



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

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## Delegates' Guide to Synodal Pathway

For clergy, parish representatives and those organising the synodal pathway

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# “ The Church of God is convoked in Synod.”

Synod Preparation Document #1, Synod of Bishops' Office

## Introduction

Pope Francis has launched a worldwide process of listening and discerning, a 'synodal pathway' from October 2021-2023. Synodal means, 'journeying together'. The Pope is inviting the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission.

It is precisely the path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium

Pope Francis, Commemoration of the 50th  
Anniversary of the institution of the Synod of  
Bishops

The synod process is a time of 'journeying together', reflecting on the journey. We begin by listening to one another, sharing our experience of travelling together in a time of challenge and change, which has been intensified by the pandemic. We will consider our wider experience of journeying together, as members of the Church and alongside others journeying in the world.

## Resources

Resources and information can be found at [www.cliftondiocese/synod](http://www.cliftondiocese/synod)

- Walking the Synodal Way
- Delegate's Guide (this one)
- Prayer Cards
- Posters
- Information Session PP.
- Tool Kit for Running Sessions
- Journeying Together – Participant's Guide
- Journeying Together – Facilitators' Guide
- Spiritual Conversations – Participants' Guide
- Interactive Listening Activities
- Guide to Group Synodal Conversations
- Over-all Summary Feedback Report
- Template for Reporting Back

## How to use these Resources

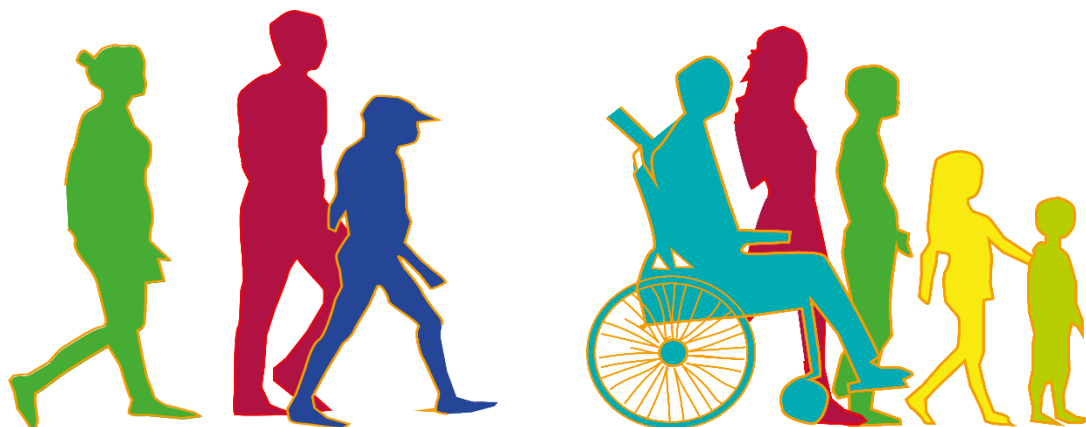
We invite you to use these resources in the way that best suits your parish/community. Here are some suggestions:

- Use the interactive activities to create easy ways for the parish, religious community, organisation to contribute to the Synod process.
- Ensure that people have a prayer card – these have been sent to all parishes.
- Ask suitable people to act as listeners and host one-to-one conversations with people both within and beyond the host community (Use the simple Question framework)
- Host group listening sessions (See the guide to Group Synodal Conversations and the Facilitator's Guide).

## Taking Part

Three types of Synodal Conversations are encouraged:

- Group synodal conversations in parishes.
- Listening events for young people, Ethnic groups, chaplaincies, diocesan networks, and school leaders.
- On-line listening events for those who cannot attend in person.
- One-to-one conversations



## Your Role

Thank you for agreeing to support the Synodal pathway in your parish or community. The listening process is focused on local dioceses and local Church communities until early 2022. Your role is crucial in helping to ensure that people can join in with varied opportunities to engage, and that people are supported to participate well by listening attentively to others, and by contributing their own experience.

If you can, form a team. Help one another to consider each of your strengths. Do you have everything you need to organise the synodal pathway in your community? If not, who else could you invite to take on a role? For example, you may be a gifted organiser or convener, but are there others in the parish/community who are better placed to facilitate your group synodal conversations? Perhaps a catechist could help, or one of the staff from the school. Invite them to support you and talk them through the Synodal Process so that they feel confident.

