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For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality

Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches:
First Phase [October 2021 – April 2022]
in Dioceses and Bishops' Conferences
Leading up to the Assembly of Bishops in Synod in October 2023

Synod of Bishops

The Vatican

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Prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, the first word of the original Latin, meaning, "We stand before You, Holy Spirit," which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years, and is attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 4 April 636). As we embrace this Synodal Process, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to be at work in us so that we may be a community and a people of grace. For the Synodal journey from 2021 to 2023, we propose to the following simplified version,[1] so that any group or liturgical assembly can pray it more easily.

**We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.**

**With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go**

and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever.
Amen.

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Note: This *Vademecum* is intended to be used by the entire Catholic Church. Therefore, “local Church” refers interchangeably to a diocese, an eparchy, an ordinariate, or any equivalent ecclesial body. Likewise, where this *Vademecum* uses the term “episcopal conference,” this corresponds to the relevant synodal institution of each Church *sui iuris*.

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Abbreviations

DV VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const. *Dei Verbum* (18 November 1965)

EC FRANCIS, Apost. Const. *Episcopalis Communio* (15 September 2018)

FT FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020)

GS VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965)

ITC, Syn. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church* (2 March 2018)

LG VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const. *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964)

PD *Preparatory Document*

RM JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990)

1. Introduction

1.1 What is the purpose of this *Vademecum*?

This *Vademecum* is designed as a handbook that accompanies the *Preparatory Document* at the service of the synodal journey. The two documents are complementary and should be read in tandem with one another. In particular, the *Vademecum* offers practical support to the Diocesan Contact Person(s) (or team), designated by the diocesan Bishop, to prepare and gather the People of God so that they can give voice to their experience in their local Church. This worldwide invitation to all the faithful is the first phase of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, whose theme is “*For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.*”

In creating the opportunity for listening and dialogue on the local level through this Synod, Pope Francis is calling the Church to rediscover its deeply synodal nature. This rediscovery of the synodal roots of the Church will involve a process of humbly learning together how God is calling us to be as the Church in the third millennium.

This handbook is offered as a guide to support each local Church’s efforts, not as a rulebook. Those who are responsible for organizing the process of listening and dialogue at the local level are encouraged to be sensitive to their own culture and context, resources, and constraints, and to discern how to implement this diocesan synodal phase, guided by their diocesan Bishop. We encourage you to take useful ideas from this guide, but also to have your own local circumstances as your starting point. New and creative pathways may be found for working together among parishes and dioceses in order to bring this Synodal Process to fruition. This Synodal Process need not be seen as an overwhelming burden that competes with local pastoral care. Rather, it is an opportunity to foster the synodal and pastoral conversion of each local Church so as to be more fruitful in mission.

Many regions already have established processes for engaging with the faithful at the level of their parishes, movements, and dioceses. We are conscious that there are a number of countries where the local Church has initiated a synodal conversation of its own, including the [Ecclesial Assembly in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), the [Plenary Council in Australia](#), and the synodal journeys in [Germany](#) and [Ireland](#). There are also many diocesan synods that have taken place all over the world, including several that are currently underway. These regions and dioceses are called to creatively articulate the synodal processes already underway with the phases of the current Synod taking place across the entire Church. For certain other regions, the experience of this Synodal Process is new and uncharted territory. Our intention is that the resources offered through this *Vademecum* might provide helpful tools at the service of all, by proposing good and fruitful practices that can be adapted along the way as we journey together. In addition to this handbook, the *Vademecum* includes: a) online liturgical, biblical, and prayer resources, as well as b) more detailed methodological suggestions and tools, c) examples from recent synodal exercises, and d) a Glossary of Terms for the Synodal Process.

It is especially important that this listening process happen in a spiritual setting that supports openness in sharing as well as hearing. For this reason, you are encouraged to root the local experience of the Synodal Process in meditation on Scripture, the liturgy, and prayer. In this way, our journey of listening to one another can be an authentic experience of discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Authentic discernment is made possible where there is time for deep reflection and a spirit of mutual trust, common faith, and a shared purpose.

The *Preparatory Document* reminds us of the context in which this Synod is taking place – a global pandemic, local and international conflicts, growing impact of climate change, migration, various forms of injustice, racism, violence, persecution, and increasing inequalities across humanity, to name a few. In the Church, the context is also marked by the suffering experienced by minors and vulnerable people “due to sexual abuse, the abuse of

power, and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons.”[2] With all this being said, we find ourselves at a crucial moment in the life of the Church and the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has made existing inequalities explode. At the same time, this global crisis has revived our sense that we are all in the same boat, and that “one person’s problems are the problems of all” (FT, 32). The context of the COVID-19 pandemic will surely affect the unfolding of the Synodal Process. This global pandemic creates real logistical challenges, but also offers an opportunity to promote the revitalization of the Church at a critical time in human history, when many local Churches are facing various questions about the path forward.

