



DIOCESE
OF SIOUX CITY

Synod

2021-2023



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

PREPARATORY DOCUMENT



DIOCESE OF SIOUX CITY

Chief of Staff

Deacon Mark Prosser

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Synod Timeline

Rome Opening Mass	October 9 / 10, 2021
Diocesan / Parish Opening Masses (Guidelines to be sent out by the Office of Worship)	October 16 / 17, 2021
Push Out Parish Instructions & Discussion Questions	October 5 through 9, 2021
Parish Meetings & Synthesis	October 18 - November 30, 2021
Deadline for Parish Meeting / Synthesis Summaries to be Submitted	December 14, 2021
Deanery Meetings & Synthesis	January 8, 2022 - February 28, 2022
Northeast Deanery	Thursday, January 13, 2022 (5:00pm)
Southeast Deanery	Tuesday, January 18, 2022 (5:00pm)
Northwest Deanery	Tuesday, January 25, 2022 (5:00pm)
Southwest Deanery	Tuesday, February 1, 2022 (5:00pm)
Collections of Comments & Drafting of Final Report	March 1, 2022 - March 14, 2022
Convocation of the Pre-Synodal Meeting Liturgy & Sharing of Findings	Friday, April 1, 2022 (11:00am)
Submit Final Synthesis Report	Mid-April 2022



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Parish Guidance

Each pastor is to convene a meeting(s) within their parish groupings that is inclusive of a wide and diverse audience including open invitations to Catholics who have left the Church, non-Catholics, representative ethnic populations within your parish grouping, young, elderly, varied socioeconomic backgrounds and any other grouping or classification that is not listed in this document. It's possible that parish groupings may have to have multiple meetings to accommodate the use of interpreters, crowd size and more.

[Although it's preferred to have the meeting in person COVID related conditions may exist that require the meeting to be virtual.] This is acceptable if deemed necessary by the pastor.

****These meetings should be completed between October 18 and November 30, 2021.**

The pastor should assign a notetaker / scribe for each meeting who will complete a summary of the main points discussed and forward that to the Diocesan Chief of Staff's Office no later than December 14, 2021.

The guiding questions for discussion at the parish meetings are noted under Section 5.3 and highlighted in yellow in this memo. Questions can be discussed in a general assembly format or in smaller groups depending on the size of your overall turnout at your parish grouping meeting(s).

It is suggested that meeting formats be designed to include a liturgical component, discussion and social component (meals, snacks, desserts, etc)

****** Once a parish grouping has scheduled their meeting(s) please provide the Central Catholic Offices with the date, time and location of the meeting (in advance) for documentation in an addendum to the Diocese's Final Report. Please email the information to Grace Zavala at GraceZ@scdiocese.org.

Deanery Meetings

The Bishop will host a meeting in each Deanery (see timeline dates) beginning in January of 2022 where the pastors of the parishes and their parish representatives will gather and share the points generated in their individual parish grouping meetings with the Bishop. This meeting is designed as a **"Listening Event"** for the Bishop. These meetings will be evening meetings inclusive of prayer and a meal. Locations and times will be announced as this process progresses.

****The Deans in each Deanery are assigned to acquire a notetaker / scribe for the Deanery Meetings who will summarize in writing comments from the gathering and have them submitted to the Chief of Staff's Office (prosserm@scdiocese.org) within 72 hours following the Deanery Meeting.**



KEY WORDS FOR THE SYNODAL PROCESS

The theme of the Synod is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” The three dimensions of the theme are **communion**, **participation**, and **mission**. These three dimensions are profoundly interrelated. They are the vital pillars of a Synodal Church. There is no hierarchy between them. Rather, each one enriches and orients the other two. There is a dynamic relationship between the three that must be articulated with all three in mind.

➤ **Communion:** By his gracious will, God gathers us together as diverse peoples of one faith, through the covenant that he offers to his people. The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. It is Christ who reconciles us to the Father and unites us with each other in the Holy Spirit. Together, we are inspired by listening to the Word of God, through the living Tradition of the Church, and grounded in the *sensus fidei* that we share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God’s call for his people.

