



STEPS IN HOSTING THE SYNODAL CONSULTATION

STEPS IN HOSTING THE SYNODAL CONSULTATION – A COORDINATOR’S GUIDE¹

Before the Consultation

1. Assemble a team of Synod Coordinators who will serve as organisers (for sending out invitations to encourage maximum participation and arranging for the use of technology, etc.); facilitators for the sessions (who will lead and manage the flow of conversation); note-takers/scribes (who will take the notes during the conversations and assist in producing the synthesis/report).
2. Ensure that every member of the team understands the nature of synodality and the synodal process, has been exposed to training/formation and information on the process in the local Church; and has access to the required resources to effectively carry out his/her responsibilities.
3. Develop a schedule of consultations and encourage participation through parish announcements, social media, text messages/calls, etc. A special effort should be made to involve those whose voices are not usually heard. Due to the pandemic, online engagement is encouraged but, where health guidelines and protocols can be observed to ensure participant safety for individual or small group engagement, in-person sessions can be arranged.
4. Where large sessions are being organised online, the technology must allow for break-out into smaller groups and there must be an adequate number of facilitators and scribes. Additional persons should be co-opted in advance of the sessions and prepared for those roles, where necessary.
5. At least two (2) weeks before the consultation, participants should receive material which would help in their preparation, e.g., a brief background reading on synodality, details of the procedure for the consultation and the fundamental questions to be discussed. This information should also be shared widely via social media and in other forms, so that it can be accessed by as many persons as possible.

During the Consultation

1. Begin with a song or hymn inviting the presence of the Holy Spirit. Pre-recorded songs may be used.

¹ This document contains excerpts from the *Vademecum* and adaptations of information from the *Vademecum* and *Preparatory Document*. These source documents are available at <https://www.synod.va/en.html>

2. Pray the Synod Prayer.
3. Welcome participants and give a short introduction, explaining the process which will be followed during the session.
4. Share a Scripture Reading. A list of suggested readings will be provided by the Synod Team.
5. Allow a short period of silent reflection on the Word of God.
6. Play the video entitled “Synod on Synodality – All You Need to Know”, which will be provided by the Synod Team.
7. Introduce the Fundamental Questions that will guide the conversations and explain the purpose of the Stimulus Questions. You may select from among the Stimulus Questions provided. The *Vademecum* reminds us: “*It is often better to have fewer questions which can be explored deeply, rather than have many questions that would be covered superficially.*”

8. The Fundamental Question(s) vs the Stimulus Questions

The **Fundamental Questions** are the ones that the entire Church has to answer in the reports.

The **Stimulus Questions** are those which evoke personal stories and real-life experiences which encourage us to share, to listen, to reflect and, through this, to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church.

Fundamental Question 1: How is this “journeying together” happening today in your particular Church?

Stimulus Questions for the Conversation:

- i. What are our experiences of journeying together in communion, participation, and mission (synodality) in our local Church?*
- ii. What joys did those experiences bring?*
- iii. What difficulties and obstacles have we encountered?*
- iv. What wounds did those experiences reveal?*
- v. What insights have those experiences elicited?*
- vi. Whose voices are currently not being heard?*
- vii. Who is absent from our worship community?*
- viii. What do you think would make our parish, community, etc., better?*
- ix. What can each of us do and what can we do collectively to make it better?*

Fundamental Question 2: What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?

Stimulus Questions for the Conversation:

- i. *What paths forward are opening up for our local Church?*
- ii. *Where in these experiences does the voice of the Holy Spirit resound?*
- iii. *What are the areas for change for our Church and what steps can be taken to realise those changes?*

9. Participants are to be reminded that they are about to participate in a Spiritual Conversation which requires active participation, attentive listening, reflective speaking, and spiritual discernment. In large gatherings, participants will form small groups of persons from diverse backgrounds, depending on the number of facilitators available.

10. This part of the session should take approximately 90 minutes and comprise three rounds of discussion on each of the two Fundamental Questions. In the first round, everyone takes equal turns to share the fruit of his or her prayer, in relation to the 1st Fundamental Question. 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 themselves, within the persons speaking, and in the group. This is followed by a time of silence to note one's interior movements.

11. In the second round, participants share what struck them as most significant or insightful 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. The Stimulus Questions can be used to encourage participation and meaningful sharing of experiences. Once again this is followed by a time of silence.

12. 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 round of conversations on the 1st Fundamental Question.

13. The same process (3 rounds of conversation) is followed for the 2nd Fundamental Question

14. Once the group dialogue has taken place, participants should review and share their reflections about their experience of the process within their small group. The one-to-one sharing may include questions such as: (a) How was their experience? (b) What were the ups and downs of the process? (c) What new and refreshing insights might they have discovered? (d) What have they learned about the synodal way of proceeding? (e) How was God present and at work during their time together?

15. Participants should then decide on the feedback from the group conversations they wish to be communicated in the Diocesan report. The note-taker will have the responsibility of preparing their short report on the fundamental questions.

16. All participants rejoin the plenary session to conclude the gathering. One representative from each small group can briefly share the experience of the group. The participants should

be informed that their input would be reflected in the Diocesan report which would inform the preparation of documents for consideration at the Synod of Bishops in October 2023 and so contribute to the building up of the Church.

17. The gathering should conclude with a prayer or song of thanksgiving.

After the Consultations have ended

1. If people are unable to attend a meeting in person or online, efforts should be made to reach out to them through text messaging, phone calls, questionnaires, or other appropriate means. It is important that we try our best to listen to the voices of everyone, especially those who may be considered as marginalized.

2. After all the consultations have ended, the Synod Coordinators will meet to review the whole experience and to prepare the Parish/Community/Commission/Congregation synthesis based on the feedback submitted by all groups. They will then forward their synthesis to the Synod Team at synod@catholicct.org

Ways of Enriching the Synodal Consultations

The following is a compilation of excerpts from the Vademecum which will enrich the synodal experience for everyone.

1. It is important to listen and talk to each other in a welcoming and meaningful way, with genuine interest and care for the views expressed by others.

2. Everyone has the right to be heard, just as everyone has the right to speak. It takes humility to listen and courage to speak.

3. Synodal dialogue is not about engaging in a debate to convince others. Rather it is about welcoming what others say as a way by which the Holy Spirit can speak for the good of all.

4. Avoid the temptation to only see “problems.” 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.

5. Avoid the temptation to lose the focus of the synodal process.

6. While the discussions might be wide-ranging, no one synodal process is going to resolve all our concerns and problems. Keep the focus on our goal of discerning how God calls us to walk forward together.

7. Avoid conflict and division. The seeds of division bear no fruit.

8. Create a rich experience which encourages the widest possible participation and expression of the full range of experiences of practicing and non-practising Catholics (the baptized) and people of other or no faith “insofar as they want to help the Church on her synodal journey of seeking what is good and true”.

9. Make an effort to reach out through ecumenical and interreligious dialogue: To dream together and journey with one another throughout the entire human family. Questions we can ask might be:

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?

10. There can be an Informal Dimension of the Synodal Process. However, this has been severely curtailed by the ongoing pandemic. 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.