

CHECKLIST AND BACKGROUND MATERIALS:
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission

FOCUS 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 to grow in “journeying together”?

SHORT-TERM GOAL

Have successful diocesan consultations in a synodal spirit reflecting on the state of the Church in “journeying together” that results in a 10-page synthesis.

LONG-TERM GOAL

Re-orient the local Church toward an inherent synodal attitude in decision making processes through communion, participation, and mission.

DOCUMENTS

- [*Preparatory Document*](#)
- [*Vademecum*](#) – Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches

CONTENTS BELOW

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- Consultations: The Heart of the Diocesan Phase
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OVERVIEW

“Dialogue is our method, not as a shrewd strategy but out of fidelity to the One who never wearies of visiting the marketplace, even at the eleventh hour, to propose his offer of love (Mt 20:1-16). The path ahead, then, is dialogue among yourselves, dialogue in your presbyterates, dialogue with lay persons, dialogue with families, dialogue with society. I cannot ever tire of encouraging you to dialogue fearlessly. The richer the heritage which you are called to share with *parrhesia*, the more eloquent should be the humility with which you should offer it.”

Pope Francis¹

The calling of this synod is well aligned with the challenge Pope Francis offered his brother bishops to “dialogue fearlessly.” The Holy Father has made a request of the People of God to participate as fully and authentically as possible in the synodal process. The ask is accompanied by a desire for a quick response. This may appear a bit daunting; however, it allows room for the spirit of a synod – a lively, “participative and inclusive ecclesial process.”²

To make sure the timeline is met, all dioceses will have to think critically and crucially about where a synodal spirit is already at work in the diocese, where other work may be postponed allowing a focus to be on the Synod, and where the synodal process can be integrated into already existing meetings, programs, and catechesis.

It is a Church-wide Synod, and the People of God are called to ‘journey together’ which “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.”³

The Diocesan Pre-Synod Phase is both a challenge and an opportunity. It will be a challenge to prioritize the synod and practice a “lived synodality” that is foundational to the future of the Church. It is also an opportunity, however, for neighbors to witness to one another’s experiences and to develop deeper relationships that will support and nourish a synodal spirit within the diocese beyond the official Diocesan Pre-Synod Phase.

¹ Pope Francis, “Meeting with the Bishops of the United States of America: Address of the Holy Father at the Cathedral of St Matthew,” Washington, DC. September 23, 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150923_usa-vescovi.html

² *Preparatory Document*, no. 2.

³ See *Vademecum*, no. 5.3.

CONSULTATIONS: THE HEART OF THE DIOCESAN PHASE

“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.”⁴ The center of the synodal experience is found in a series of local meetings or consultations, where the local Church listens together to answer this 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”?⁵

HOLDING CONSULTATION MEETINGS

The Vatican has asked for the coordination of a large-scale, yet locally established synod. The [*Preparatory Document*](#) and the [*Vademecum*](#) offer a flexible outline for how to go about this. Given the short time in which this needs to be established, the USCCB offers these suggestions to meet the proposed schedule from the Synod of Bishops. The synod process may look different from diocese to diocese; it may require a structure outside of the traditional diocesan hierarchical standards; the key is to listen to the Holy Spirit and be flexible.

Your Synod Team should develop where and when the local consultations take place. They can begin by looking at existing structures within the diocese and the parishes that are already synodal in nature – parish and financial councils, various parish and diocesan groups, for example. They should also encourage universities, health care systems, and Catholic Charities to do the same. It is crucial that the Synod team also create new opportunities for consultations with communities that otherwise might not be represented.

⁴ *Vademecum*, 5.1.

⁵ *Vademecum*, 5.3.

STEPS FOR THE SYNODAL PROCESS

These steps are not necessarily linear; some may happen simultaneously, and some may happen in various orders.⁶

- Appointing the Diocesan Co-Contacts
- Setting up a Diocesan Synodal Team
- Discerning the path for your diocese
- Planning the participatory process (Consultations)
- Preparing group coordinators for synodal consultation meetings
- Providing an orientation workshop for diocesan synodal team and local coordinators
- Communicating to everyone
- Implementing, monitoring, and guiding the synodal consultation process
- Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting
- Preparing and submitting Diocesan Synthesis

⁶ See *Vademecum*, no. 4.4.