➤ **Participation:** A call for the involvement of all who belong to the People of God – laity, consecrated and ordained – to engage in the exercise of deep and respectful listening to one another. This listening creates space for us to hear the Holy Spirit together and guides our aspirations for the Church of the Third Millennium. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and are called to serve one another through the gifts they have each received from the Holy Spirit. In a synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to *pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern and offer advice* on *making pastoral decisions* which correspond as closely as possible to God's will (ICT, *Syn.*, 67-68). Genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded.

➤ **Mission:** The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centered on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world. In this way, synodality is a path by which the Church can more fruitfully fulfill her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God’s kingdom.

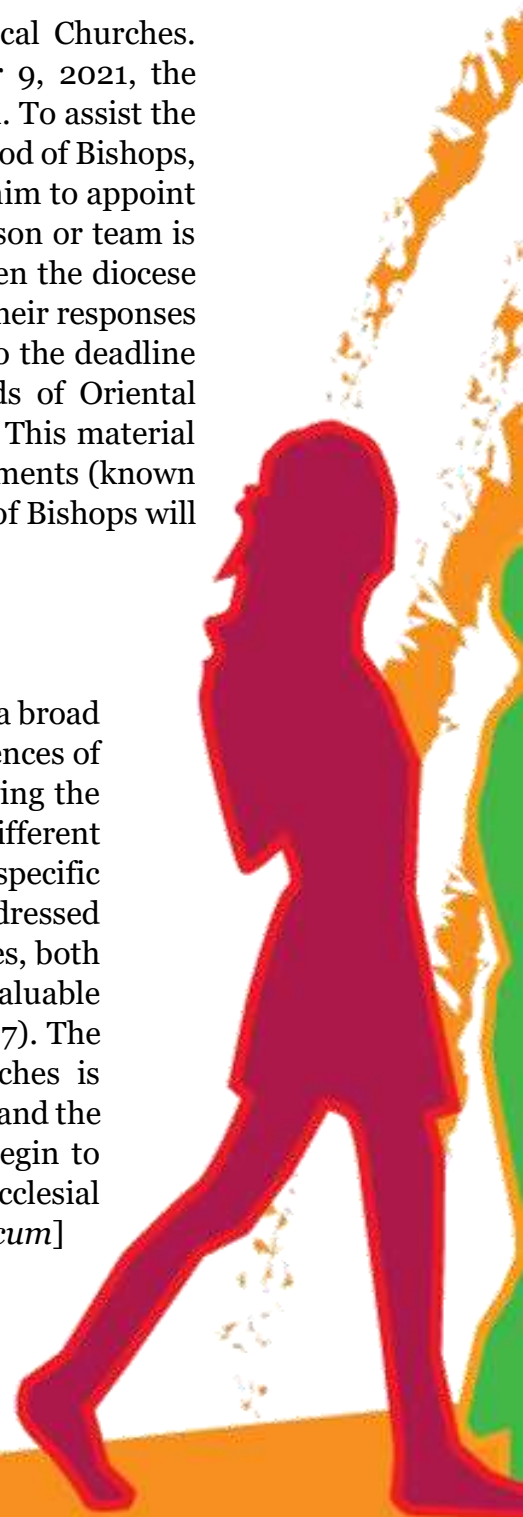
THE EXPERIENCE ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

The first phase of the Synodal Process is a listening phase in local Churches. Following an opening celebration in Rome on Saturday, October 9, 2021, the diocesan phase of the Synod will begin on Sunday, October 17, 2021. To assist the initial phase of the synodal journey, the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Mario Grech, wrote to each Bishop in May 2021, inviting him to appoint a contact person or team to lead the local listening phase. This person or team is also the liaison between the diocese and parishes, as well as between the diocese and the episcopal conference. Local Churches are asked to provide their responses to their episcopal conference to enable aggregation of ideas prior to the deadline of April 2022. In this way, episcopal conferences and the synods of Oriental Churches can in turn provide a synthesis to the Synod of Bishops. This material will be synthesised as the basis for the writing of two working documents (known as the *Instrumentum Laboris*). Finally, the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be held in Rome in October 2023.