In the midst of this context, synodality represents the path by which the Church can be renewed by the action of the Holy Spirit, listening together to what God has to say to his people. However, this journey together not only unites us more deeply with one another as the People of God, it also sends us out to pursue our mission as a prophetic witness that embraces the entire family of humanity, together with our fellow Christian denominations and other faith traditions.

1.2 What is Synodality? Background for this Synod

By convening this Synod, Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission: “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”[3] Following in the wake of the renewal of the Church proposed by the Second Vatican Council, this common journey together is both a gift and a task. By reflecting together on the journey that has been made so far, the diverse members of the Church will be able to learn from one another’s experiences and perspectives, guided by the Holy Spirit (PD, 1). Enlightened by the Word of God and united in prayer, we will be able to discern the processes to seek God’s will and pursue the pathways to which God calls us – towards deeper communion, fuller participation, and greater openness to fulfilling our mission in the world. The International Theological Commission (ITC) describes synodality this way:

‘Synod’ is an ancient and venerable word in the Tradition of the Church, whose meaning draws on the deepest themes of Revelation [...] It indicates the path along which the People of God walk together. Equally, it refers to the Lord Jesus, who presents Himself as ‘the way, the truth and the life’ (Jn 14,6), and to the fact that Christians, His followers, were originally called ‘followers of the Way’ (cf. Acts 9,2; 19,9.23; 22,4; 24,14.22).

First and foremost, synodality denotes the particular *style* that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church’s ordinary way of living and working.

In this sense, synodality enables the entire People of God to walk forward together, listening to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, to participate in the mission of the Church in the communion that Christ establishes between us. Ultimately, this path of walking together is the most effective way of manifesting and putting into practice the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God (PD, 1).

The entire People of God shares a common dignity and vocation through Baptism. All of us are called in virtue of our Baptism to be active participants in the life of the Church. In parishes, small Christian communities, lay movements, religious communities, and other forms of communion, women and men, young people and the elderly, we are all invited to listen to one another in order to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who comes to guide our human efforts, breathing life and vitality into the Church and leading us into deeper communion for our mission in the world. As the Church embarks on this synodal journey, we must strive to ground ourselves in experiences of authentic listening and discernment on the path of becoming the Church that God calls us to be.

1.3 What is the aim of this Synod? Objectives of the Synodal Process

The Church recognizes that synodality is an integral part of her very nature. Being a synodal Church finds expression in ecumenical councils, Synods of Bishops, diocesan Synods, and diocesan and parish councils. There are many ways by which we experience forms of “synodality” already across the Church. Yet being a

synodal Church is not limited to these existing institutions. Indeed, synodality is not so much an event or a slogan as a style and a way of being by which the Church lives out her mission in the world. The mission of the Church requires the entire People of God to be on a journey together, with each member playing his or her crucial role, united with each other. A synodal Church walks forward in communion to pursue a common mission through the participation of each and every one of her members. The objective of this Synodal Process is not to provide a temporary or one-time experience of synodality, but rather to provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term.

One of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council was the institution of the Synod of Bishops. While the Synod of Bishops has taken place up until now as a gathering of bishops with and under the authority of the Pope, the Church increasingly realizes that synodality is the path for the entire People of God. Hence the Synodal Process is no longer only an assembly of bishops but a journey for all the faithful, in which every local Church has an integral part to play. The Second Vatican Council reinvigorated the sense that all the baptised, both the hierarchy and the laity, are called to be active participants in the saving mission of the Church (*LG*, 32-33). The faithful have received the Holy Spirit in baptism and confirmation and are endowed with diverse gifts and charisms for the renewal and building up of the Church, as members of the Body of Christ. Thus the teaching authority of the Pope and the bishops is in dialogue with the *sensus fidelium*, the living voice of the People of God (cf. *Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church, 74). The path of synodality seeks to make pastoral decisions that reflect the will of God as closely as possible, grounding them in the living voice of the People of God (*ICT*, *Syn.*, 68). It is noted that collaborating with theologians – lay, ordained, and religious – can be a helpful support in articulating the voice of the People of God expressing the reality of the faith on the basis of lived experience.

While recent Synods have examined themes such as the new evangelization, the family, young people, and the Amazon, the present Synod focuses on the topic of synodality itself.

The current Synodal Process we are undertaking is guided by a fundamental question: ***How does this "journeying together" take place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allowing the Church to proclaim the Gospel? and what steps is the Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?*** (*PD*, 2)

In this light, the objective of the current Synod is to listen, as the entire People of God, to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church. We do so by listening together to the Word of God in Scripture and the living Tradition of the Church, and then by listening to one another, and especially to those at the margins, discerning the signs of the times. In fact, the whole Synodal Process aims at fostering a lived experience of discernment, participation, and co-responsibility, where a diversity of gifts is brought together for the Church's mission in the world.

