



DIOCESE
— *of* —
GAYLORD

SYNOD 2021–2023

STUDY GUIDE

For Parish and School Teams

Being a Synodal Church

The practice of living as a synodal Church means:

- The conversations lead to conversion to Christ and commitment to active participation in the mission given by Christ — **Communion**
- The people of God talk with one another and listen to one another about questions that matter — **Participation**
- The communion exists for a common purpose; mission flows naturally from the experience of communion — **Mission**

Synodal Requirements

- Addressing the basic questions together
- Listening to the Holy Spirit
- Remaining open to the perspectives of other people
- “Progressively maturing” the fruits of the Holy Spirit over time

The Main Question for Consultation

This Synod poses the following fundamental question: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” **How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?**

Process for Facilitating Synodal Consultations

Who Facilitates Synodal Consultations: Choosing Facilitators

Good facilitation has participants engaging with one another in meaningful dialogue on the given topic or question. The facilitator is not the center of conversation but rather a guide for the conversation. It is important to select and train excellent facilitators for this listening process.

Strong facilitators are people who:

- Are at home with their Catholic faith
- Are prayerful and reflective
- Have strong interpersonal skills
- Have effective communication skills
- Are willing participants in the synodal process
- Are able to maintain a “big picture” view without injecting their personal agenda
- Can focus a conversation
- Can connect participants with each other without becoming the center of the conversation.

It is important to select facilitators with the experience and competencies needed, depending on the nature and makeup of the group.

- Volunteers can usually facilitate parish, diocesan, religious order, movements, or similar synodal consultations
- A Catholic professional facilitator — or someone else with higher level facilitation skills — may be needed on occasion when participants come from marginalized groups (e.g., different ethnic or cultural groups, abuse survivors, youth, LGBTQ, persons with disabilities, migrants/refugees, etc.) or when special interest groups are participating in a particular consultation
- All facilitators need preparation and training on the synodal approach, the synodal purpose, and the synodal process.

All facilitators will be asked to:

- Establish clear boundaries of time and topic for speakers
- Gently interrupt a speaker who talks disproportionately more than others
- Gently interrupt and redirect a speaker who gets off topic
- Gently re-focus a speaker who is preoccupied with an issue that is not pertinent to the topic or inhibits the participation of others in the group.

The Roadmap (Sample Steps for the Diocesan Phase)

1. **Appointing the Diocesan Contact Person** (DONE)
2. **Setting up a diocesan synodal team** (DONE)
3. **Discerning the path for your diocese**

The Preparatory Document and Vademecum provide information about the current Synod and offer guidelines for organizing the consultation process. **These documents are to be applied differently in diverse contexts, depending on the current realities and challenges in the local Church and in society, as well as any concurrent or recent synodal processes occurring in the diocese.** (DONE)

4. **Planning the participatory process**

Each diocese should aim for the widest participation possible, involving a variety of platforms. **These could include parish-level meetings, inter-parish gatherings, school-based groups, local associations, online platforms, special language groupings, and suitable means of reaching those who have been distant from the Church.** Ideally, there would be opportunities for diverse groups to listen to one another. (DONE)

5. **Preparing group coordinators for the synodal consultation meetings**

The diocesan synodal team can work through coordinators to carry out the synodal consultation meeting across the diocese. For example, **the synodal consultation within a parish can be overseen by a coordinator in that parish, working with a parish team.** All coordinators will need to be briefed on the spirit, objectives, and attitudes of the Synodal Process.

6. **Providing an orientation workshop for the diocesan synodal team and local coordinators**

Since the level of understanding and experience regarding synodality likely differs across the diocese, formation workshops can be provided to give people an orientation about synodality and equip them with basic skills for synodal processes. Such skills would include carrying out synodal consultation meetings, and this basic formation is in itself a valuable outcome of the current Synodal Process.

What is most crucial is adopting suitable methods that facilitate attentive listening, genuine sharing, and a communal spiritual discernment. Further resources are available on the Synod website.