As stated in the Preparatory Document (no. 31):

The purpose of the first phase of the synodal journey is to foster a broad consultation process in order to gather the wealth of the experiences of lived synodality, in its different articulations and facets, involving the Pastors and the Faithful of the [local] Churches at all the different levels, through the most appropriate means according to the specific local realities: the consultation, coordinated by the Bishop, is addressed “to the Priests, Deacons and lay Faithful of their [local] Churches, both individually and in associations, without overlooking the valuable contribution that consecrated men and women can offer” (*EC*, 7). The contribution of the participatory bodies of the [local] Churches is specifically requested, especially that of the Presbyteral Council and the Pastoral Council, from which “a synodal Church [can truly] begin to take shape.”⁴ Equally valuable will be the contribution of other ecclesial entities to which the *Preparatory Document* [and this *Vademecum*] will be sent, as well as that of those who wish to send their own contribution directly. Finally, it will be of fundamental importance that the voice of the poor and excluded also find a place, not only that of those who have some role or responsibility within the [local] Churches.

Religious communities, lay movements, associations of the faithful, and other ecclesial groups are encouraged to participate in the Synodal Process in the context of the local Churches.

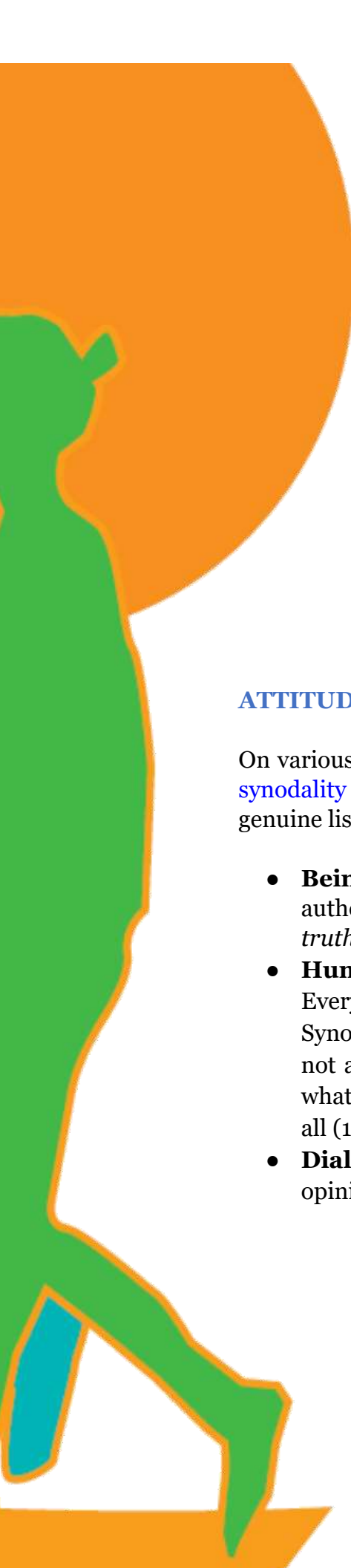


However, it is also possible for them, and for any group or individual that does not have an opportunity to do so at the local level, to contribute directly to the General Secretariat as stated in *Episcopalis Communio* (art. 6 on the *Consultation of the People of God*):

§1. The consultation of the People of God takes place in the particular Churches, through the Synods of Bishops of the Patriarchal Churches and the Major Archbishoprics, the Councils of Hierarchs and the Assemblies of Hierarchs of the Churches *sui iuris* and through the Episcopal Conferences. In each particular Church, the Bishops carry out the consultation of the People of God by recourse to the participatory bodies provided for by the law, without excluding other methods that they deem appropriate. §2. The Unions, the Federations and the male and female Conferences of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life consult the Major Superiors, who in their turn may approach their own Councils and other members of the Institutes and Societies in question. §3. In the same way, the Associations of the Faithful recognized by the Holy See consult their own members. §4. The dicasteries of the Roman Curia offer their contribution, taking account of their respective particular areas of competence. §5. The General Secretariat of the Synod may identify other forms of consultation of the People of God.

Each listening phase will be adapted to local circumstances. People in remote communities with limited internet access are likely to have a different involvement than those in urban settings. Communities currently in the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to organize different dialogue and listening opportunities than those with high rates of recovery. Whatever the local circumstances, the Diocesan Contact Person(s) are encouraged to focus on maximum inclusion and participation, reaching out to involve the greatest number of people possible, and *especially those on the periphery who are often excluded and forgotten*. Encouraging the widest participation possible will help to ensure that the syntheses formulated at the levels of dioceses, episcopal conferences, and the whole Church capture the true realities and lived experience of the People of God. Because this engagement of the People of God is foundational, and a first taste of the experience of synodality for many, it is essential that each local listening exercise be guided by the principles of communion, participation, and mission that inspire this synodal path. The unfolding of the Synodal Process at a local level must also involve:

- **Discernment** through listening, to create space for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- **Accessibility**, in order to ensure that as many people as possible can participate, regardless of location, language, education, socio-economic status, ability/disability, and material resources.