In this sense, it is clear that the purpose of this Synod is not to produce more documents. Rather, it is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people's hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission (*PD*, 32). Thus the objective of this Synodal Process is not only a series of exercises that start and stop, but rather a journey of growing authentically towards the communion and mission that God calls the Church to live out in the third millennium.

This journey together will call on us to renew our mentalities and our ecclesial structures in order to live out God's call for the Church amid the present signs of the times. Listening to the entire People of God will help the Church to make pastoral decisions that correspond as closely as possible to God's will (*ITC*, *Syn.*, 68) The ultimate perspective to orient this synodal path of the Church is to serve the dialogue of God with humanity (*DV*, 2) and to journey together the kingdom of God (cf. *LG*, 9; *RM*, 20). In the end, this Synodal Process seeks to move towards a Church that is more fruitfully at the service of the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

1.4 The theme of this Synod, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*

In the ceremony to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015, Pope Francis declared that “the world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission.” This call to cooperate in the mission of the Church is addressed to the entire People of God. Pope Francis made this clear when he issued a direct invitation to all the People of God to contribute to Church efforts towards healing: “every one of the baptised should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need. This change calls for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does.” In April 2021, Pope Francis initiated a synodal journey of the whole People of God, to begin in October 2021 in each local Church and culminating in October 2023 in the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

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.

à 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.

à 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, analyse, 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.

à Mission: The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centred on ourselves. Our mission is to witness the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deep 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 fulfil her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God’s kingdom.

1.5 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 Archdioceses, 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.
- **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.

The Diocesan Contact Person(s) are encouraged to tap into the richness of the lived experience of Church in their local context. Throughout the diocesan phase, it is helpful to keep in mind the principles of the Synodal Process and the need for some structure to the conversation, so that it can be synthesised and effectively inform the writing of the working documents (*Instrumentum Laboris*). We aim to be attentive to how the Spirit speaks through the People of God.

2. Principles of a Synodal Process

2.1 Who can participate?

We see throughout the Gospels how Jesus reaches out to all. He does not only save people individually but as a people that he gathers together, as the one Shepherd of the entire flock (cf. John 10:16). The ministry of Jesus shows us that no one is excluded from God's plan of salvation.

The work of evangelization and the message of salvation cannot be understood without Jesus' constant openness to the widest possible audience. The Gospels refer to this as the *crowd*, composed of all the people who follow Jesus along the path and everyone that Jesus calls to follow him. The Second Vatican Council highlights that "all human beings are called to the new people of God" (LG, 13). God is truly at work in the entire people that he has gathered together. This is why "the entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole people's supernatural discernment in matters of faith when from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful, they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals" (LG, 12). The Council further points out that such discernment is animated by the Holy Spirit and proceeds through dialogue among all peoples, reading the signs of the times in faithfulness to the teachings of the Church.

Dioceses are called to keep in mind that the main subjects of this synodal experience are all the baptised. Special care should be taken to involve those persons who may risk being excluded: women, the handicapped, refugees, migrants, the elderly, people who live in poverty, Catholics who rarely or never practice their faith, etc. Creative means should also be found in order to involve children and youth.

Together, all the baptised are the subject of the *sensus fidelium*, the living voice of the People of God. At the same time, in order to participate fully in the act of discerning, it is important for the baptised to hear the voices of other people in their local context, including people who have left the practice of the faith, people of other faith traditions, people of no religious belief, etc. For as the Council declares: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts" (GS, 1).

For this reason, while **all the baptised** 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.

2.2 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.”[5]

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.

2.3 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*):
 - o **An innovative outlook:** To develop new approaches, with creativity and a certain audacity.
 - o **Being inclusive:** A participatory and co-responsible Church, capable of appreciating its own rich variety, embraces all those we often forget or ignore.
 - o **An open mind:** Let us avoid ideological labels and make use of all methodologies that have borne fruit.
 - o **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.
 - o **An understanding of “journeying together”:** To walk the path that God calls the Church to undertake for the third millennium.
 - 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.