Your role will be to work together to enable people to participate in the synodal pathway. You are also invited to take on a special listening role. This means to listen deeply as the synodal pathway continues so that you can feedback what you have heard to the Synod team in the Diocese. You will, in a sense, need to try to listen to what emerges from the entire listening phase so you can be faithful in how you feedback what has been shared. It is not necessary to attend every group that is being run because each conversation group will help you with this by giving you written feedback.

# Overview of Diocesan Synodal Process

**October 17, 2021** - Opening of the Diocesan Phase of Synod by Bishop Declan

**November 6th 8th 9th and 13<sup>th</sup>** – Information Sessions

**20th November** - Assembly of Parish Delegates

**21st November** - Beginning of the listening phase in parishes

**Advent 2021** - a time of prayer and preparation to form groups and opportunities for listening conversations.

**January – February 2022** – Listening Conversations to take place

**February 6, 13, 20, 27<sup>th</sup>** – Area Assemblies

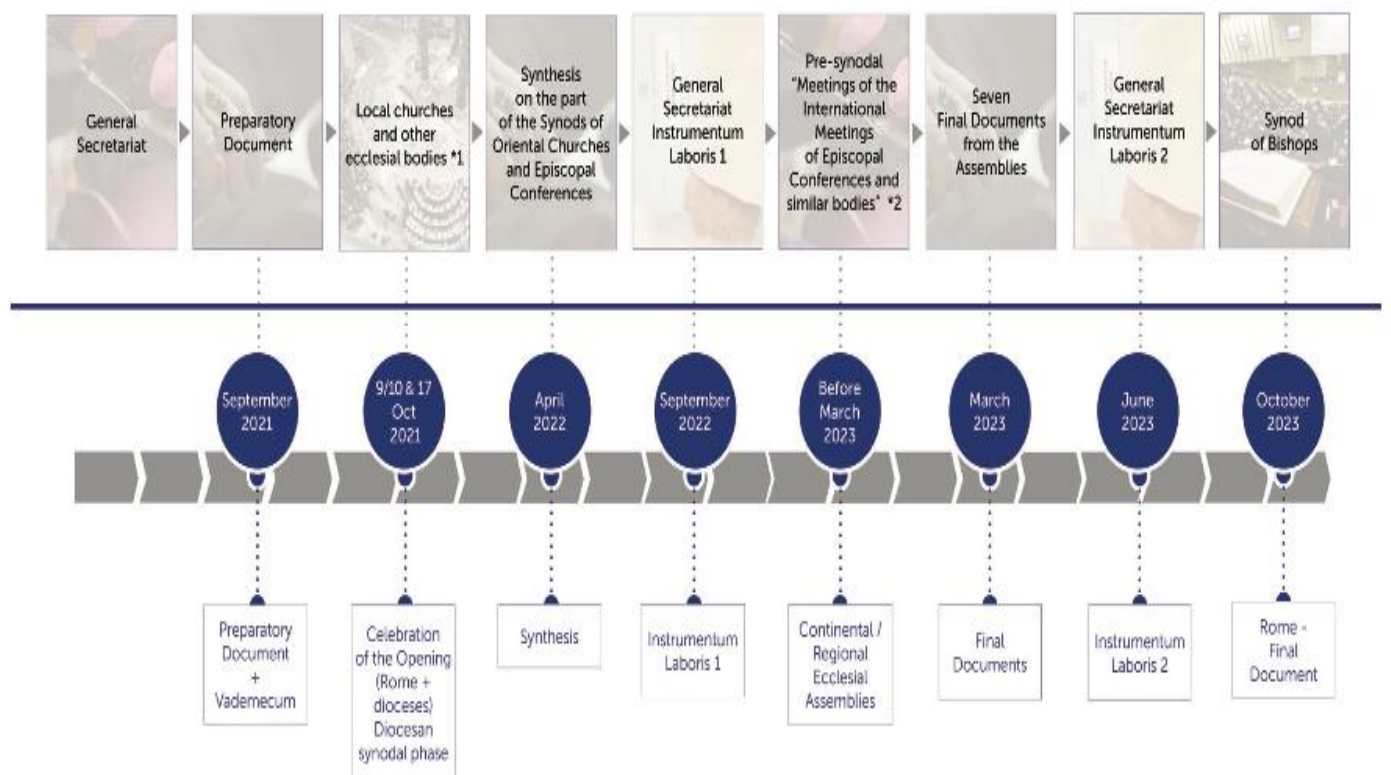
**28th February 2022** – deadline for parish and communities submissions