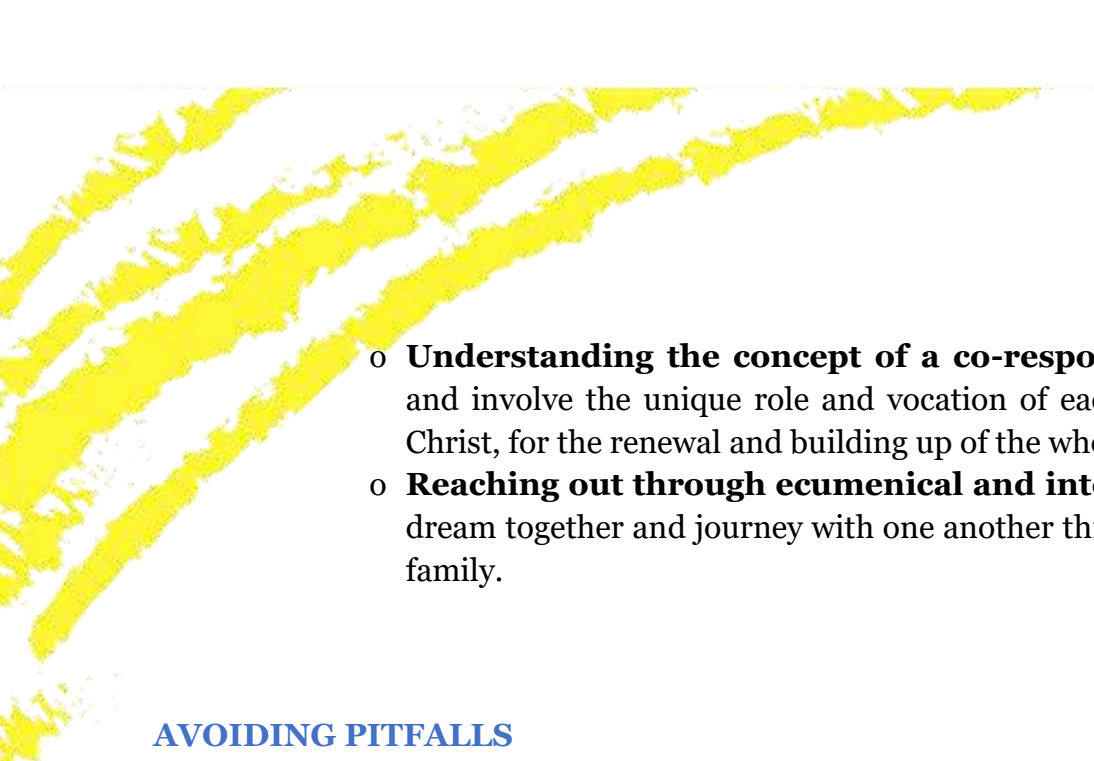
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- **Cultural awareness** to celebrate and embrace the diversity within local communities.
 - **Inclusion**, making every effort to involve those who feel excluded or marginalized.
 - **Partnership** based on the model of a co-responsible Church.
 - **Respect** for the rights, dignity, and opinion of each participant.
 - **Accurate syntheses** that truly captures the range of critical and appreciative perspectives of all responses, including views that are expressed only by a minority of participants.
 - **Transparency**, ensuring that processes of invitation, involvement, inclusion, and aggregation of input are clear and well communicated.
 - **Fairness**, ensuring that participation in the listening process treats each person equally, so that every voice can be duly heard.

ATTITUDES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE SYNODAL PROCESS

On various occasions, Pope Francis has shared his vision for [what the practice of synodality looks like concretely](#). The following are particular attitudes that enable genuine listening and dialogue as we participate in the Synodal Process.