A PROPOSED TIMELINE

Early October 2021	Creating Diocesan Synodal Team
October 2021	Synod Team a) identifies local events at parishes and schools that a synodal component could be adapted to; b) encourages universities, health care systems, and Catholic Charities to do the same; c) creates opportunities for consultations for communities that otherwise might not be represented
October 9-10, 2021	Synod Opening in Rome (perhaps a time to gather Diocesan Synod team together)
October 17-18, 2021	Synod Opening in Diocese (see Appendix below)
October – November	Training for diocesan facilitators (Trainings can serve as initial meetings to serve as model for diocese)
November 2021	Preparing the People of God through preaching, catechesis, and other prayer opportunities (adoration, rosary, prayer circles, petitions)
November 15-18	USCCB Plenary Assembly: Additional Presentation on the Synod
November 28, 2021	Advent – Consultations with the People of God begin
January 18-25, 2022	Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: opportunity to consult with other Christians
June 1, 2022	Local reports given to the Diocesan Team
June 2022	Drafting and feedback of Diocesan report
June 2022	Pre-Synod Meeting
June 30, 2022	Diocesan Reports given to USCCB
July – August 2022	Drafting and feedback of USCCB Report
August 15, 2022	USCCB Report given to Synod of Bishops

DIOCESAN SYNODAL TEAM⁷

ABOUT

- Facilitates the consultation process.
- Meets regularly during the course of Synod.
 - Operates with a disposition of synodality that is mindful of: spiritual maturity, collaboration, communication, diocesan structures and processes, diversity, and humility.
- Ideally, the Diocesan Synodal Team will continue after the Diocesan Pre-Synod Meeting, through the course of the 2023 Synod, and beyond to implement the fruits of the Synod to becoming a Synodal Church.

MEMBERSHIP

- Local Ordinary⁸
 - is to “facilitate the synodal experience of the whole People of God on the journey toward a more Synodal Church”
 - Promotes the synodal spirit within the People of God
 - Provides financial, logistical, technical and personnel resources
 - Meets regularly with Diocesan Co-Contacts
 - Participates in local synod meetings
- Diocesan Co-Contacts
 - Appointed by the Local Ordinary
 - Main point of contact for local ordinary regarding synodal process
 - Liaise between diocese and USCCB
 - Subscribes to the [Synodal Journey Newsletter](#) Develops how the diocesan synodal process will unfold and topics discussed as relevant to the local context
 - Facilitates local synodal consultations
 - Trains the People of God to facilitate synodal consultations
 - Resource for local parishes and groups
 - Assists in the planning and execution of Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting
 - Facilitates the development of the diocesan synthesis
 - Ensures consultations with traditionally marginalized voices

⁷ See Appendix A of the *Vademecum* for a more in-depth description.

⁸ See *Vademecum*, no. 4.2.

- *Note:* Diocesan Co-Contacts do not have to be members of the clergy. It is recommended that the co-contacts be one man and one woman. At least one should be a lay person.
- Team
 - Facilitates local synodal consultations
 - Assists in training synodal facilitators
 - Acts as logistical support at synodal consultations
 - Identifies and invites groups on periphery into consultation
 - There is no recommended number for the Diocesan Synod Team; however, it should be representative of the diocese:
 - Lay people
 - Clergy and consecrated religious
 - Cultures
 - Generations
 - Ministries and charisms
 - Socio-economic status
 - *Note:* Particular attention should be paid towards the inclusivity of young people, families, migrants and refugees, and the poor.

PREPARING YOUR DIOCESE

- The goal of the preparing the People of God prior to the start of consultations is to invigorate a spirit of dialogue, collaboration, and synodality within the diocese as a crucial part of the synod process, which is focused upon all the baptized.
 - **No one** – no matter their religious affiliation – **should be excluded** from sharing their perspective and experiences⁹

- Communication
 - Write a pastoral letter to be read at Mass for the opening the Diocesan Phase of the Synod
 - Frequent communication about the synodal process can encourage the “journeying together” that is necessary for synodality
 - Invite the press where appropriate to attend consultations
 - Creating communication infrastructure for updates on consultation opportunities
 - Video messaging from the local ordinary
 - Social media campaigns
 - Have your communications team follow the Vatican Synod social media:
 - [Instagram](#) [Twitter](#)
 - [Facebook](#) [Flickr](#)

- Invitation
 - It is important to extend invitations for consultations, especially with intentionality toward those on the margins and the poor.
 - Create a team/process to identify the groups most often on the margins

- Education
 - Encourage priests, educators, and catechists to speak about the synodal process at Mass, in the classroom, and religious instruction
 - Link consultations with Catholic school events
 - Encourage young people to get involved in the facilitation of consultations

⁹ “Insofar as they want to help the Church on her synodal journey of seeking what is good and true.”
Emphasis original. See *Vademecum* 2.1.