2.4 Avoiding Pitfalls

As on any journey, we need to be aware of possible pitfalls that could hamper our progress during this time of

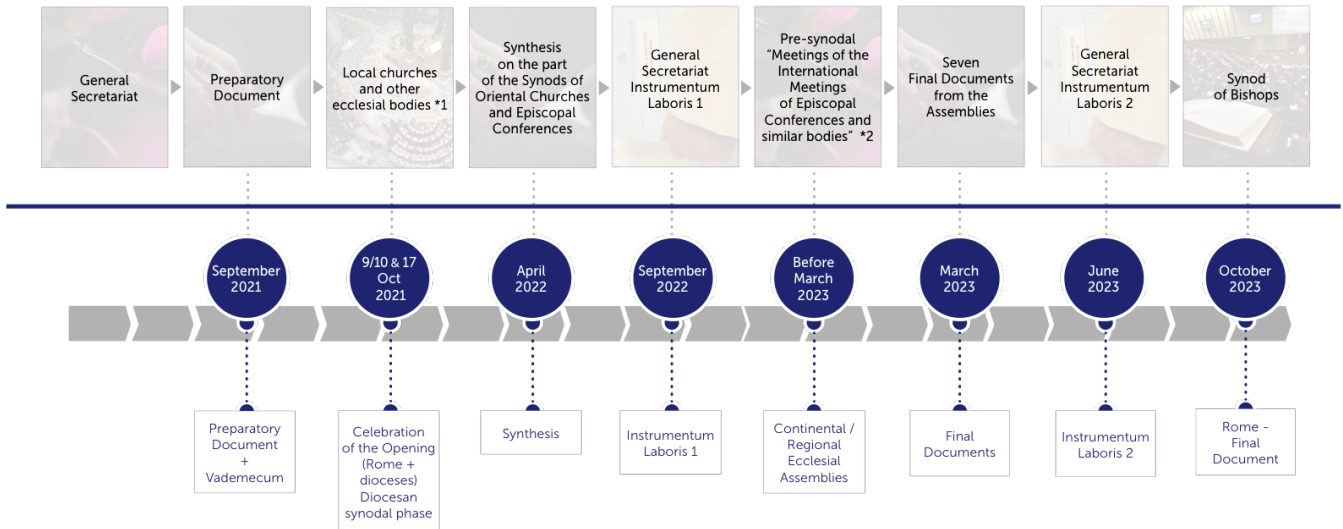
synodality. The following are several pitfalls that must be avoided in order to promote the vitality and fruitfulness of the Synodal Process.

- 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.
- 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.

3. The Process of the Synod

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION AND MISSION

XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS



*1 Dicasteries, Consecrated Life (UISG-USG, UNIONS & FEDERATIONS), Associations of the Faithful, Institutions of Higher Education
 *2 Africa (SECAM), Oceania (FCBCO), Asia (FABC), Middle East (CPCO), Europa (CEE), Latin America (CELAM), North America (USCCB+CCCCB)



Figure 1. This infographic displays the overall flow of the Synodal Process. The General Secretariat publishes the *Preparatory Document* and the *Vademecum* as tools for the local Churches to carry out the diocesan phase of the Synod. The fruits of this diocesan phase will be gathered into a synthesis for each local Church. Then a synthesis will be formulated by the episcopal conferences and synods of Oriental Churches, on the basis of the syntheses received from the local Churches. Other ecclesial bodies will also receive this *Vademecum* and Questionnaire (see Part 5) to take part in the consultation and can elaborate their own synthesis. These include the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the Union of Superiors General and International Union Superiors General (USG and UISG), other Unions and Federations of Consecrated life, international lay movements, Universities, and Faculties of Theology. The General Secretariat will formulate the first edition of the *Instrumentum Laboris* (working document) based on the syntheses received from episcopal conferences, synods of Oriental Churches, and the other ecclesial bodies mentioned by *Episcopalis Communio*. This first *Instrumentum Laboris* will then be discussed at the continental meetings (see Part 3.3 below). Based on the documents produced at the continental level, a second edition of the *Instrumentum Laboris* will be elaborated for the use of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023 (*General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops*).

3.1 The Diocesan Phase

Much of the richness of this listening phase will come from discussions among parishes, lay movements, schools and universities, religious congregations, neighbourhood Christian communities, social action, ecumenical and inter-religious movements, and other groups. Bishops initiate the process, so it is likely that involvement at the diocesan level will be coordinated through the regular communication channels of the diocesan Bishop. Those parishes with a Parish Pastoral Council, and those dioceses with a Diocesan Pastoral Council, can make use of these existing “synodal” bodies to organize, facilitate, and give life to the Synodal Process at the local level, provided that efforts are made to reach out to the peripheries and to those voices that are seldom heard. The aim is not to overwhelm dioceses and parishes, but rather to integrate the Synodal Process into the life of the local Church in creative ways that promote deepen communion, fuller participation, and a more fruitful mission.

In this listening phase we encourage people to gather, respond to stimulus questions/images/scenarios together, listen to each other, and provide individual and group feedback, ideas, reactions, and suggestions. However, if circumstances (such as pandemic restrictions or physical distance) make face-to-face interaction difficult, then it is possible to use moderated online discussion groups, self-guided online activities, chat groups, phone calls, and various forms of social communication, as well as paper-based and online questionnaires. Prayer materials, biblical reflections, and sacred music, as well as works of art, poetry, and so on, can also be used to stimulate reflection and dialogue.