- **Being synodal requires time for sharing:** We are invited to speak with authentic courage and honesty (*parrhesia*) in order to integrate *freedom*, *truth*, and *charity*. Everyone can grow in understanding through dialogue.
- **Humility in listening must correspond to courage in speaking:** Everyone has the right to be heard, just as everyone has the right to speak. Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate to convince others. Rather, it is welcoming what others say as a way by which the Holy Spirit can speak for the good of all (1 Corinthians 12:7).
- **Dialogue leads us to newness:** We must be willing to change our opinions based on what we have heard from others.
 - **Openness to conversion and change:** We can often be resistant to what the Holy Spirit is trying to inspire us to undertake. We are called to abandon attitudes of complacency and comfort that lead us to make decisions purely on the basis of how things have been done in the past.
 - **Synods are an ecclesial exercise in discernment:** Discernment is based on the conviction that God is at work in the world and we are called to listen to what the Spirit suggests to us.


- **We are signs of a Church that listens and journeys:** By listening, the Church follows the example of God himself, who listens to the cry of his people. The Synodal Process provides us with the opportunity to open ourselves to listen in an authentic way, without resorting to ready-made answers or pre-formulated judgments.
- **Leave behind prejudices and stereotypes:** We can be weighed down by our weaknesses and sinfulness. The first step towards listening is freeing our minds and hearts from prejudices and stereotypes that lead us on the wrong path, towards ignorance and division.
- **Overcome the scourge of clericalism:** The Church is the Body of Christ filled with different charisms in which each member has a unique role to play. We are all interdependent on one another and we all share an equal dignity amidst the holy People of God. In the image of Christ, true power is service. Synodality calls upon pastors to listen attentively to the flock entrusted to their care, just as it calls the laity to freely and honestly express their views. Everyone listens to one other out of love, in a spirit of communion and our common mission. Thus the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in manifold ways in and through the entire People of God.
- **Cure the virus of self-sufficiency:** We are all in the same boat. Together we form the Body of Christ. Setting aside the mirage of self-sufficiency, we are able to learn from each other, journey together, and be at the service of one another. We can build bridges beyond the walls that sometimes threaten to separate us – age, gender, wealth, ability, education, etc.
- **Overcoming ideologies:** We must avoid the risk of giving greater importance to ideas than to the reality of the life of faith that people live in a concrete way.
- **Give rise to hope:** Doing what is right and true does not seek to attract attention or make headlines, but rather aims at being faithful to God and serving His People. We are called to be beacons of hope, not prophets of doom.
- **Synods are a time to dream and “spend time with the future”:** We are encouraged to create a local process that inspires people, with no one excluded to create a vision of the future filled with the joy of the Gospel. The following dispositions will help participants (cf. *Christus Vivit*):
 - **An innovative outlook:** To develop new approaches, with creativity and a certain audacity.
 - **Being inclusive:** A participatory and co-responsible Church, capable of appreciating its own rich variety, embraces all those we often forget or ignore.
 - **An open mind:** Let us avoid ideological labels and make use of all methodologies that have borne fruit.
 - **Listening to each and every one:** By learning from one another, we can better reflect the wonderful multi-faceted reality that Christ’s Church is meant to be.
 - **An understanding of “journeying together”:** To walk the path that God calls the Church to undertake for the third millennium.

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- o **Understanding the concept of a co-responsible Church:** To value and involve the unique role and vocation of each member of the Body of Christ, for the renewal and building up of the whole Church.
 - o **Reaching out through ecumenical and interreligious dialogue:** To dream together and journey with one another throughout the entire human family.

AVOIDING PITFALLS

As on any journey, we need to be aware of possible pitfalls that could hamper our progress during this time of synodality. The following are several pitfalls that must be avoided in order to promote the vitality and fruitfulness of the Synodal Process.

