxieties, and cultural scripts that precede and condition their capacity to participate. A genuinely synodal community cannot assume that the invitation to participate is sufficient; it must actively create the conditions under which thrown *Dasein* can find its voice.

c. The They-Self (*Das Man*) and Inauthentic Participation

Heidegger's concept of *das Man*, the anonymous "they" that governs everyday existence through idle talk, conformism, and the leveling of genuine difference, describes a mode of being in which *Dasein* "is lived" by norms before it can question them (Tüter, 2025). The *das Man* is not an enemy to be defeated but a structural feature of all communal life; the question is whether a community's structures enable *Dasein* to retrieve itself from the anonymity of the *they*, or whether they deepen absorption within it.

Multiple respondents describe ecclesial structures in which *das Man* operates powerfully as a suppressor of authentic participation. Respondent 6's account is the most direct: "In a way not able to express my own ideas because if I'm speaking or having my own opinions they are calling 'sip-sip, pabida, etc.'" The labeling function of *das Man* is visible here in its purest form: the anonymous collective uses language not to open up understanding but to enforce conformity, punishing any deviation from the prevailing norms of what a "proper" young Church member sounds like. This is precisely what Heidegger called *Gerede* (idle talk), discourse that forecloses rather than opens possibilities (Tüter, 2025).

Respondent 15 describes the structural form of *das Man* in the parish: "I admit that within the parish, people have their own separate groups." The clique structure, wherein youth communities are subdivided into closed groups with their own internal norms, is a manifestation of *das Man* operating at the meso-level. Individual youth are not simply governed by an anonymous collective; they are governed by multiple competing anonymous collectives, each with its own leveling pressure. Yet even within this structure, Respondent 15 finds a crack in *das Man*'s authority: "Despite this, there are still people willing to talk to me and include me in their conversations"—a moment of genuine being-with that cuts through the clique structure and restores the possibility of participation.

Respondent 5 narrates the destabilizing effect of *das Man* on faith itself: "I feel connected but at the same time I feel distant...because of backstabbing and more." The betrayal named here, backstabbing within the community, is not merely interpersonal conflict; it is the *das Man* turning against its own members, using the instruments of gossip and social undermining to enforce hierarchy and silence dissent. The consequence for faith is direct: "they're also going to be the reason for you to be away from God." The

das Man in the parish can, in extremis, become an obstacle to the very encounter it is supposed to mediate.

From the perspective of synodality, this analysis suggests that participatory structures alone are insufficient for genuine synodal participation. If the communal culture is governed by the leveling anonymity of *das Man*, if youth who speak are labeled, if cliques exclude newcomers, if backstabbing silences voices, then the formal invitation to participate becomes an instrument of inauthenticity rather than genuine co-responsibility.

d. Moments of Authentic Belonging: Intentional Recognition and Being-Seen

Against the weight of thrownness and the leveling pressure of *das Man*, the youth responses also describe moments of genuine, authentic belonging—moments that Heidegger would recognize as instances of *eigentliche mitsein* (authentic being-with), where the other is not absorbed into the anonymous collective but genuinely recognized in their ownmost singularity.

Respondent 4 provides the most philosophically precise account of how such moments are constituted: “Imagine being new or quiet in a youth group, then one day a leader notices you, asks your name, and invites you to join a small activity... The group actually listens, not just politely but with interest. Someone follows up after, messages you, or saves you a seat the next week.” The phenomenological precision here is remarkable: belonging is not produced by grand gestures or doctrinal instruction but by a sequence of small, intentional acts of recognition, being noticed, being named, being followed up with, being given a place. Each of these acts is a form of what Heidegger called *Fürsorge* (solicitude): authentic care for the other that enables rather than dominates, that “leaps ahead” of the other to open their possibilities rather than “leaping in” to take those possibilities over (Tüter, 2025).