7. **Communicating to everyone**

To raise awareness and encourage participation, wide publicity about the Synod can be carried out to communicate the significance and objectives of the Synod and how people can participate. Some examples of publicity materials are provided on the website. [<https://www.synod.va/en.html>]

8. **Implementing, monitoring, and guiding the synodal consultation process**

Throughout the diocesan phase, the Diocesan Contact Person(s) should keep in regular contact with group coordinators of the synodal consultation meetings across the dioceses so

as to monitor progress, provide support where needed, and facilitate the exchange of ideas, best practices, and emerging feedback. A date should be specified for the submission of the consultation feedback.

9. Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting

It is strongly recommended that the consultation process in the diocese culminate in a Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting that includes a liturgical celebration. A wide representation from across the diocese should be invited to take part with the aim of coming together to pray, listen, reflect, and discern the synodal path along which God's Spirit is calling the whole diocese.

10. Preparing and submitting the diocesan synthesis

Finally, a diocesan synthesis should be prepared based on all the collated feedback from across the diocese as well as the proceedings of the Pre-Synodal Meeting. This is to be submitted to the episcopal conference by a specified date. **After all, this Synodal Process is not the end but a new beginning.**

Once finalized, the synthesis should be communicated to the public in the diocese. Each diocese can discern the most conducive ways of enabling a Spirit-led synodal experience for its people, paying particular attention to those whose voices have not been heard in the past. **There is advice and resources on how to go about this on the Synod website. As mentioned above, individuals and groups are encouraged to participate in the Synodal Process through their local Church.**

However, it is also possible for individuals and groups to contribute directly to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops (EC, 6). **Within each local Church, gatherings should be set up in a way that promotes the most fruitful synodal experience in the local context.** Ideally more than one of these “synodal consultation meetings” would be organized for the same group of participants so they can go deeper and dialogue more richly. Alternatively, new groupings can be organized so that more people get to listen to and engage with a wider diversity of views and experiences.

Individuals can also contribute their consultation feedback directly to the diocese. For individual submissions to the consultation, adequate information and materials should be distributed in a timely way so that the views expressed can be included in the diocesan synthesis. **Communal experiences of the Synodal Process are to be encouraged over individual contributions, since they better manifest the synodal spirit of walking together.** In this sense, videos, videoconferences, Scripture reflections, and prayers can be proposed to those who contribute individually, in order to more closely unite them to the experience of synodality.

Holding synodal consultation meetings that bring together multiple parishes can be a good way of gathering a range of people from different socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities,

age groups, etc. Two or more parishes can come together to plan a series of joint synodal consultation meetings. They can focus their sharing around a common relevant experience, such as the challenges they face as Christians, being Church amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, or something connected to their context. **An inter-parish organizing team can be formed.**

The Main Question for Consultation

This Synod poses the following fundamental question: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” **How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?** (PD, 26)

In responding to this question, we are invited to:

-**Recall our experiences:** What experiences of our local Church does this question call to mind?

- **Re-read these experiences in greater depth:** What joys did they bring? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered? What wounds did they reveal? What insights have they elicited?

- **Gather the fruits to share:** Where in these experiences does the voice of the Holy Spirit resound? What is the Spirit asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are opening up for our local Church?

To help people explore this fundamental question more fully, the following themes highlight significant aspects of “lived synodality” (PD, 30). In responding to these questions, it is helpful to remember that “journeying together” occurs in two deeply interconnected ways.

First, we journey together with one another as the People of God. Next, we journey together as the People of God with the entire human family. These two perspectives enrich one another and are helpful for our common discernment towards deeper communion and more fruitful mission.

A Process that is truly Synodal: Listening, Discernment, and Participation

The Synodal Process is first and foremost a spiritual process. **It is not a mechanical data-gathering exercise or a series of meetings and debates.** Synodal listening is oriented towards discernment. **It requires us to learn and exercise the art of personal and communal discernment. We listen to each other, to our faith tradition, and to the signs of the times in order to discern what God is saying to all of us.** Pope Francis characterizes the two interrelated goals of this process of listening: “to listen to God, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us.”