- 1) The **temptation of wanting to lead ourselves instead of being led by God.** Synodality is not a corporate strategic exercise. Rather it is a spiritual process that is led by the Holy Spirit. We can be tempted to forget that we are pilgrims and servants on the path marked out for us by God. Our humble efforts of organization and coordination are at the service of God who guides us on our way. We are clay in the hands of the divine Potter (Isaiah 64:8).
- 2) The **temptation to focus on ourselves and our immediate concerns.** The Synodal Process is an opportunity to open up, to look around us, to see things from other points of view, and to move out in missionary outreach to the peripheries. This requires us to think long-term. This also means broadening our perspectives to the dimensions of the entire Church and asking questions, such as: What is God's plan for the Church here and now? How can we implement God's dream for the Church on the local level?
- 3) The **temptation to only see "problems."** The challenges, difficulties, and hardships facing our world and our Church are many. Nevertheless, fixating on the problems will only lead us to be overwhelmed, discouraged, and cynical. We can miss the light if we focus only on the darkness. Instead of focusing only on what is not going well, let us appreciate where the Holy Spirit is generating life and see how we can let God work more fully.

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- 4) The **temptation of focusing only on structures.** The Synodal Process will naturally call for a renewal of structures at various levels of the Church, in order to foster deeper communion, fuller participation, and more fruitful mission. At the same time, the experience of synodality should not focus first and foremost on structures, but on the experience of journeying together to discerning the path forward, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The conversion and renewal of structures will come about only through the on-going conversion and renewal of all the members of the Body of Christ.
 - 5) The **temptation not to look beyond the visible confines of the Church.** In expressing the Gospel in our lives, lay women and men act as a leaven in the world in which we live and work. A Synodal Process is a time to dialogue with people from the worlds of economics and science, politics and culture, arts and sport, the media and social initiatives. It will be a time to reflect on ecology and peace, life issues and migration. We must keep the bigger picture in view to fulfil our mission in the world. It is also an opportunity to deepen the ecumenical journey with other Christian denominations and to deepen our understanding with other faith traditions.
 - 6) The **temptation to lose focus of the objectives of the Synodal Process.** As we proceed along the journey of the Synod, we need to be careful that, while our discussions might be wide-ranging, the Synodal Process maintains the goal of discerning how God calls us to walk forward together. No one Synodal Process is going to resolve all our concerns and problems. Synodality is an attitude and an approach of moving forward in a co-responsible way that is open to welcoming God's fruits together over time.
 - 7) The **temptation of conflict and division.** "That they may all be one" (John 17:21). This is the ardent prayer of Jesus to the Father, asking for unity among his disciples. The Holy Spirit leads us deeper into communion with God and one another. The seeds of division bear no fruit. It is vain to try to impose one's ideas on the whole Body through pressure or to discredit those who feel differently.
 - 8) The **temptation to treat the Synod as a kind of a parliament.** This confuses synodality with a 'political battle' in which in order to govern one side must defeat the other. It is contrary to the spirit of synodality to antagonize others or to encourage divisive conflicts that threaten the unity and communion of the Church,
 - 9) The **temptation to listen only to those who are already involved in Church activities.** This approach may be easier to manage, but it ultimately ignores a significant proportion of the People of God


THE ROLE OF PRIESTS AND DEACONS IN THE SYNODAL PROCESS

The ministry of priests and deacons has two vital points of reference: on one hand, the diocesan Bishop; and on the other hand, the people entrusted to their pastoral care. Thus, the clergy present in the local Church provide a helpful point of connection between the Bishop and those they serve. This gives priests and deacons a key role in journeying together in the midst of the People of God, united with the Bishop and at the service of the faithful. They are able to communicate to the people on behalf of the Bishop, and they are also able to communicate from the people to the Bishop. They are agents of communion and unity in building up the Body of Christ, helping the faithful to journey together, walking forward with one another in the midst of the Church. The clergy are likewise heralds of renewal, attentive to the evolving needs of their flock, and pointing out how the Holy Spirit is opening new pathways. Finally, they are men of prayer who promote a genuinely *spiritual* experience of synodality, so that the People of God can be more attentive to the Holy Spirit and listen together to the will of God.

In this sense, priests and deacons have a crucial role to play in accompanying the entire People of God on the path of synodality. Their efforts towards promoting and putting in practice a more synodal way of being the Church of Christ are of vital importance. Priests and deacons can raise awareness about the synodal nature of the Church and the meaning of synodality in the parishes, ministries, and movements that they serve. Priests and deacons are also called to support, encourage, promote, and enable the unfolding of the diocesan phase of the Synodal Process in the local Church. They do so through the participatory bodies that are already established across the diocese, such as the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Presbyteral Council, and Parish Pastoral Councils. The involvement of the “synodal” bodies of the local Churches is specifically requested, especially the Presbyteral Council and the Pastoral Council (*PD*, 31). On the Church’s path of synodality, these participatory bodies on the diocesan level “can prove fundamental, and from here a synodal Church can begin to emerge” (*EC*, 7).

