

XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Listening and Discernment Guide Session II



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”?

The three dimensions of the Synod 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.

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. Genuine efforts must be made to ensure the involvement of those at the margins or who feel excluded.

The three areas covered within this theme are:

- **Authority and participation**
- **Discerning and deciding**
- **Forming ourselves in synodality**

PRAY TOGETHER

READ QUESTIONS
AND REFLECT

SHARE AND
LISTEN

PRAY AND
RESPOND

If you are working in a group of five or more, you may need to set aside 1.5 hours to use this guide appropriately.

At the beginning of this session, you are invited to pray together.

You might like to read Scripture, use the words written below or just speak to God from your heart.

Prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*

**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.

STEP 02

READ AND REFLECT

Read and reflect on the following questions in silence. You may want to choose a few that speak to you the most.

Reflect on your personal experience of faith, life and the Church related to these questions.

Write a list of all the responses to these questions that come to mind.

Share aloud all of the responses you have written down, working together through Step 3.

1. 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?

2. 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?

3. 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?

ROUND 1: SHARING MY REFLECTION

- Speakers work in a clockwise direction. The facilitator may nominate someone to start, then participants can share one after the other.
- Everyone speaks for two to three minutes about what happened during their reflection time.
- Begin with the phrase: *“In my reflection today...”*
- When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart. The focus is to listen to others, rather than simply thinking about what you want to say.
- Between each person, there will be a 30-second pause to recall what was said.
- At the end, the group pauses for a period of prayer. This may help to absorb what was said and to take a break before beginning the second round.

ROUND 2: GATHERING WHAT I HEARD

- This round will be shorter than the first. Speaking order is clockwise, as before.
- Everyone speaks for one to two minutes.
- This is an opportunity to answer questions like:
 - *What consoled me or struck me as I listened to my companions?*
 - *What did I hear? What did I feel? What was the Spirit saying to me/us?*
 - *Was I especially touched by a particular sharing?*
- Begin with the phrase, *“In the group I heard...and it left me feeling...”*.
- When everyone finishes, the group pauses for a period of prayer.

ROUND 3: MOVING FORWARD

- In this round, participants are not obliged to speak, and can speak spontaneously without any particular order.
- This is an opportunity to reflect on questions like:
 - *Is there a common thread in what was shared? Is there something missing that you had expected would be said?*
 - *Have you received any particular insight or revelation? What is it?*
 - *Where did you experience a sense of harmony with others as you shared with one another?*
 - *What are the feelings of the group? Is there consensus or disagreement?*
 - *What is the way forward?*
- The leader helps summarise the discussion.

At this stage, the group begins to realise what unites them. It is here that signs of the action of the Holy Spirit in the group begin to manifest themselves, and the conversation becomes an experience of shared discernment.

STEP 04

PRAY AND RESPOND

PRAY At the end of the Spiritual Conversation, you are invited to pray together. You can use the words below, or you might like to say a prayer of gratitude in your own words. You may also choose to close with the prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*.

**Creator God, we thank you for the encounter with one another today.
We know that where two or three are gathered, you are in our midst.**

**Thank you for being with us and for the courage to speak boldly and
with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.**

**We ask you to continue to walk with us, as we discover the pathway
toward the future you are calling us to.**

Amen.

RESPOND Your voice is important as it conveys the main fruits of the discernment of the whole People of God across the world.

It is recommended that your group's response be captured in a short summary of no more than 250 words.

- The response should reflect the diversity of views and opinions expressed and pay particular attention to the lived experiences of participants, both positive and negative. It should be faithful to the people's voices and to whatever emerged from their discernment and dialogue, rather than a series of generalised or doctrinally correct statements.
- Views should not be excluded simply because they were expressed by a small minority of participants.
- Overall, the response should capture what the Holy Spirit has inspired the community to see regarding the current reality of synodality, including the present lights and shadows, and in what ways the Holy Spirit is inviting the community to grow in synodality.

Your response will become your submission to the Synod of Bishops and will be compiled and sent to your diocese. Please submit your response online between 20 October 2021 and 17 December 2021 at <https://www.catholic.org.au/synodalchurch> via the **SUBMISSION** link.



Thank you for contributing to the discernment process
of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

*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).*



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