**March 2022** Bishop Declan with the Synod Team compile the report to be submitted by 8th April.



# Overview of Global Synodal Process

## FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION AND MISSION XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS



\*1 Dioceses, Consecrated Life (MISG-USG, UNIONS & FEDERATIONS), Associations of the Faithful, Institutions of Higher Education  
\*2 Africa (SECAM), Oceania (PCBCO), Asia (FABC), Middle East (CPCCO), Europe (CCCE), Latin America (CELAM), North America (USCCB / CCCB)



## Who are we listening to?

A consistent question has been – who is this for? Who are we being asked to listen to? Is it just for our parishes?

The simple answer to this question is that we listen to as many people as we can, trying to ensure that no one feels left out or left behind. The Synod is providing several pathways for listening which it is hoped will enable many experiences to be shared, both joyful and painful.

Our listening needs to involve those who may experience exclusion or marginalisation in the Church or our world. All these voices are important so that we can discern what steps the Spirit of God may be inviting us to take.

Growing as a synodal Church - a Church that journeys together is a participative and inclusive process that offers everyone, especially those on the 'margins' the opportunity to express themselves, to be heard and to contribute to how the People of God can better 'journey together'.

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“Special care should be taken to involve those who may risk being excluded: women, those with disabilities, refugees, migrants, the elderly, people who live in poverty, Catholics who rarely or never practise their faith.... 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 marginalised.”

*Vademecum, for the Synod on Synodality, from the Synod of Bishops, Rome #2.1*

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## Questions to Consider

When you are considering who to invite to engage, please take time to reflect. The following questions, may help:

- In our parish/community/school, who are those who “walk together”?
- Who those who seem further apart?
- What groups or individuals are left on the margins of the parish/community?
- Which voices might be missing, especially women and young people?
- With whom do we journey outside our parish/community? With whom are we called to grow as companions?
- How well do we listen to those on the peripheries? What space is there for the voice of the minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalisation, or social exclusion?

## Pathways for Engagement

We are offering various pathways for engaging people in a listening process. Each of these can be used to include the voices of both those within our parish/community and those outside:

- Simple interactive activities to enable people to participate
- One-to-one
- Group conversations

## The Goal

The goal is to ensure the participation of the greatest number possible, to listen to the living voice of the entire People of God and those we journey alongside. This will not be possible unless we make special efforts to actively reach out to people where they're at, especially those who are often excluded or who are not involved in the life of the Church. There must be a clear focus on the participation of the poor, marginalised, vulnerable, and excluded, to listen to their voices and experiences.

## Engagement Process

The process of the Synod can be supported by taking time to focus on 'engagement'. This section provides some ideas based on a methodology developed over many years, learning from different types of projects. Often parishes/communities invest huge amounts of time and effort in developing initiatives that receive a luke-warm take up, sometimes just involving the handful parishioners who turn up faithfully to everything. The method shared here is designed to help us think about how to engage a broader range of people, raising their awareness of the Synod process and then engaging their interest in a specific opportunity to get involved, which is relevant to them. This leads people to commit to taking action, whether large or small.

The stages to this engagement process are:

1. Raise Awareness
2. Stimulate Interest
3. Create an Opportunity
4. Facilitate Choice
5. Preparation
6. Action

One of the most important things about this process of engagement is accepting that people will engage with projects in

different ways and hence there needs to be a variety of ways available to them to get involved. That is why the synod pathways are designed to allow different levels of involvement. For example, someone may hear a homily about listening, pick up a participant's guide or prayer card as they leave Mass and read it on the way home. This might lead to them to consider what they could do to listen to the Holy Spirit in their own lives and then making a written response. Other parishioners may, after having their interest stimulated, decide to stay behind for a few minutes after Mass and participate in one of the activities, or to attend one of the listening events. Over time, this may lead to committing to a more engaged involvement, such as taking part in ongoing groups that might be set up in the parish.

There are many opportunities to engage people. It simply involves us taking the time to go beyond merely making people aware of the Synodal process (although that is the first step). We need to consider how we might get people interested further and, crucially, what the specific opportunities might be that would attract someone to decide to take part. Every opportunity should be made to do this over the weeks leading up to the listening phase. Think big! How can you raise awareness and stimulate interest in the different opportunities?

