



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission



Participant's  
Guide

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC  
ARCHDIOCESE OF  
ATLANTA

## Participant's Guide

*For all participating in small-group, prayer-centered listening sessions in the Archdiocese of Atlanta\**

### **The Synod on Synodality**

*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*

*“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Mt 18:20)*

... We recall that the purpose of the Synod, and therefore of this consultation, is not to produce documents, but “to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands...”

Preparatory Document, no. 32 (quote from Pope Francis, Address at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People [October 3, 2018])

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\* Adapted from the Parish Synod Resources developed by the Archdiocese of Washington.

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## Introduction: Journeying Together

The entire Catholic Church is called to participate in the upcoming Synod of Bishops entitled: “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.*”

Synod is a Greek word (*synodos*) meaning a meeting or assembly in customary usage. The two Greek words that make up synod are *syn* meaning “together” and *hodos* meaning “way or journey.” At its core, synod, and the more recent term synodality, refer to being *together on the way* or *journeying together*.

Pope Francis has called the entire people of God to journey together. This Synod is not just another meeting with oral presentations and written reports. This Synod is a **process of journeying together**. As the Church, we will listen to each other, dialogue with each other, pray together, discern together and make decisions together for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world!

In his homily at the opening Mass for the Synod, the Pope encouraged us to begin the synodal process “by asking ourselves — all of us, pope, bishops, priests, religious and laity — whether we, the Christian community, embody this 'style' of God, who travels the paths of history and shares in the life of humanity.” Our Holy Father is asking us to “walk on the same road as others, living out the ‘three verbs’ that characterize a synod: to encounter, listen and discern.”

This process is founded in prayer, because the synod is “a journey of spiritual discernment that takes place in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God.” Discernment is what lights the way and guides the synod, “preventing it from becoming a Church convention, a study group or a political congress, but rather a grace-filled event, a process of healing guided by the Holy Spirit. Like he asked the rich man in the Gospel reading, Jesus is asking everyone to empty ourselves, to free ourselves from all that is worldly, including our inward-looking and outworn pastoral models, and to ask ourselves what it is that God wants to say to us in this time and the direction in which he wants to lead us.” (Pope Francis, October 10, 2021).

### History of Synods in the Catholic Church

The Church journeying together in a synod is an ancient practice in Christianity rooted in Scripture. In the Acts of the Apostles (chapter 15), we hear about Peter and Paul being “welcomed by the Church, as well as by the apostles and the presbyters” (Acts 15:4) to listen, discuss and discern together how to reconcile Jewish and Gentile religious practices. It was after much listening, discussion and prayerful silence listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit, that the early Church discerned how to proclaim the Gospel to all people.

Several Church Fathers wrote about synodality in the early Church (c. 30 AD - c. 500 AD), including St. John Chrysostom who wrote that the “Church and Synod are synonymous” (Commentary on Psalm 149; see *Preparatory Document*, no. 11). Local churches gathered together with their bishops to discuss matters related to their local situation throughout the first millennium. This local practice grew to provincial (regional) and universal (ecumenical) councils that would gather bishops, clergy, religious and laity together.

The practice of synodality continued into the second millennium, even as decision-making was reserved more and more to bishops and the Holy See. The Second Vatican Council, an ecumenical council, emphasized the communion of the Church and reclaimed the image of the Church as the pilgrim people of God journeying together towards holiness. “...There is but one People of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly and not an earthly nature. For all the faithful scattered throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit...” (*Lumen Gentium* no. 13).

Pope St. Paul VI created the modern structure of the Synod of Bishops in 1965 after the close of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Paul wanted to ensure that the collaboration and dialogue between bishops, theologians, religious and the lay faithful continued after the Second Vatican Council. Since 1967, the Church has held a Synod of Bishops roughly every two to three years to examine an issue affecting the Church. At each of these synods since 1967, bishops have consulted with members of the clergy, religious and the laity. In fact, at these synods, priests, deacons, religious and laity have been present and have addressed the bishops and Pope. While the “new” aspect of this current Synod, “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*,”

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is asking each diocesan bishop to listen and consult with his flock on the theme of synodality, the synodal process of listening and consulting with the entire people of God is an ancient practice of the Church.

### What is Synodality?

Throughout this process, we hear the terms: synod, synodality and synodal process. What do these words mean? Do they mean the same thing?