Respondent 8 describes an analogous moment at a point of personal vulnerability: “Sometimes, a fellow ministry member—whether an older sister, older brother, younger sibling, or someone else—will unexpectedly ask you, ‘Are you okay?’”

This single question, *are you okay?* is an act of genuine Heideggerian *fürsorge*: it attends to the other in their particular situation, refuses the anonymity of the *das Man*, and creates the possibility of authentic self-disclosure. The respondent describes this as the moment belonging was truly felt, not during formal activities but in this spontaneous act of individual attentiveness.

For synodality, these accounts point to a crucial insight: the conditions for genuine participation are not primarily structural but relational and attitudinal. Small groups, approachable leaders, and intentional follow-up, named repeatedly across the responses, create the *Umwelt* (surrounding world) within which the *Selbstwelt* (self-world) of the young person can safely emerge. This is synodality at its most concrete: not as an organizational model but as a practice of seeing the other in their particularity.

2. Youth Experiences of Listening, Dialogue, and Accompaniment Within the Church

a. Listening as Phenomenological Disclosure

In Heidegger's phenomenology of Paul's letters, the apostle's relationship with the Thessalonians was understood not as a teacher-student dynamic but as a mutual having-become (*Gewordensein*): Paul experienced himself in the congregation, and the Thessalonians' having-become was also the having-become of Paul (Leng, 2022). This mutual co-constitution through shared factual life is the phenomenological ground of genuine listening: one does not merely receive information from the other but enters into the other's situation, allowing it to reshape one's own.

The youth responses reveal a spectrum of listening experiences ranging from this genuine phenomenological disclosure to various modes of its absence or distortion. Respondent 4 describes authentic listening in terms that precisely parallel Heidegger's account: "Instead of correcting or preaching right away, the leader pauses, listens, and asks follow-up questions like, 'What's been making it feel that way?' Others start sharing too. The leader doesn't rush the moment, they validate what's said and even adjust the topic for the day to focus on what the group actually needs." The key phenomenological markers here are pause (the suspension of the speaker's own agenda), follow-up questions (genuine entry into the other's situation), not rushing (the refusal to impose one's own temporal framework), and adjusting the topic (allowing the other's disclosure to reshape the shared space). This is Heidegger's mutual having-become enacted in a youth ministry setting.

Respondent 12 describes a similarly transformative listening experience at a DCYM: "The facilitator listened carefully to everyone's opinions and encouraged us to speak honestly. Because of that, many of us became comfortable opening up about issues such as pressure in school, family problems, and struggles with faith." The causal logic here is precisely Heideggerian: genuine listening (the facilitator listened carefully) creates the conditions for authentic self-disclosure (many of us became comfortable opening up), which in turn enables genuine community (the experience made me feel supported and understood). Listening is not merely a communication technique but an ontological act that opens the space within which *Dasein* can disclose itself authentically.

Respondent 18's account introduces an equally important dimension: the listening that occurs in open-forum settings: "Whenever we hold an open forum, each of us is heard and given advice." The structure of the open forum—where each person is individually heard and individually responded to—is a practical instantiation of what synodality calls the *sensus fidei* in action: the recognition that every member of the community bears the Spirit's gifts and therefore deserves to be heard. From a Heideggerian perspective, the open forum creates a space where *das Man*'s anonymity is suspended and each *Dasein* is called to speak in its own name.

b. The Experience of Not Being Listened To: Structural and Relational Failures

Equally significant, and more extensive in the data, are the accounts of not being listened to, which reveal the structural and relational conditions that make genuine listening impossible.

Respondent 9 articulates the most structurally precise account of a failure to listen: "We feel heard when our suggestions are followed and implemented, but I feel that we are not being heard when they make decisions without consulting us." This distinction is

philosophically crucial: the youth experience functional listening (suggestions are sometimes implemented) but not constitutive listening (they are not consulted in decision-making). From the perspective of synodality, this is a fundamental failure: synodal listening is not merely receptive (hearing what youth say and occasionally acting on it) but constitutive (allowing youth voices to shape the very deliberative processes through which the community discerns its direction).