This diocesan phase is an opportunity for parishes and dioceses to encounter, experience, and live out the synodal journey together, thus discovering or developing synodal tools and pathways that are best suited for their local context, which will ultimately become the new style of the local Churches on the path of synodality.

Thus this Synod not only expects responses that can assist the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to be held in Rome in October 2023, but also desires to promote and develop the practice and experience of *being Synodal* in the course of the process and in the future moving forward. There are excellent resources available from those local Churches that have already embarked along this journey, such as the [Methodological Guide for the Ecclesial Assembly of the Latin American Episcopal Conference](#) and the [Plenary Council of Australia](#) and its [key documents](#). We encourage you to consult these resources to assist and inspire your work in your local Church.

3.2 The role of Episcopal Conferences and Synods of Oriental Churches

Once the diocesan phase has culminated with a Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting and diocesan synthesis, the episcopal conferences and synods of Oriental Churches will compile the input and feedback that they have received from the dioceses and eparchies in order to formulate syntheses that aptly capture the contributions of participants at the local level. Episcopal conferences and synods of Oriental Churches are called to discern and assemble this wider synthesis through a Pre-Synodal Meeting of their own.

These syntheses will then serve as the basis for the first edition of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, which will be published by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

3.3 The Continental Phase

This initial *Instrumentum Laboris* will be the “working document” for the seven continental meetings: Africa (SECAM); Oceania (FCBCO); Asia (FABC); Middle East (CPCO); Latin America (CELAM); Europe (CCEE) and North America (USCCB and CCCB).

These seven international meetings will in turn produce seven *Final Documents* that will serve as the basis for the second *Instrumentum Laboris*, which will be used at the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023.

3.4 The Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

Bishops and auditors will gather with the Holy Father Pope Francis in the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2023 to speak and listen to one another on the basis of the Synodal Process that began at the local level. The aim of the Synod of Bishops is not to overshadow the diocesan, episcopal conference/synod of Oriental Churches, and continental phases, but rather to discern at a universal level the voice of the Holy Spirit who has been speaking throughout the entire Church.

3.5 The Implementation Phase

Since this Synod aims to promote a new style of living out the communion, participation, and mission of the Church, the implementation phase will be crucial for walking forward together on the path of synodality. This implementation is intended to reach all the local Churches throughout the world, so that the Synodal Process entire People of God as its point of departure as well as its point of arrival (*EC*, 7). The Diocesan Contact

Person(s) and other persons and bodies that were involved in the diocesan phase can be helpful in this regard, including the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Presbyteral Council, and Parish Pastoral Councils.

The hope is that the experience of the Synodal Process will bring about a new springtime for listening, discernment, dialogue, and decision-making, so that the whole People of God can better journey together with one another and the entire human family, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

4. Travelling the Synodal Path in Dioceses

4.1 Summary of what is envisaged in the diocesan phase

This first stage of the Synodal Process provides the foundation for all the other phases that follow. More than simply responding to a questionnaire, the diocesan phase is meant to offer as many people as possible a truly *synodal experience* of listening to one another and walking forward together, guided by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God, who illuminates and brings to life this journey together, is the same Spirit who is at work in the mission that Jesus entrusted to his apostles. The Holy Spirit works through all the generations of disciples who hear God's Word and put it into practice. The Spirit sent by Christ does not only confirm the continuity of the Gospel of Jesus, but illuminates the ever-new depths of the Word of God and inspires the decisions necessary to sustain the Church's journey and invigorate her mission (cf. John 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15) (*PD*, 16).

The *Preparatory Document* outlines two "images" from Scripture to inspire our journey of building a synodal Church. The first image emerges from the "community scene" that constantly accompanies the journey of evangelization, since the preaching ministry of Jesus: everyone finds their place – the crowd, the apostles, and the Lord (*PD*, 17-21). The second image refers to the experience of the Holy Spirit in which Peter and the early community recognize the risk of placing unjustified limits on sharing the faith (*PD*, 22-24). We encourage you to reflect on these two images as a source of nourishment and inspiration in the Synodal Process.

The Gospel constant approach of reaching out to people who are excluded, marginalized, and forgotten. A common trait throughout Jesus' ministry is that faith always emerges when people are valued: their plea is heard, they are aided in their difficulty, their availability is appreciated, their dignity is confirmed by God's gaze and restored within the community. As Peter was changed by his experience with Cornelius, so too we must allow ourselves to be transformed by what God is inviting us to. Through the Synodal Process, God leads us on the common path of conversion by what we experience with one another. God reaches us through others and he reaches others through us, often in surprising ways.

In order for this to happen, it is necessary to make significant efforts to involve the highest number of people possible in a meaningful way. This is the first responsibility of the Diocesan Contact Person(s), appointed to guide and animate the diocesan phase of the Synodal Process. Superficial or scripted input that does not accurately and richly represent the experience of the people will not be helpful, nor that which does not express the full range and diversity of experiences.