A helpful short definition of the Synod of Bishops is a gathering of bishops that

1. Fosters closer unity between the bishops and Pope
2. Provides counsel to the Pope on matters of faith and morals and discipline of the Church
3. Studies questions concerning the Church in the world (c.f. *Code of Canon Law* c. 342).

Voting in the Synod of Bishops is limited to bishops present at the synod gathering. However, clergy, men and women religious, theologians, catechists, canon lawyers and lay experts all participate in the synod gathering with bishops by providing their counsel.

Synodality and the synodal process are not a gathering or meeting of bishops, nor are they the administrative arm of the Church. Rather, synodality is the path and process of the Church as communion. It is the communion of all the baptized who are listening to each other, dialoguing with each other and praying together to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit as we all seek holiness and proclaim the Gospel. Synodality involves clergy, religious and laity listening and speaking, praying and discerning together and placing the hopes and concerns of the People of God in the hands and hearts of the bishops, who, united with the Pope, decide matters of faith and morals in order to preserve the faith and strengthen the Church throughout the world.

In a nutshell, referring to the Church as synodal recalls the basic truth that every baptized member is a subject or agent of evangelization, co-responsible for the Church's mission.

“Synodality, in this perspective, is much more than the celebration of ecclesial meetings and Bishops' assemblies, or a matter of simple internal

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administration within the Church; it is ‘the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* [way of living and being] of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission” (*Preparatory Document*, no. 10).

“In fact, this People, gathered together by its Pastors, adheres to the sacred deposit of the Word of God entrusted to the Church, perseveres constantly in the teaching of the Apostles, in fraternal communion, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer, ‘so that holding to, practicing, and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the Bishops and Faithful a single common effort” (*Preparatory Document*, no. 13). Synodality and the synodal process are not about engaging others for the purpose of deciding matters through a parliamentary vote. Nor is the primary purpose of synodality to introduce democratic methods into the Church, where the majority determines how the Church will act. Synodality is also not about promulgating strategic plans or managing pastoral parish ministries through objectives. Synodality is about the entire People of God journeying together to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to become holy.

“The Pastors, established by God as ‘authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church,’ should not be afraid to listen to the Flock entrusted to them. The consultation of the People of God does not imply the assumption within the Church of the dynamics of democracy based on the principle of majority, because there is, at the basis of participation in every Synodal process, a shared passion for the common mission of evangelization and not the representation of conflicting interests. In other words, this is an ecclesial process that can only take place ‘at the heart of a hierarchically structured community.’ Every Synodal process, in which the Bishops are called to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church, not by themselves but by listening to the People of God, who ‘shares also in Christ’s prophetic office’ (LG, no. 12), is an evident form of that “journeying together” which makes the Church grow” (*Preparatory Document*, no. 14; see also *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12; CCC, nos. 91-93).

As we embark on this synodal process as the local Church of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, let us remember the words of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good” (1 Thes 5:19-21).

## Timeline of the Synod

The global Synod, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*, is a process that Pope Francis launched in October 2021, and it will conclude with a meeting of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023 (the 16<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops). A detailed timeline of the global Synod process is available on <https://www.synod.va/en.html>. The timeline below highlights the Archdiocese of Atlanta's participation in the diocesan consultation phase of the Synod. Continued prayers and implementation will be ongoing!

## Timeline of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta





## Prayer-Centered Listening Session Overview

### **A Saturday half-day option**

(3 hours and 15 minutes \*\*)

*Optional hospitality, fellowship and check-in (30 minutes)*

- Welcome, introduction and opening prayer (10 minutes)
- Overview of the synod process and participant ground rules (10 minutes)
- Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection (25 minutes)
  
- Small group sharing and dialogue (2 hours and 15 minutes)
  - Fundamental Question(s) [25-30 min.]
  - Supporting Questions [90 min.]
  - Prayer & Concluding Question [15-20 min.]
- Conclusion and closing prayer (5 minutes)

*\*\*Specific schedules will be determined by the parish/group responsible for arranging the listening session.*

## Prayer-Centered Listening Session Overview

### A three-week evening option

(90 minutes each week\*\*)

*Optional hospitality, fellowship and check-in (30 minutes)*

#### Week One:

- Welcome, introduction and opening prayer (10 min.)
- Synod process overview and participant ground rules (10 min.)
- Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection (25 min.)
- Small group sharing and dialogue: **Fundamental Question** (35 min.)
- Conclusion and closing prayer (5 min.)