From Heidegger's perspective, this describes a community in which youth are heard as objects of pastoral concern rather than as subjects of shared discernment—precisely the reduction of persons to *vorhandensein* (present-at-hand things) that his entire philosophy opposes. The youth are consulted about their needs but not about the community's direction; they are the recipients of ministry but not its co-authors.

Respondent 7 describes a more intimate and devastating form of not being listened to—one rooted not in structural exclusion but in the internalization of unworthiness: "I have not yet experienced being heard because I have not shared my opinion. I simply remain quiet and listen." And: "I have not yet expressed my ideas because I feel shy and believe that I still lack sufficient knowledge." The shame (*hiya*) and perceived lack of knowledge (*kulang pa sa kaalaman*) that silence this respondent are not merely psychological states; they are the internalized effects of a communal world that has communicated, whether explicitly or implicitly, that this particular voice does not yet merit a hearing. This is what Heidegger would call *Verfallenheit* (fallenness) at the level of self-understanding: *Dasein* has absorbed the *das Man*'s judgment of its own inadequacy and pre-emptively silences itself before the community can do so.

Respondent 1 describes a different failure of listening—one directed not at the youth themselves but enacted by them: "It is when I talk to my fellow brothers about forgiveness, the proper actions inside the church and other catechisms on church as not even once did they follow what I taught." Here the respondent is in the position of speaker rather than listener, and the failure is the community's refusal to receive. This points to the bidirectional nature of listening in synodal communities: it is not only the young person who must be listened to by leaders, but also the young person who must find peers willing to receive their voice.

Respondent 19 introduces perhaps the most complex dimension of listening failure, the paradox of the pastoral minister who listens to everyone but is heard by no one: "As a former coordinator, I was usually the one people came to with their problems, and my role was to help, comfort, and make sure things didn't get worse. Because of that, I didn't always feel heard myself, but it taught me how important it is to truly listen and care for others." This is Heidegger's *Fürsorge* pushed to its asymmetric limit: a *Dasein* so committed to caring for others that it loses the space for its own self-disclosure. The respondent names this as formative rather than simply damaging, but the structural imbalance it reveals—where certain youth are positioned as permanent listeners and caregivers rather than as participants in mutual accompaniment—is a synodal concern of the first order.

c. Accompaniment as Authentic Being-With: The Call That Recalls

Heidegger's concept of the *gewissensruf* (call of conscience) describes a rupture within the noise of the *das Man* that recalls *Dasein* from its lostness in the anonymous collective to its own ownmost possibilities (Tüter, 2025). Crucially, this call does not come from outside *Dasein* but from within the structure of its own being-with-others; it is the voice of care itself, which is irreducibly both *Dasein*'s own and constitutively relational.

The most vivid phenomenological illustration of this structure in the data is Respondent 14's account of accompaniment during ecclesial withdrawal: "My close friends never grew tired of inviting me back. They continued messaging me and encouraging me to serve again. I knew that it was the Lord Himself calling me through my friends—He used them to call me back to serve Him, and I returned." The theological interpretation the respondent offers, that God used the friends as instruments, is the respondent's own formal indication, their way of naming what Heidegger would describe as the call of conscience operating through the structure of authentic being-with. The friends who kept calling did not impose or moralize; they simply remained present and continued to invite, precisely the mode of *fürsorge* that "leaps ahead" of the other to open their possibilities without taking those possibilities over (Tüter, 2025).

The moment of return—the emotional breakdown during the *Ama Namin* (The Lord's Prayer)—is described as a moment of being heard by God: "I felt the Lord comforting me once again and urging me to return to Him." In Heideggerian terms, this is the moment of *erschlossenheit* (disclosure). *Dasein*, having been recalled by the care of its friends to its ownmost possibilities, finds itself open to the depths of its own being in a way that the noise of everyday life had foreclosed. The liturgical space—the shared prayer—becomes the site of this disclosure precisely because *Dasein* has been accompanied back to it.