In this sense, the diocesan phase should begin by finding the most effective ways of achieving the widest participation possible. We must personally reach out to the peripheries, to those who have left the Church, those who rarely or never practice their faith, those who experience poverty or marginalization, refugees, the excluded, the voiceless, etc.

The heart of the synodal experience is listening to God through listening to one another, inspired by the Word of God. We listen to each other in order to better hear the voice of Holy Spirit speaking in our world today. This can take place over the course of one gathering, but we strongly encourage that several gatherings take place to allow for a more interactive atmosphere of sharing as people get to know each other, trust one another, and feel that they can speak more freely thus making it a truly synodal experience of journeying together. In addition to the more formal aspects of speaking and listening to one another, it is important that gatherings have informal

moments as well. Pilgrimages, group activities, artistic expressions, and even coffee breaks can help to foster a sense of community through the experience of sharing life with one another.

How these meetings take place will depend on your local circumstances. Several parishes can join together, as well as ministries such as pastoral health care or Catholic education, religious communities, lay movements, and ecumenical groups.

Stimulus questions are suggested in the Questionnaire below (Part 5) to initiate and facilitate this experience of sharing and listening. The aim is not to answer all of the questions, but to choose those that are most relevant in your local context. You can also ask other questions, and we encourage you to do so. As a general guide, give more emphasis to the types of questions that evoke personal stories and real-life experiences rather than “doctrinal” statements. See Part 5 for some examples.

The feedback received throughout the listening process should be gathered into a “synthesis.” As explained in the roadmap below (Part 4.4), a synthesis should be written any time there is a gathering in the diocese to respond to the questions outlined in this *Vademecum* (Part 5). At the same time, a synthesis will be written for each diocese, and ultimately for each episcopal conference. The goal of these syntheses, at any level, is not to produce a generic summary of everything that was said or to carry out an academic exercise. Rather, the synthesis is an act of discernment in choosing and writing what will contribute to the next stage of the Synodal Process, by being sent to the diocese (in the case of consultation within the diocese) and eventually the episcopal conference (in the case of the synthesis written by the diocese). In this sense, the synthesis does not only report common trends and points of convergence, but also highlights those points that strike a chord, inspire an original point of view, or open a new horizon. The synthesis should pay special attention to the voices of those who are not often heard and integrate what we could call the “minority report.” The feedback should not only underline positive experiences but also bring to light challenging and negative experiences in order to reflect the reality of what has been listened to. Something of the *experience* of the local gathering should be conveyed in the feedback: the attitudes of the participants, and the joys and challenges of engaging together in discernment.

The feedback received from these local gatherings will then be compiled in an overall synthesis at the diocesan level. The synthesis that each diocese will elaborate at the end of this work of listening and discernment will constitute its concrete contribution to the journey of the whole People of God. It can also serve as a helpful document for identifying next steps in the journey of the local Church on the path of synodality. To facilitate the subsequent phases of the Synodal Process, it is important to condense the fruits of prayer and reflection into a maximum of **ten pages**. Other texts can be attached to the diocesan synthesis in order to support or accompany its contents.

The synthesis of each diocese or eparchy will then be transmitted to the episcopal conferences and synods of Oriental Churches. In turn, these bodies will draft their own synthesis with the same spirit of discernment as described above, on the basis of the diocesan/eparchial syntheses that they have received. The episcopal conferences and synods of Oriental Churches will then submit this synthesis that they assemble to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, which will compose the first edition of the working document (*Instrumentum Laboris*) on the basis of what was shared and experienced at the local level.

4.2 The Role of the Bishop in the Synodal Process

Synodality does not exist without the pastoral authority of the College of Bishops, under the primacy of the Successor of Peter, as well as the pastoral authority of each diocesan Bishop in the diocese entrusted to his care. The ministry of Bishops is to be pastors, teachers, and priests of sacred worship. Their charism of discernment calls them to be authentic guardians, interpreters, and witnesses to the faith of the Church. In and from the local Churches exists the one unique Catholic Church (LG, 23). The fullness of the Synodal Process can only truly exist with the involvement of the local Churches, requiring the personal involvement of the diocesan Bishop. “In virtue of this catholicity, each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the entire church, so the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by the

common effort to achieve fullness in unity” (LG, 13). The diversity of the local Churches and their context and culture bring different gifts to the whole, enriching the entire Body of Christ. This is key to understanding the Church’s path of synodality.

Therefore, the primary role of the diocesan Bishop in this Synodal Process is to facilitate the synodal experience of the whole People of God on the journey towards a more Synodal Church. The diocesan Bishop holds a key role in listening to the People of God in his diocesan Church. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Bishop can discern the most fruitful processes for listening to the People of God in his diocese, along the path of synodality undertaken by the entire Church. To assist the diocesan Bishop in this task, he is to appoint the Diocesan Contact Person or Team. Together, they can prayerfully discern. The Bishop is encouraged to take an active role in the diocesan phase of this Synodal Process. His involvement should foster open dialogue amidst the diversity of the People of God.