#### Week Two:

- Introduction, prayer and overview of the evening (10 min.)
- Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection (25 min.)
- Small group sharing and dialogue: **Supporting Questions (1-2): Listening & Discernment / Co-Responsibility & Participation** (40 min.)
- Conclusion and closing prayer (5 min.)

#### Week Three:

- Introduction, prayer and overview of the evening (10 min.)
- Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection (25 min.)
- Small Group sharing and dialogue: **Supporting Questions (3): Prayer & Celebration / Prayer to the Holy Spirit & Concluding Question** (40 min.)
- Closing prayer (5 min.)

*\*\*Specific schedules will be determined by the parish/group responsible for arranging the listening session. Themes and questions may be adapted.*

## Participant Ground Rules & Small Group Process

### Keys to Communicating and Listening Effectively

**P** – PRAY and PONDER before and after you speak. Ask our Lord to be in your heart and mind and on your lips as you begin to speak. Also, ponder what has been shared and what the Lord is putting on your heart.

**R** – Take RESPONSIBILITY for your own thoughts and feelings, avoiding the temptation to lay blame on others. Likewise, keep in mind that you are not responsible for the thoughts and feelings of others in your group. In a context of listening and sharing, it is okay for varying thoughts and feelings to be shared.

**A** – ALLOW others to speak and to share without correction or criticism. If you are more outgoing and assertive in conversation, it may be helpful to listen more and to allow those who typically do not speak to be heard first. We hope to hear from everyone during this synodal process, especially those on the margins.

**Y** – YOU – Be attentive to your own thoughts, feelings, opinions or even prejudices. Ask yourself, “Why do I feel or think this way?”

**E** – Use EMPATHETIC listening, and be attentive not just to words but also to feelings being expressed. Try placing yourself in the speaker’s situation to help yourself truly feel what he or she is feeling.

**R** – RESPECT every person as Jesus taught us: *love one another*. Avoid minimizing or dismissing other people’s thoughts or experiences. Always seek to control your emotions while speaking and listening, showing kindness and generosity towards others.

The prayer-centered listening sessions are ultimately opportunities to listen and share, primarily in small-group format. The goal is not to discuss or debate, but rather to pray and to allow an opportunity for all to listen and share. A method of invitation is a way to include all people in the conversation in a very respectful atmosphere. While each person is speaking, the others listen. No one may interrupt the speaker or jump in to speak without being invited/prompted by the facilitator. In cases where there is one facilitator for a number of small groups, as is envisioned for many of the sessions outlined above, participants can go in order around the table to share, choosing to pass if they would rather not share at a particular moment. In cases where a volunteer table moderator is present, that person can assist to ensure that each person in the small group has an opportunity to share.

### **Table Moderators & Note Taker Roles**

The role of the table moderators, if utilized, is to help guide the conversations. Please listen to their instructions. They will try to keep flowing the time of sharing, keeping an eye on the time allotted, so everyone in the small group can share the inspirations and insights they received during the pondering and praying time

There will be a volunteer secretary at each table taking notes. The notes will be anonymous. The notes from all of the small groups at the prayer-centered listening session will help in the creation of a parish/group summary report (one report per parish/group, synthesizing all of the prayer and listening experiences and sharing highlights). This parish/group summary report will be sent to the archdiocesan Synod Team who will create an archdiocesan report based on the parish/group reports, regional gatherings and feedback from the online survey and other meetings.

### Questions for Listening Sessions – Small Groups

*The following questions are offered as the leading questions to guide the parish/community prayer-centered listening sessions in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. They can be adapted or modified by parishes or other groups according to time, circumstances and needs. If adaptations occur, communities are encouraged to follow the suggested themes and questions in the Synod Preparatory Document and Vademecum as a guide (see also optional questions suggested below). An online survey will complement the feedback gained from the parish/community prayer-centered listening sessions and regional gatherings. Please go to [archatl.com/synod](http://archatl.com/synod) to learn more and to complete the online survey.*

### The Fundamental Question

***A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in our parish/community? How is the Holy Spirit inviting our parish/community to grow in “journeying together?”***

- What does “journeying together” mean to you? What experiences come to mind?
- What joys have you experienced in our parish/community? What difficulties and obstacles to journeying together, or to active and vibrant participation in the life of the parish/community, have you encountered?
- Where in these experiences do you hear the Holy Spirit inviting growth?