At the same time, priests and deacons can find new and creative ways of fostering an authentically *synodal* experience among the lay faithful, in connection with the initiatives of the diocesan Bishop and the Diocesan Contact Person(s) that are designated for this Synodal Process. It is worth noting that the consultation undertaken by the diocesan phase of the Synodal Process is coordinated by the diocesan Bishop and addressed “to the priests, deacons and lay faithful of their [local] Churches, both individually and in associations, without overlooking the valuable contribution that consecrated men and women can offer” (*EC*, 7).





The *Preparatory Document* tells us that in the ministry of Jesus, “The election of the apostles is not the privilege of an exclusive position of power and separation but the grace of an inclusive ministry of blessing and fellowship. Thanks to the gift of the Spirit of the Risen Lord, they are to guard the place of Jesus, without replacing him: not to put filters on his presence, but to make it easy to encounter him” (PD, 19). So too all the clergy, endowed with the sacred gifts and charisms received through their ordination, have a critical role to play in ensuring that this synodal experience is an authentic encounter with the Risen Christ, grounded in prayer, nourished by the celebration of the Eucharist, and inspired by listening to the Word of God.

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?

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:

1. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road. In our local Church, who are those who “walk together”? Who are those who seem further apart? How are we called to grow as companions? What groups or individuals are left on the margins?

2. LISTENING

Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice. How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore? How are the laity listened to, especially women and young people? What facilitates or inhibits our listening? How well do we listen to those on the peripheries? How is the contribution of consecrated men and women integrated? What are some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than our own? What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?

3. SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity. What enables or hinders speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and in society? When and how do we manage to say what is important to us? How does the relationship with the local media work (not only Catholic media)? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

4. CELEBRATION


“Walking 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 celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy? What space is given to participating in the ministries of lector and acolyte?

5. SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION

Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is every baptised person called to participate in the mission of the Church? What hinders the baptised from being active in mission? What areas of mission are we neglecting? How does the community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment, etc.)? How does the Church help these members to live out their service to society in a missionary way? How is discernment about missionary choices made and by whom?

6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding. To what extent do diverse peoples in our community come together for dialogue? What are the places and means of dialogue within our local Church? How do we promote collaboration with neighboring dioceses, religious communities in the area, lay associations and movements, etc.? How are divergences of vision, or conflicts and difficulties addressed? What particular issues in the Church and society do we



need to pay more attention to? What experiences of dialogue and collaboration do we have with believers of other religions and with those who have no religious affiliation? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the spheres of politics, economics, culture, civil society, and people who live in poverty?

7. ECUMENISM

The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations? What do we share and how do we journey together? What fruits have we drawn from walking together? What are the difficulties? How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?

8. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued, the way to reach them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority or governance exercised within our local Church? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice? How are evaluations conducted and by whom? How are lay ministries and the responsibility of lay people promoted? Have we had fruitful experiences of synodality on a local level? How do synodal bodies function at the level of the local Church (Pastoral Councils in parishes and dioceses, Presbyteral Council, etc.)? How can we foster a more synodal approach in our participation and leadership?

9. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community. What methods and processes do we use in decision-making? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures? Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God? What is the relationship between consultation and decision-making, and how do we put these into practice? What tools and procedures do we use to promote transparency and accountability? How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment?

10. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY


Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning. How does our church community form people to be more capable of “walking together,” listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue? What formation is offered to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal way?

SUGGESTED GUIDE FOR ORGANIZING A SYNODAL CONSULTATION MEETING

Synodal consultation meetings can be organized among various groups in a parish or by bringing diverse peoples together from different parishes. Other diocesan bodies or religious and lay organizations can also collaborate to hold consultation meetings. The following is a general outline of the steps that can be taken.