The Bishop can seek feedback and participation wherever helpful in the organization process. The Bishop is invited to communicate with the respective bodies, organizations, and structures in the diocese, including the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Presbyteral Council, parishes, religious communities, lay movements, various pastoral ministries (such as in schools and hospitals), and diocesan commissions to encourage their participation in the Synodal Process and to request their help as is fitting. Under the authority of the Bishop, the Diocesan Contact Person(s) can communicate directly with the coordinators in parishes and other local communities to prepare and facilitate the consultation process.

At the same time, the Bishop can ensure that appropriate resources are set aside, including financial, logistical, technical, and personnel resources. The Bishop also has a role in encouraging the involvement of diverse groups and individuals so that the Synodal Process can be a truly collaborative effort, drawing on the wide participation of the faithful and reaching the full diversity of the People of God: priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, and the laity. Diocesan structures that already aim at exercising synodality can be a vital support in this regard, particularly the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Presbyteral Council, Parish Pastoral Councils, etc.

A personal letter or even a video can be created in which the Bishop invites and encourages everyone in the diocese to participate in the process of listening, dialogue, and consultation. It is recommended that the diocesan phase of the Synodal Process open and close with a liturgical celebration, over which the Bishop can preside.

During the consultation process, the key role of the Bishop is to listen. Though the personal involvement of the diocesan Bishop in the listening process may take many forms, he is encouraged to take part and be attentive to the voice of the faithful. Besides participating in local listening sessions across the diocese, the Bishop may convene ad-hoc small community gatherings of his own if he wishes to do so, inviting representatives from a cross-section of the diocese, especially those at the peripheries. In addition, he can also listen by reviewing the feedback gathered from the consultations, discerning what the Holy Spirit is saying through the people entrusted to his care. On a regular basis, the Bishop should meet with the Diocesan Contact Person(s) to review progress of the consultation and address any challenges faced. Care should be taken to ensure that the presence of the Bishop and clergy does not have the inadvertent effect of stifling authentic and unfettered input by the faithful, especially in circumstances where there has been scandal, or simply because of cultural deference.

Finally, the Bishop convokes a Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting to culminate the diocesan phase, and works with the Diocesan Contact Person(s) to organize it. This gathering should seek wide representation from across the diocese 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. The Bishop can then review the diocesan synthesis in collaboration with the Diocesan Contact Person(s) before it is submitted to the episcopal conference. It is very important to note that the diocesan synthesis is not intended to reflect positively or negatively on the diocesan Bishop. Rather, the diocesan synthesis should be an honest report of all that was shared during the diocesan phase of the Synodal Process, representing the variety of views and perspectives of the People of God.

Understandably, embarking on this consultation process will evoke a range of feelings among pastoral leaders, from excitement and joy to anxiety, fear, uncertainty, or even scepticism. Such nuanced reactions are often part of the synodal path. Bishops can acknowledge the mix of reactions arising in the diocese, while also encouraging openness to the Holy Spirit who often works in surprising and refreshing ways. As a good shepherd for his flock, the Bishop is called to go before the People of God, to stand in their midst, and to follow behind, ensuring that no one is left out or gets lost.

4.3 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.

4.4 The Roadmap (Sample Steps for the Diocesan Phase)

The tasks involved in carrying out the listening and dialogue phase within each diocese will vary depending on local factors, but the general approach will involve the following steps:

1. Appointing the Diocesan Contact Person(s)

Each diocese should select one or two individuals to serve as the Diocesan Contact Person(s). Appendix A provides details of the responsibilities and desired qualities of these contact persons. Ideally, two co-leaders are appointed as a model of co-responsibility. If there is more than one diocesan contact person, it is recommended that at least one woman and one man be appointed. These may be voluntary or remunerated positions, and might be undertaken by person(s) already working within the diocese. Diocesan Contact Persons can be priests, religious, or lay people. Dioceses can reflect on the possible role of the Diocesan Contact Person(s) in continuing to serve the path of synodality in the diocese up to October 2023 and beyond.

2. Setting up a diocesan synodal team

The Diocesan Contact Person(s) will likely need to work with the collaboration of a core team, which can either be assembled through an open process of people expressing their interest, or by appointment of the diocesan Bishop. Members of the diocesan synodal team are likely to comprise representatives from parishes, movements, diocesan ministries, and religious communities. They can be convened as an advisory and working body for the Diocesan Contact Person(s). Beyond the diocesan phase of the current Synod, the diocesan synodal team can continue to promote and implement the path of synodality in the diocese into the future, in conjunction with the diocesan Bishop.