This kind of discernment is not only a one-time exercise, but ultimately a way of life, grounded in Christ, following the lead of the Holy Spirit, living for the greater glory of God. Communal discernment helps to build flourishing and resilient communities for the mission of the Church today. **Discernment is a grace from God, but it requires our human involvement in simple ways: praying, reflecting, paying attention to one’s inner disposition, listening and talking to one another in an authentic, meaningful, and welcoming way.**

The Church offers us several keys to spiritual discernment. **In a spiritual sense, discernment is the art of interpreting in what direction the desires of the heart lead us, without letting ourselves be seduced by what leads us to where we never wanted to go.** Discernment involves reflection and engages both the heart and head in making decisions in our concrete lives to seek and find the will of God.

If listening is the method of the Synodal Process, and discerning is the aim, then participation is the path. **Fostering participation leads us out of ourselves to involve others who hold different views than we do.** Listening to those who have the same views as we do bears no fruit. Dialogue involves coming together across diverse opinions. **Indeed, God often speaks through the voices of those that we can easily exclude, cast aside, or discount. We must make a special effort to listen to those we may be tempted to see as unimportant and those who force us to consider new points of view that may change our way of thinking.**

For this reason, while all the baptized are specifically called to take part in the Synodal Process, no one – no matter their religious affiliation – should be excluded from sharing their perspective and experiences, insofar as they want to help the Church on her synodal journey of seeking what is good and true. **This is especially true of those who are most vulnerable or marginalized.**

The questions accompanying each of the following ten themes can be used as a starting point or helpful guideline. Your conversation and dialogue do not need to be limited to the following questions: (See APPENDIX 1)

Appendix 1: Ten Thematic Nuclei to be Explored

I. THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS

In the Church and in society, we are side by side on the same road. In your local Church, who are the ones “journeying together”? When we say: “our Church,” who is part of it? Who is asking us to journey together? Who are the road companions, including those outside the ecclesial perimeter? What persons or groups are left on the margins, expressly or in fact?

II. LISTENING

Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices. To whom does our particular Church “need to listen to”? How are the Laity, especially young people and women, listened to? How do we integrate the contribution of Consecrated Men and Women? What space is there for the voice of minorities, the discarded, and the excluded? Do we identify prejudices and stereotypes that hinder our listening? How do we listen to the social and cultural context in which we live?

III. SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, integrating freedom, truth, and charity. How do we promote a free and authentic style of communication within the community and its organizations, without duplicity and opportunism? And in relation to the society of which we are a part? When and how do we manage to say what is important to us? How does the relationship with the media system (not only Catholic media) work? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

IV. CELEBRATING

“Journeying together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. How do prayer and liturgical celebration inspire and direct our “journeying together”? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the Faithful in the liturgy and the exercise of the sanctifying function? What space is given to the exercise of the ministries of the reader and acolyte?

V. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

Synodality is at the service of the Church’s mission, in which all her members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is each Baptized person called to be a protagonist in the mission? How does the community support its members committed to service in society (social and political commitment, in scientific research and teaching, in the promotion of social justice, in the protection of human rights, and in caring for the Common home, etc.)? How do you help them to live out these commitments in a logic of mission? How is discernment about mission-related choices made, and who participates in it? How are the different traditions that constitute the patrimony of many Churches, especially the Oriental ones, integrated and adapted, with respect to the synodal style, in view of an effective Christian witness? How does collaboration work in territories where different *sui iuris* Churches are present?

VI. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Dialogue is a path of perseverance that also includes silences and sufferings, but which is capable of gathering the experience of persons and peoples. What are the places and modes of dialogue within our particular Church? How are divergences of vision, the conflicts, the difficulties addressed? How do we promote collaboration with neighboring Dioceses, with and among religious communities in the area, with and

among lay associations and movements, etc.? What experiences of dialogue and shared commitment do we have with believers of other religions and with non-believers? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the world of politics, economics, culture, civil society, the poor...?