1. An **organizing team** can be formed to plan and carry out the consultation process and gatherings on the local level, including discerning how to reach out to people and the most suitable methods for fostering dialogue and participation in an authentic synodal experience.
2. **Participation** can be encouraged through parish announcements, social media, letters, etc. With the help of local neighborhoods as well as church institutions such as schools and social centers, a special effort can be made to identify and reach out to those who have not been in regular contact with the church community for some time. Care should be taken to involve those who are excluded or whose voices are often not taken into account.
3. Participants should ideally include people from a **diversity** of communities, experiences, cultures, ages, and walks of life. The total group size may depend on the available venue and the number of facilitators.
4. About 2-3 weeks before the gathering, **preparatory materials** for prayer and reflection should be sent to all participants. These can include a brief background reading on synodality, the main reflection question(s), and suggested ways of praying and discerning about these questions, including recommended Scripture passages. Participants should also be informed about the method to be used at the synodal meeting. They should set aside time for personal preparation using all these materials because this is crucial for a fruitful dialogue.
5. The main **reflection questions** should be relevant and brief. It is often better to have fewer questions which can be explored deeply, rather than have many questions that would be covered superficially. 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)






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- *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?

It is often very fruitful for participants to reflect on the journey of their local community up until now. What has been the history of the faith life of the community? How has the community travelled to where they are now? How has God been present? Recollecting the past together often helps to build up the community and guide its path forward.

To help people explore this fundamental question more fully, ten themes have been developed to highlight significant aspects of “lived synodality” (PD, 30). The questions accompanying each of the ten themes can be used as a starting point or helpful guideline for enriching the consultation. These questions can be found in Part 5 of the *Vademecum* and a more detailed version is available in the accompanying materials on the Synod website.

6. It should be ensured that there are enough group **facilitators** according to the chosen method and format of the consultation gathering, and that they have been adequately prepared to conduct the process. The team of people who will prepare the **synthesis** of the consultation should also be identified.
 7. At the gathering, **communal prayer and liturgy** will play a vital role. Listening to one another is grounded in listening to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Meaningful forms of prayer can be used to ask God’s guidance and inspiration and let him deepen our communion with one another. The liturgy and meditating together on Scripture can be very helpful means in this regard.
 8. A suitable method for **group dialogue** which resonates with the principles of synodality can be used. For instance, the **Spiritual Conversation** method promotes active participation, attentive listening, reflective speaking, and spiritual discernment. Participants form small groups of about 6-7 persons from diverse backgrounds. This method takes about at least an hour and comprises three rounds. In the first round, everyone takes equal turns to share the fruit of his or her prayer, in relation to the reflection questions circulated beforehand (see #5 of this Appendix). There is no discussion in this round and all participants simply listen deeply to each person and attend to how the Holy Spirit is moving within oneself, within the person speaking, and in the group as a whole. This is followed by a time of silence to note one’s interior movements. In the second round, participants share what struck them most in the first round and what moved them during the time of silence. Some dialogue can also occur, and the same spiritual attentiveness is maintained. Once again this is followed by a time of silence. Finally in the third-round participants reflect on what seems to be
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resonating in the conversation and what moved them most deeply. New insights and even unresolved questions are also noted. Spontaneous prayers of gratitude can conclude the conversation. Usually, each small group will have a facilitator and note-taker. (A detailed description of this process is provided on the Synod website.)

9. Once the group dialogue has taken place, participants should **review** and share about their experience of the process within their small group. How was their experience? What were the ups and downs? What new and refreshing insights might they have discovered? What have they learned about the synodal way of proceeding? How was God present and at work during their time together?
10. Participants should then decide on the **feedback** they wish to communicate to the organizing/facilitation team. The guiding questions for the diocesan synthesis as outlined in Part 4 of the *Vademecum* can be used as a basis for this feedback on the local level (see also Appendix D).
11. All participants can then come together to conclude the gathering. One representative from each small group can briefly share about the experience of the group. The participants should be informed about the next stage of the Synodal Process, so that they know how their input will contribute to the whole Church. It is recommended that the gathering conclude with a prayer or song of thanksgiving.
12. After the gathering, the organizing/facilitation team members can meet to review the whole experience and to prepare the synthesis based on the feedback submitted by all the small groups. They can then forward their synthesis to the Diocesan Contact Person(s).
13. If people are unable to attend a meeting in person or online, efforts should be made to reach out to them through text messaging, phone calls, radio, or other appropriate means. It is important that we try our best to listen to the voices of everyone, especially those who are marginalized.