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. A prayerful reflection can be made with these documents to discern the key areas of focus for the diocese.

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. Resources needed for the consultation process should be identified and made available, including an overall budget, physical facilities, and online platforms. Solidarity can be organized between dioceses to provide financial assistance and human resources as needed.

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, and should have access to relevant resources including this *Vademecum* and the Synod website. The coordinators can then discern and plan the most appropriate processes for their particular groups, in communication with the diocesan synodal team.

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. Appendix B provides an outline of how a typical synodal consultation meeting can be conducted. 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.

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

Once ready, the synodal consultation process begins. The heart of this stage is are the synodal consultation meetings that happen across the diocese. A diocesan liturgical celebration can be organized to open the diocesan phase and invoke the Holy Spirit to guide the whole 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, which can follow the guidelines for the diocesan synthesis as described below.

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. Appendix C provides suggestions for organizing this meeting.

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. Appendix D provides a suggested outline. This is to be submitted to the episcopal conference by a specified date. Once finalized, the synthesis should be communicated to the public in the diocese. The Diocesan Contact Person(s) should maintain their appointment throughout the Synod process at least until the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023, and their role can continue beyond this date. In the successive phases of the present Synod, they will be a liaison point for the episcopal conferences and continental gatherings, and can help the diocese remain engaged in the Synodal Process. Where needed, they can also ensure a smooth transition towards the implementation of any suggestions raised during the consultation in the diocese. After all, this Synodal Process is not the end but a new beginning.

4.5 The Basic Ingredients of the Synodal Experience

The steps listed above in Part 4.4 are to be used as guidelines. Ultimately, the diocesan phase involves similar "ingredients" as the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, such as the one that will occur in Rome in October 2023. These elements are: a liturgical celebration to begin, gathering in a large assembly, small group meetings, moments of silence and prayer, informal conversations, shared experiences (such as pilgrimages, artistic expressions, and experiences with those who are vulnerable, handicapped persons, and the elderly), and a liturgical celebration to conclude. These basic ingredients of synodality can be easily adapted to your local circumstance to foster a fruitful synodal experience in your local Church, keeping in mind the principles, attitudes, and pitfalls outlined above in Part 2.

5. Resources for organizing the Synodal Process

5.1 Methodology for the Diocesan Synodal Process

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.

We also encourage you to integrate the theme of synodality and this Synodal Process of consultation into local or diocesan gatherings and meetings that are already planned, wherever possible. In this sense, the diocesan phase of the Synodal Process can enrich the existing pastoral agenda for the year 2021-2022, while also inspiring certain new elements.

5.2 The Informal Dimension of the Synodal Process

Listening to one another is enriched by knowing each other and sharing life together. It can be very helpful to share a common activity before starting to meet and dialogue with one another.

Some examples of activities that can be done together include a pilgrimage, social or charitable outreach, or simply sharing a meal with each other. Besides developing mutual trust among participants, this could also help foster the participation of people who are more attracted by practical action rather than intellectual discussion.

This approach follows Jesus’ example of gathering His disciples to share a meal, walk together, or simply spend time with each other. It can be important to allow sufficient time and suitable space for participants to share food and beverage, prolonging the experience of listening to one another in a less formal and more spontaneous exchange during break times. This may open the door to a more fruitful participation of people who feel less comfortable in formal meetings, as well as give some opportunities to more freely clarify certain points.

Taking part in physical, cultural, social, and charitable activities can contribute to building communion among the participants, renewing the Church through new experiences of fraternity with one another.

5.3 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.

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 neighbouring 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?

The Synod website provides suggestions on how to pose these questions to various groups of people in simple and engaging ways. Each diocese, parish, or ecclesial group should not aim to cover all the questions but should discern and focus on those aspects of synodality most pertinent to its context. Participants are encouraged to share with honesty and openness about their real-life experiences, and to reflect together on what the Holy Spirit might be revealing through what they share with one another.

A WORD OF GRATITUDE

A sincere word of gratitude to all those who organize, coordinate, and participate in this Synodal Process. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we make up the living stones through whom God builds up the Church that he desires for the third millennium (1 Peter 2:5). May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles and Mother of the Church, intercede for us as we journey together on the path that God sets before us. As in the Upper Room at Pentecost, may her maternal care and intercession accompany us as we build up our communion with one another and carry out our mission in the world. With her, we say together as the People of God: *“Let it be with me according to your word”* (Luke 1:38).

[1] The original version of the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* can be found on the Synod website.

[2] FRANCIS, [Letter to the People of God](#) (20 August 2018).

[3] FRANCIS, [Address for the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops](#) (17 October 2015).

[4] FRANCIS, [Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops](#) (17 October 2015).

[5] FRANCIS, [Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops](#) (17 October 2015).

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