## Ideas for Raising Awareness

- How can you use the Sunday liturgy to raise awareness and stimulate interest in the synodal pathway?
- Consider expanding your newsletter for several weeks – from now and into the listening phase. Consider changing the look of the newsletter using the Synod logo as a focal point. Use the synod resources – copy and edit the text to suit your needs.

## Worldwide Synodal Process – The Church is listening!

Pope Francis has launched a worldwide process of listening and discerning, a 'synodal pathway' from October 2021-2023.

Synodal means 'journeying together'. The Pope is inviting the entire Church to reflect on this theme: "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."

The synodal process is a time of 'journeying together'. It is also a time to reflect together on the journey. We will begin by listening to one another, sharing our experience of travelling together in a time of profound change, intensified by the challenging time of the pandemic. And we will consider our wider experience of journeying together, as members of the Church and alongside others journeying in the world.

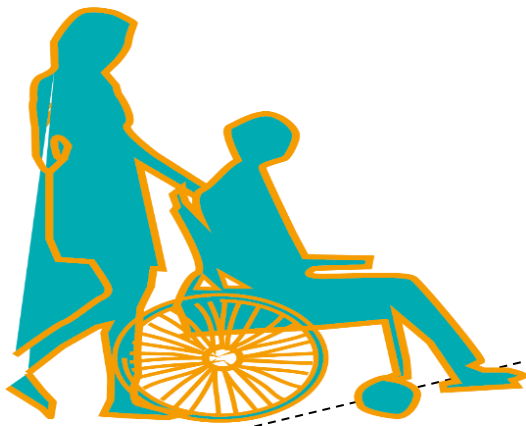
It is hoped that every parish in the world will take part. Our parish will participate with a series of listening events in January. Save the dates... *[Insert dates and details of your listening events]*

There will also be opportunities to gather with our Bishops and people from across the diocese in area listening events. All are welcome.

- Prepare your social media using extracts from resources
- Think of existing groups and raise awareness using them.
- Consider what listening events you wish to host. Develop a promotion plan for each of those.

## Inviting and addressing barriers to engagement

All that is left is to extend the invitation so people can choose to say yes. This also means being aware of the barriers that may mean people feel they can't engage (e.g., transport or childcare) and considering how we can support them – can we pool lifts to events or run a crèche? Nothing replaces the power of a personal invitation. A face-to-face approach such as the following is far more powerful than a notice in the newsletter:



### To a Parishioner

“Pope Francis has launched a new initiative [explain a little about the vision of the Synod]. What do you think? It is important to the parish, and we need people to participate so that we hear from as many as possible and so that we listen to one another. I think you would enjoy it, and I think you would bring a lot to it. Your experience in [e.g. supporting your neighbours in lockdown] would really help. Would you consider coming to one of the listening sessions? ... Great – I'll give you some material to help you prepare. What can I do to help ensure that you can make it? Do you need anything from me?”



## To someone outside the community

Pope Francis has launched a new initiative... [explain a little about the vision of the Synod emphasising that the Church wants to learn from the experience of others – of all faiths and none]. What do you think? It is important to me and to my community that we hear from a wide range of people. We would really value local people to share their experience with us and help us consider how we, as the Catholic community can be better at journeying with others. We need people to participate so that we hear from as many as possible. I think you would bring a lot to your experience [e.g., from your own faith community / from not feeling welcome / of this local community] would really help. Would you consider having a conversation with me? Or I'll give you some material to help you prepare. What can I do to help ensure that you can make it? Do you need anything from me?

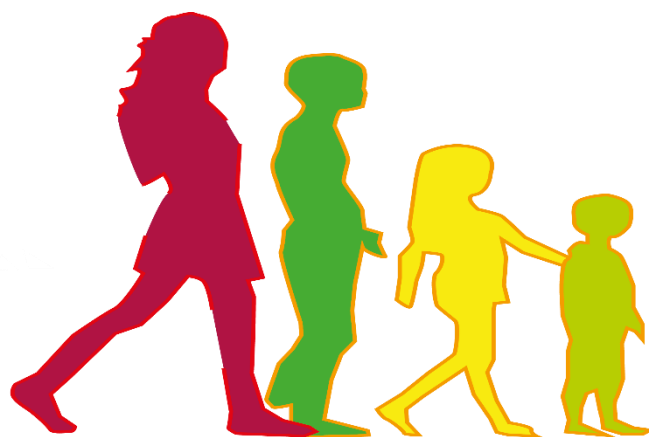
## Hosting Listening Conversations

### Hosting one-to-one or small informal groups

Invite suitable people in your parish/community to act as 'listeners' and host one-to-one conversations (or small informal groups). Use the 'Listening Deeply' resource in the appendix and the 'Simple Question Framework' to guide you.