- Consult local Catholic colleges and universities about assistance and participation

- Information
 - Materials should be distributed in a timely way, so the People of God have ample opportunity to prepare their hearts and minds to participate in synodal consultations

- Prayer
 - Encourage the *Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus* prayer found in the *Vademecum* to be prayed at Mass during the synodal process

 - Scripture reflections

 - Prayers to be said in community, in personal preparation for participation, and in the consultation itself

 - Suggestions for ties into liturgical celebrations, especially Marian feasts, Advent, and Lent

STRUCTURING CONSULTATIONS

- Ensure each consultation incorporates prayer, reflection, and exchange
- **Focus on the fundamental question**
- Diocesan Team should consult Section 5.3 of the [Vademecum](#) for suggested questions that may be relevant to a particular diocese or consultation group surrounding the Ten Themes:
 - Companions on the Journey
 - Listening
 - Speaking Out
 - Celebration
 - Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission
 - Dialogue in Church and Society
 - Ecumenism
 - Authority and Participation
 - Discerning and Deciding
 - Forming Ourselves in Synodality
- Allow room for other questions that emerge within the process

TIPS

- Open each consultation with *Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus* prayer found in the *Vademecum*
- Each consultation should have one facilitator and one note-taker
- Prepare a short Diocesan Consultation guide
- Encourage young people to be involved in planning and facilitation of consultations, especially in e-synodal meetings
- Encourage parishes and groups to hold joint consultations
- Link liturgical celebrations with consultations
- Be mindful that larger consultations can be broken up into smaller groups
- Incorporate moments of silence and prayer through the consultation process
- Encourage informal conversations as a way of embodying the Spirit
- Combine shared experiences, such as pilgrimages and social or charitable outreach, with consultations

ECUMENICAL CONSULTATION

- The [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#) (January 18-25) presents a perfect opportunity in the middle of the synodal process to engage more deeply in ecumenical relationship.
- Have a diocesan consultation with diverse representatives from other ecclesial communities.
- Consult your [CADEIO](#) representative (Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers) about ecumenical and interreligious events in which it is feasible to attach a consultation.

DIOCESAN SYNTHESIS¹⁰

PROCESS

- Diocesan Co-Contacts and Diocesan Synodal Team should keep track of any feedback/notes about synodal process itself – the decisions, structures, choices of questions, etc. to help provide contextual information for the report.
- Each Consultation Facilitator should provide the Synod Team a simple report describing the results of the consultation noting the context of the discussion and the synodal process itself.
- From these reports, the Diocesan Team should:
 - Describe the current reality in the Church in light of the synodal experience
 - Make recommendations for how the Diocese can grow in synodality

PRE-SYNODAL MEETING

- Appendix C of the *Vademecum* envisions an “opportunity for diverse members of the diocese to come together for a liturgical celebration, to pray together, to reflect on their experience of the Synodal Process in the diocese, to listen to feedback that has emerged from the synodal consultation meetings across the diocese, to dialogue about the current reality of the local Church and the signs of the times, and to discern the Holy Spirit’s call for the diocese on the path of synodality.”

SYNTHESIS

- Prepared collaboratively by a small team. For continuity, the team may be comprised of members of the Diocesan Synodal Team. The Diocesan Co-Contacts will facilitate the synthesis.
- **No longer than 10 pages**
 - May include supporting materials: images, videos, artistic expressions, and personal testimonies
- Should respond to the appropriate questions in Appendix D of the *Vademecum*.
- Should be reflective of diversity of experience, inclusive of views in the minority, recognizing that “minority reports” can be prophetic.

¹⁰ See Appendix D of *Vademecum*

- In light of transparency, the Diocesan Synthesis draft is to be made public as an opportunity for the People of God to respond, and have their responses incorporated into the final Diocesan Synthesis.

RESOURCES

VATICAN RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- [Methodological Guide to the Process of Listening to the People of God on Pilgrimage in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)
- [Documents for the Australian Plenary Council: Listen to what the Spirit is saying...](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

General Secretariat for Synod of Bishops
Via della Conciliazione 34
VA-00120 Vatican City
+39 06 698 84821 / 84324
synodus@synod.va
<https://www.synod.va/en.html>

USCCB

Richard Coll (rcoll@usccb.org)
Julia McStravog (synod@usccb.org)
<http://www.usccb.org/synod>

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