

KEYWORDS 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 (ITC, 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 fulfil her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God's kingdom.

Synod:

Synod means "journeying together" and it involves listening to the Holy Spirit and to each other in order to discern the path we are called to walk together. The synod "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." Synod Handbook

SAMPLE AGENDA AND SYNODAL PROCESS INFORMATION

- **Sample Agenda** to ensure each consultation incorporates prayer, reflection, and exchange
(At the parish level the suggested time for most synodal consultations is 90-120 minutes)
 - Gathering time
 - Opening prayer or Mass
 - Welcoming and hospitality
 - Introduction to the theme: *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission* process (large group)
 - Break for informal sharing
 - Sharing around the main question and the 10 themes for consideration (small groups)
 - Reporting (small group)
 - Closing prayer and dismissal

- **Focus on the fundamental question**

Parish teams should consult section 5.3 **The Main Question for Consultation** of the *Vademecum* (see page 9, 10 & 11 of this guidebook) for suggested questions that may be relevant to a particular parish or consultation group surrounding the Ten Themes:

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| ○ Companions on the Journey | ○ Dialogue in Church and Society |
| ○ Listening | ○ Ecumenism |
| ○ Speaking Out | ○ Authority and Participation |
| ○ Celebration | ○ Discerning and Deciding |
| ○ Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission | ○ Forming Ourselves in Synodality |

Allow room for other questions that emerge within the process.

- **Tips for a successful parish consultation**

- Open each consultation with the Prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*
- Each consultation should have one facilitator and one note-taker per small group
- You are encouraged to prepare a short parish consultation guide with materials that are provided by the archdiocesan offices
- Encourage young people to be involved in planning and facilitation of consultations, especially if you plan to conduct e-synodal meetings
- Encourage parish groups to hold joint consultations within the timeframe of listening
- Link liturgical celebrations with parish consultations
- Be mindful that larger consultations can be broken up into smaller groups (groups of 7-10 are optimal for discussion)
- Incorporate moments of silence and prayer through the consultation process
- Encourage informal conversations during breaks in the process as a way of embodying the Spirit
- Combine shared experiences, such as pilgrimages and social or charitable outreach, with consultations

MAIN QUESTION AND TEN THEMES

For a Synodal Church...Communion, Participation, and Mission

The following section should be reviewed by parish leadership and parish synodal teams as they prepare for their synodal experience. It offers reflection on the main question for consultation as well as the 10 nuclei themes that can be used.

Section 5.3 The Main Question for Consultation (from the *Vademecum*)

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" (*Preparatory Document*, 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 local church 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 parish? 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 baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church? What hinders the baptized from being active in mission? What areas of mission are we neglecting? How does the parish 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 local 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 in our area? 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 parish? 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 and other consultative bodies in parishes)? 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 church 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 on all levels within our parish? 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 parish leadership to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal way?

Remember: each parish or ecclesial group should discern and focus on those aspects of synodality (communion, participation and mission) applicable in their ministry. 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. The Synod website www.synod.va/en.html provides suggestions on how to pose these questions to various groups of people in simple and engaging ways.