Respondent 8 describes a structurally analogous moment of accompaniment: the spontaneous approach of a stranger within the ministry who simply asked "*Okay ka lang ba?*" (Are you okay?). The accompaniment here is not programmatic but responsive; it arises from attentiveness to the other in their particular situation. This is synodal accompaniment at its most basic and most powerful: not a formal mentoring program but a community sufficiently attentive to its members that their distress is noticed and named.

Respondent 10 adds an important dimension: "Listening within the Church is beneficial to us because, sometimes, when we listen to the priest's homily, we find healing from the problems weighing on our minds." This account of the homily as a site of listening and accompaniment—where the preacher's words meet the hearer's own situation and produce healing—reflects what Heidegger's reading of Paul identified as the heart of primordial Christian community: a shared temporality in which the word of the other reaches the listener in their concrete situation and effects a transformation of self-comportment (Leng, 2022).

d. Digital Spaces and the Paradox of Mediated Accompaniment

The responses reveal a complex and ambivalent relationship between digital communication and genuine accompaniment that deserves extended Heideggerian analysis.

Heidegger's concept of *Gerede* (idle talk) – discourse that circulates without genuine commitment to truth or the other – finds its contemporary expression in the endless stream of digital communication that respondents describe with both appreciation and suspicion. Respondent 9 describes the positive dimension: "Technology and social media can greatly help us remain connected to the Church ... They can also serve as a bridge that prevents us from losing our connection to the faith." The bridge metaphor is apt: digital spaces maintain connection across distance but do not constitute genuine presence. They are *Zeug* (equipment) in Heidegger's sense – tools that are useful for specific purposes but that become obstacles when they are mistaken for the purposes themselves.

Respondent 14's critique is the most philosophically precise: "I do not feel that my concerns are truly acknowledged when we communicate through chat ... What I want to say feels invalidated. That is why I prefer talking in person." The invalidation experienced in digital communication is not accidental but structural: text-based communication strips away the *stimmung* (attunement) – the bodily, affective, temporal dimensions of presence through which genuine accompaniment operates. What is lost in the medium is precisely the enactment sense (*vollzugssinn*) of care: the way a person's body, voice, and presence communicate solidarity that no text can replicate.

Respondent 11 offers an interesting counter-case: digital spaces are valuable precisely because they enable people to voice concerns and make intimate disclosures more easily through the protective distance of a screen: "They also often share their problems with me through chat." Here the digital medium's protective distance becomes an asset rather than a liability, lowering the threshold for self-disclosure in ways that face-to-face encounter may not. This suggests that digital and in-person modes of accompaniment are not simply better or worse but complementary – each enabling forms of encounter that the other forecloses.

For synodality, this analysis suggests that digital spaces can serve as a threshold to accompaniment but not as its fulfillment. They lower barriers to initial self-disclosure and maintain connection across distance, but genuine accompaniment – the full enactment of being-with – requires the bodily, affective, temporal presence that only face-to-face encounter makes possible.

3. Synodality and How It Shapes the Youth's Understanding of Church as a Communal and Relational Reality

a. The Phenomenological Reduction of Ecclesiology: Church as "TAYO"

The most philosophically striking finding in the entire dataset is the convergent, independent arrival of multiple respondents at a single formulation of ecclesiology: the Church is not a building but a people; the Church is "*tayo*" (we/us). Respondents 6, 8, 11, and 13 each articulate versions of this claim independently, using different language but arriving at the same phenomenological insight.