These simple conversations are an effective way to listen to people who may otherwise, be overlooked, both within and beyond the community. 'Listeners' may want to invite different people to have a conversation with them:

- People from within your parish/community who may not participate in the Synod process in another way. It is a good opportunity to hear from them
- Members of your parish/community who no longer participate in the way they used to e.g., no longer come to Sunday Mass.
- Children or family members who appear to be more distant from the parish/community than yourself
- Those who may feel marginalised or excluded from the Church and/or society
- People of other Christian denominations and other faiths
- People of no faith who may be willing to help your parish/community consider how to 'journey together'.



## Hosting Group Conversations

A detailed guide for hosting group conversations can be found in the resources available [www.cliftondiocese.com/synod](http://www.cliftondiocese.com/synod). This guide, along with a participants' guide offers suggested session process.

### **Spiritual Conversation - another method of group dialogue**

The Spiritual Conversation method promotes active participation, attentive listening, reflective speaking, and spiritual discernment. Simple questions are shared in advance (see appendix Participants Guide for Spiritual Conversations). Participants form small groups of about 6-7 persons from diverse backgrounds. This method takes about at least an hour and comprises three rounds. In the first round, everyone takes equal turns to share the fruit of his or her prayer, in relation to the reflection questions circulated beforehand. There is no discussion in this round and all participants simply listen deeply to each person and attend to how the Holy Spirit is moving within oneself, within the person speaking, and in the group as a whole. This is followed by a time of silence to note one's interior movements.

In the second round, participants share what struck them most in the first round and what moved them during the time of silence. Some dialogue can also occur, and the same spiritual attentiveness is maintained. Once again this is followed by a time of silence. Finally, in the third-round participants reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation and what moved them most deeply. New insights and even unresolved questions are also noted. Spontaneous prayers of gratitude can conclude the conversation.

Usually, each small group will have a facilitator and note-taker. (A detailed description of this process is provided on the Vatican Synod website: [www.synod.va](http://www.synod.va))

Once the group dialogue has taken place, participants should review and share about their experience of the process within their small group. How was their experience? What were the ups and downs? What new and refreshing insights might they have



discovered? What have they learned about the synodal way of proceeding? How was God present and at work during their time together?

## Supporting your synodal conversations

The synodal pathway is about sharing our experience of journeying together as Church, and discerning steps forward. It is, as Pope Francis says, about how we live and apply our faith today.

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“What is under discussion at synodal gatherings are not the traditional truths of Christian doctrine. The Synod is concerned mainly with how teaching can be lived and applied in the changing contexts of our time.”  
(Let us Dream, 84-85)

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Two resources to avoid different kinds of conversation which might take us away from synodal listening and discerning are to be found in the Appendix:

- Listening Deeply
- Staying Focused on Synodality



## Feedback

We invite you to collate a report by 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022. Please use the template provided on [www.cliftondiocese.com/synod](http://www.cliftondiocese.com/synod). Please feel free to return all the record forms from one-to-one and group conversations.

As a delegate, prepare yourself to complete the summary by meeting with others who journeyed with you to organise the process (or several people who participate/facilitated groups) and consider these questions:

### What was the story of your synodal pathway in your community?

- What were the main steps you took?
- What was done to engage as many participants as possible and to reach out to the peripheries?
- Approximately what proportion of people in the community participated in one way or another?
- Were there any groups of people whose participation was especially noteworthy?
- Were there specific groups of people who did not participate for any reason?
- What was most significant about the whole experience?
- What were the high points and low points, or the consolations and desolations?
- What dispositions, attitudes, or feelings were notable?
- What was particularly significant, surprising or unexpected?
- Which stories or real-life experiences were especially moving and why?
- What tensions or disagreements emerged from the listening process?
- What topics or issues gave rise to diverse points of view?
- Which points of view seem to have strong resonance? Which points of view were mentioned less but are interesting and noteworthy?

Overall, what were the fruits that the Holy Spirit has brought about through this experience?

- What new perspectives or new horizons emerged?
- What dreams, desires, and aspirations for the Church were expressed by participants?
- Based on what was shared, what steps might your community feel called to take in their journeying together?



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*With grateful thanks to the on-going support of other Dioceses in bringing this material together especially RCDO*

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