

On Trust

David McCallum, SJ
October 2021



Trust. It is at the heart of our faith. It is the basis for relationships and the essential currency of leadership. It has been suggested that the presence of trust determines both the speed and the quality of the institutional decisions we make. It is not without its risks, and while we might want to know the trustworthiness of the other person or group with whom we are interacting before we invest ourselves, the paradox of the trust dynamic is that it is actually built by demonstrating our confidence in the other without absolute security or guarantee. This brings us to the topic of Ignatius of Loyola’s “Presupposition,” his suggestion for the way a person giving the Spiritual Exercises and the one receiving them would relate to one another.

The Presupposition suggested that we **give the person speaking** what we might call, “**the benefit of the doubt**”, by putting the best interpretation on what they are saying and why they are saying it. We might call this a kind of “appreciative inquiry” that resists reactions or quick judgements, but stays positive, open, and curious for as long as this is sensible. If by chance we don’t agree or find value in what was said, Ignatius recommends we ask what the other person means and how they understand their own intention. If then we know for a fact, not just by virtue of our opinion or preference, that the other person is mistaken, we should correct the person, but in a spirit of love. Ignatius goes on to say that if this is not enough to shift the other person’s perspective, “one should search out every appropriate means through which, by understanding the statement in a good way, it may be saved.” What a contrast to what we witness in society and the spaces of social media!

As we enter into the Synodal journey, we believe that the spirit in which we listen to one another’s experience will determine whether or not we’re able to discern how the Holy Spirit is present in experiences and in perspectives distinct from our own. Without this willingness to listen deeply to one another, especially those who feel marginalized or alienated by the Church, we will not fulfill this call to full synodality and miss the change to restore and deepen trust. But if in a spirit of vulnerability and courage, we enter this process in freedom from fear, attachment, and excessive bias, we will discern together what future God desires to enact through us.

These two considerations drawn from Ignatian Spirituality, the faith and confidence that God is present, and that we are invited to listen in a spirit of appreciative inquiry, these presuppositions alone will serve the synodal process for great benefit. Over the coming weeks, we will continue to explore themes and practices related to listening.