This convergence is not coincidental. It represents what Heidegger called a *destruktion* of ecclesiology: the stripping away of the institutional, architectural, and doctrinal forms of Church to reveal its primordial existential content. As Tüter (2025) explains, Heidegger's *destruktion* "does not demolish but 'de-structures' [and] breaks

open coated conceptual frameworks to return to something more original and primary” (p. 34). When Respondent 6 states, “I understand Church as a people not only a building, I learned it from the Basic Orientation Seminar, they said the Church is not only a building this is ‘me, you, them, they, us’,” they are performing exactly this de-structuring: the architectural-institutional form of Church (the building) is suspended to reveal its primordial content (the gathered community of persons).

Respondent 8 presses this point further, explicitly describing the Church as “*tayo*” (we/us): “If we are not here, what would happen to the Church? If there were no one among us, who would continue proclaiming the words of the Lord?” This is not merely an observation about Church membership but a claim about ontological constitution: the Church does not first exist and then include members; the Church *is* the community of persons gathered in Christ, and without their active co-participation, it does not exist in its fullness. This is, remarkably, an experiential articulation of the synodal theology of the *People of God*—the Second Vatican Council’s recovery of the Church’s communal, participatory nature arrived at not through theological study but through the lived experience of a young person in a Filipino parish.

Respondent 11 takes the formulation to its most radical point: “I realized that the Church is not a building, but me.” The substitution of the collective “*tayo*” (we/us) with the singular “*ako*” (I) is theologically and phenomenologically significant: it names the irreducible first-person dimension of ecclesial belonging. The Church is not only *us* as a collective; it is *me* as a responsible, irreplaceable subject. This resonates with Heidegger’s insistence that *Dasein*’s being “is in each case mine” (*Jemeinigkeit*)—that existence cannot be delegated or absorbed into the anonymous collective without essential loss (Tüter, 2025). For synodality, this insight carries profound implications: a genuinely synodal Church must not only include youth as a demographic category but must recognize each young person as an irreplaceable *ako*—a subject whose particular voice, story, and discernment cannot be substituted by any other.

b. Church as Home and Hospital: The Existential Metaphors of Ecclesial Belonging

Two metaphors recur with striking frequency across the responses—Church as *home* (Respondents 1, 13, 18, 19) and Church as *hospital* (Respondents 17, 19). Their Heideggerian and synodal significance deserves extended analysis.

Heidegger’s concept of *unheimlichkeit* (uncanniness, literally “not-at-home-ness”) names the fundamental anxiety of *Dasein* when it is wrested from the comfortable familiarity of its everyday world and confronted with its own groundlessness and finitude (Tüter, 2025). Authentic existence requires the capacity to dwell *in* this uncanniness rather than fleeing from it into the tranquillizing anonymity of the *das Man*. The metaphor of Church as home can be read in two ways from this perspective: as a genuine dwelling that enables authentic existence, or as a flight from uncanniness into a false security.

The youth responses suggest that the best accounts of Church as home are not the second but the first: not a refuge from difficulty but a place where one can be genuinely present in one’s finitude, vulnerability, and incompleteness. Respondent 8 captures this: “I can say that the church is my home where I can be strong and weak.” The double

affirmation—strong and weak—is crucial: this is not a home that demands performance or pretense but one that holds the full range of human experience, including vulnerability. Respondent 18 describes a similar experience: “As a young person, the Church has become my home and my source of support.” The word “*sandigan*” (something to lean on) evokes not merely comfort but structural support—the Church as the communal scaffolding that enables the young person to stand.

The hospital metaphor, most explicitly articulated by Respondents 17 and 19, carries a distinctively Heideggerian resonance. Respondent 17 states: “When the Church becomes a ‘hospital for the wounded’ rather than a ‘museum for saints,’ that is when people experience a true sense of belonging.” This is a precise inversion of inauthentic ecclesial life: the “museum for saints” is an institution governed by the *das Man*’s demand for conformity and the performance of holiness; the “hospital for the wounded” is a community that begins from the recognition of shared finitude, shared need, and shared vulnerability. In Heidegger’s terms, the hospital Church creates the conditions for authentic self-disclosure by removing the pressure to perform adequacy before the anonymous gaze of the community.