VII. WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one Baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relations do we have with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations? What areas do they concern? What fruits have we drawn from this “journeying together”? What are the difficulties?

VIII. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How do we identify the goals to be pursued, the way to achieve them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority exercised within our particular Church? What are the practices of teamwork and co-responsibility? How are lay ministries and the assumption of responsibility by the Faithful promoted? How do synodal bodies function at the level of the particular Church? Are they a fruitful experience?

IX. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit. By what procedures and methods do we discern together and make decisions? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchically structured communities? How do we articulate the consultative phase with the deliberative one, the process of *decision-making* with the moment of *decision-taking*? How and with what tools do we promote transparency and accountability?

X. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

The spirituality of journeying together is called to become an educational principle for the formation of the human person and of the Christian, of the families, and of the communities. How do we form people, especially those who hold roles of responsibility within the Christian community, to make them more capable of “journeying together,” listening to one another and engaging in dialogue? What formation do we offer for discernment and the exercise of authority? What tools help us to read the dynamics of the culture in which we are immersed and their impact on our style of Church?

Appendix 2: Helpful Links

[Synod 2021 - 2023](https://www.synod.va/en.html)

<https://www.synod.va/en.html>

[Synod 2021-2023 | USCCB](https://www.usccb.org/synod)

<https://www.usccb.org/synod>

[Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality | USCCB](https://www.usccb.org/resources/vademecum-synod-synodality)

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/vademecum-synod-synodality>

[Synod Preparatory Document | USCCB](https://www.usccb.org/resources/synod-preparatory-document)

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/synod-preparatory-document>

[Process for Facilitating Synodal Consultations](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/document/common/resources/external_tools/Process-for-Facilitating-Synodal-Consultations.pdf)

https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/document/common/resources/external_tools/Process-for-Facilitating-Synodal-Consultations.pdf

[Tools for Reflecting, Sharing, and Responding to Questions of the Synod | USCCB](https://www.usccb.org/resources/tools-reflecting-sharing-and-responding-questions-synod)

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/tools-reflecting-sharing-and-responding-questions-synod>

[Lista de elementos y materiales de referencia | USCCB](https://www.usccb.org/resources/lista-de-elementos-y-materiales-de-referencia)

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/lista-de-elementos-y-materiales-de-referencia>

[Adsumus Sancte Spiritus Prayer \(Spanish\)](https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/ES-ADSUMUS.pdf)

<https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/ES-ADSUMUS.pdf>

[Adsumus Sancte Spiritus Prayer \(English\)](https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/EN-ADSUMUS.pdf)

<https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/EN-ADSUMUS.pdf>

[USCCB Synod Recommendations for Dioceses | USCCB](https://www.usccb.org/resources/usccb-synod-recommendations-dioceses)

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/usccb-synod-recommendations-dioceses>

[Synod 21-23 Social Media Toolkit | USCCB](https://www.usccb.org/resources/usccb-synod-recommendations-dioceses)

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/usccb-synod-recommendations-dioceses>

[Walking Together: Sharing Resources for the Synod](https://www.synodresources.org/)

<https://www.synodresources.org/>

Appendix 3: Best Practices

It is helpful and advisable to use structures within your parish that already have outreach to the wider Parish family and the Community your Parish is situated in. Examples include:

- Parish Pastoral Council
- Stewardship Committees
- Christian Service Committees
- L.A.R.C.C. Teams and Ecumenical Teams
- Etc.

Pope Francis has asked us to seek the input of those “on the margins” in consultation. Think creatively about those whose voices may seldom be heard because of physical limitations (the elderly, homebound, hospitalized, imprisoned, etc.), as well as those who may feel they are “on the outside looking in” for other reasons (non-Catholic spouses of Catholic parishioners, Catholics in irregular marriages, the same-sex attracted, etc.). The Synod provides an excellent opportunity to reach out to parishioners who have become inactive for any reason.