Respondent 19 offers a synthesis: “The Church is my home and my hospital a place where I belong and feel accepted, and also where I find healing, comfort, and strength whenever I am hurting or in need.” This integrates both metaphors into a comprehensive phenomenology of ecclesial belonging: a space that simultaneously provides the ontological security of home and the healing care of the hospital. This is synodality experienced as existential reality: not as an organizational principle but as a mode of being-together that genuinely attends to the full humanity of each member.

c. The Temporal Horizon of Synodal Hope: Anticipatory Resoluteness and the Not-Yet Church

One of Heidegger’s most important contributions to the understanding of temporality is his concept of ecstatic temporality: the recognition that *Dasein*’s existence is not lived in a series of present moments but in the unity of past (*gewesenheit*/having-been), present (*gegenwart*/making-present), and future (*ukunft*/coming-toward), with the future as the primary ecstasis (Tüter, 2025). Authentic existence is characterized by anticipatory resoluteness (*vorlaufende entschlossenheit*): a resolute running-ahead into one’s own possibilities, structured by an honest reckoning with finitude, that enables genuine engagement with the present.

Heidegger derived this structure from his reading of Paul’s community, for whom the not-yet of the Parousia was not a comfort but a pressing urgency: “the compressed temporality is constitutive for Christian religiosity: an ‘only-yet,’ there is no time for postponement” (Leng, 2022, p. 7). The community lives between the times—between the already of conversion and the not-yet of consummation—and this between-ness structures all present action with eschatological urgency.

The youth responses are permeated by this same temporal structure, now directed not toward the Parousia but toward a Church that does not yet fully exist. The not-yet Church functions as the eschatological horizon that gives urgency and direction to present experience. What makes this particularly significant is that the respondents

describe this hoped-for Church in terms that are remarkably consistent and convergent—suggesting not idiosyncratic preferences but a shared *sensus fidei* about what genuine synodal community looks like.

Respondent 7 articulates this most explicitly: “I want to experience a Church that is open—a Church that listens to their voices, values their ideas, and is free from bias; a Church where everyone feels accepted and loved.” The triple articulation of openness, listening, and acceptance describes a Church characterized by genuine *erschlossenheit* (disclosedness): a community that does not close off possibilities through the anonymity of *das Man* but remains open to the self-disclosure of each of its members.

Respondent 4’s vision presses further into the conditions of authentic communal existence: “A place where questions aren’t judged but welcomed, and where doubts are treated as part of growth, not something to hide.” The distinction between welcomed questions and hidden doubts maps precisely onto Heidegger’s distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence: authentic *Dasein* can dwell in the uncanniness of its own questioning without fleeing into false certainties; inauthentic *Dasein* must hide its doubts to conform to the *das Man*’s demand for the performance of faith. A Church that genuinely welcomes questions creates the existential conditions for authentic faith, faith that is owned, questioned, and enacted rather than inherited, assumed, and performed.

Respondent 17 adds the dimension of unconditional welcome: “A Church without discrimination, where everyone—regardless of their status in life, past, or background—is welcomed with love and without judgment.” The emphasis on regardless of background or status resonates with Heidegger’s fundamental ontological egalitarianism: all *Dasein*, regardless of its factual situation, shares the same ontological structure of thrownness, care, and being-toward-death. The Church that discriminates on the basis of social position is a Church that has replaced the primordial *faktische lebenserfahrung* of shared finitude with the hierarchical structures of *das Man*’s social world.

Respondent 15 adds a dimension that is perhaps the most pragmatically synodal of all: “The kind of Church I want to experience is one without hypocrisy, where people treat one another well, and where no one acts like a leader or gives orders to others when they have not actually been chosen as a leader.” The critique of false leadership—people who “act like leaders and give orders” without having been chosen—names a specific failure of synodal governance: the colonization of shared discernment by informal power hierarchies that replicate the *das Man*’s anonymous authority in a more insidious, personalized form.

d. The Eschatology of Participation: Ecclesial Community as Shared Mission

The third movement of synodality, after communion and participation, is mission: the outward orientation of the community toward the world it is called to serve. This dimension emerges most clearly in the responses of youth who understand their ecclesial identity not as passive membership but as active witness and service.

Respondent 3 articulates this most directly: “*Maging Simbahan* (‘to be Church’) for those who are discouraged. I am ready to listen to them so that they will not feel that they are alone.” The phrase “*maging Simbahan*” (to be Church) names precisely what

Heidegger called enactment, the “how” of inhabiting one’s possibilities rather than merely possessing them as theoretical options. To *be* Church is not to belong to Church but to enact its communal care in the world, particularly for those who are isolated and discouraged.

Respondent 8’s remarkable reflection on love as the animating principle of ecclesial mission – “If you have love for a ministry or the church, and many people come to see you as a model... it is not because you forced them, but because you simply shared the word ‘love/*pag-ibig*’” – resonates with Heidegger’s reading of Paul’s community, where the primordial Christian experience is the experience of conversion through love: not a doctrine about love but love as a mode of factual *enactment* that transforms the surrounding world and communal world of all who encounter it (Leng, 2022).

Respondent 9’s citation of the parish priest: “The youth are the hope of the Church,” places the youth within an explicitly temporal and missional framework: they are not merely the Church’s present members but its projected future, the not-yet of ecclesial existence pressing upon the present as both promise and demand. In Heidegger’s ecstatic temporality, this is the ahead-of-itself character of *Dasein* transposed onto the communal level: the Church is always already ahead of itself, projecting possibilities that its current members are called to actualize or betray.

IV. LIMITATIONS

This study is deliberately bounded. Its purposive sample of 19 youth coordinators and leaders from a single diocese offers information-rich but leadership-oriented accounts; it does not represent all young Catholics, particularly those who are inactive, alienated, or outside organized ministry. The findings are therefore offered for interpretive resonance and transferability rather than statistical generalization.

The Heideggerian framework is also a productive but selective lens. It foregrounds relationality, care, authenticity, thrownness, and temporality while potentially leaving other theological, sociological, psychological, and cultural dimensions less visible. The researcher’s insider position and the emerging, relatively narrow literature on synodality further shape the horizon of interpretation. Accordingly, the claims of the study should be read as situated philosophical interpretations of these narratives, not as exhaustive descriptions of Filipino Catholic youth or definitive accounts of synodality in every ecclesial setting.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study suggest that young people understand the Church primarily as a lived community grounded in relationships, participation, and shared experience rather than as a purely institutional structure. Their responses show that synodality becomes concrete when young people experience genuine listening, acceptance, and accompaniment within the ecclesial community. Viewed through Heidegger’s phenomenology, these experiences reveal deeper existential realities connected to belonging, care, authenticity, and hope. The recurring descriptions of the Church as “tayo,” as a home, and as a “hospital for the wounded” reflect young people’s

longing for a Church where they are welcomed, valued, and accompanied in their struggles. At the same time, the findings reveal that young people do not see themselves merely as passive members of the Church. They understand themselves as active participants who are called to shape, sustain, and embody the mission of the Church in their everyday lives.

The findings also carry important implications for the understanding and practice of synodality within the Church, particularly in relation to young people. The participants' responses reveal that young people experience belonging and participation most meaningfully when they are actively engaged, genuinely recognized, and allowed to contribute to the life of the community. Their experiences of listening, dialogue, and accompaniment also show that synodality is not merely a structural or organizational approach but a lived relational reality grounded in attentiveness, openness, and authentic care for others. Furthermore, the study suggests that synodality significantly shapes young people's understanding of the Church as a communal and relational body rooted in shared participation, mutual responsibility, and accompaniment. These findings imply that a genuinely synodal Church must continue to create spaces where young people are heard, welcomed, empowered, and recognized as active participants in the mission and life of the Church.

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