### Supporting Questions

#### (1) Listening & Discernment

*Listening is a first step that requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice. Discernment in a synodal style, which requires attentiveness to the Holy Spirit through the prayer and sharing of the whole community, depends first on listening.*

- How do you listen to God’s voice every day?
- How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst, including those on the peripheries (the poor, marginalized, socially

excluded, disaffiliated, etc.)? How do we hear the voices from the peripheries without prejudice?

- What space(s) does our parish/community provide for listening and sharing (speaking freely) among all the members as well as those not regularly connected to our community?
- How do we together discern God's will in our parish/community, and what role does consultation play?

### **(2) Co-Responsibility & Participation**

*Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate. All the baptized are co-responsible for the mission of the Church—to proclaim the Gospel and make disciples of Jesus Christ.*

- What enables or hinders you from witnessing and speaking up courageously and responsibly in our parish/community and in society?
- How are all the members of our parish/community called and empowered to participate in the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel?
- What obstacles to active discipleship and participation do you see?
- How are teamwork and co-responsibility for mission put into practice in our parish/community?

### **(3) Prayer and Celebration**

*Central to “walking together” is the communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.*

- How do prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially Sunday Mass, inspire and guide our parish/community in our shared life and mission?
- How does listening to the Word of God together (e.g., Holy Mass, Scripture study groups, Holy Hours, etc.) inspire our parish/community's most important decisions?
- What does the Eucharist mean to you? How does the Eucharist inspire your life and actions?
- How do we encourage the active participation of all the faithful in prayer, the liturgy and the sacraments?

## Concluding Question – Listening to the Holy Spirit

Take 5-10 minutes to pray in silence with your small group, after invoking the Holy Spirit again through a “Come Holy Spirit” prayer or impromptu prayer. Then, from your small group sharing, **name one insight where you heard the voice of the Holy Spirit today, or share one insight that is on your heart after your time of prayer.**

**\*\*Optional Additional Questions** – These could be integrated into the framework above or adapted for groups outside of parish life or ministry settings:

### On God and the Catholic Church

- What thoughts and experiences come to mind when you hear mention of “God?”
- What does a relationship with God mean to you?
- What thoughts and experiences come to mind when you hear mention of “Jesus Christ?”
- What does a relationship with Jesus mean to you?
- What thoughts and experiences come to mind when you hear mention of the “Catholic Church” or “being Catholic?”

### Dialogue and Relationship with Others

- Are you aware of the ways the Catholic Church promotes dialogue and is in dialogue with others? How can this be strengthened?
- Are you aware of the ways the Catholic Church walks together with other Christians? How can this be strengthened?

### Other Topics Related to Synodality

- What does authority mean to you?
- What does listening mean to you?
- What does discernment mean to you?
- How can we better communicate how decisions and actions are taken in the Catholic Church?
- Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation and ongoing learning. How do you live synodality in your daily life?


*Please note: As a reminder, the Synod [Preparatory Document](#) and [Vademecum](#) provide further possible questions that can be adapted by groups.*

## Prayer for the Synod: Adsumus Sancte Spiritus

***Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus***  
***We stand before You, Holy Spirit***

Prayer of invocation to the Holy Spirit for an ecclesial assembly of governance or discernment (thus synodal)

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.



SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, the first word of the original Latin, meaning, “We stand before You, Holy Spirit,” which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years and is attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 4 April 636). As we embrace this Synodal Process, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to be at work in us so that we may be a community and a people of grace. For the Synodal journey from 2021 to 2023, we propose to use the following simplified version, so that any group or liturgical assembly can pray it more easily. The original version of the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* can be found on the Synod website.



### Glossary of Terms

This glossary was created by the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops and is accessible at

<https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/document/common/resources/Glossary.pdf>.

#### **Authority**

The New Testament uses a specific term to express the power Jesus received from the Father to grant salvation, which he exercises over all creatures in the power ( $\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$ ) of the Holy Spirit:  $\epsilon\acute{\xi}\theta\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$  (authority). It consists in imparting the grace that makes us “children of God” (cf. John 1, 12). The Apostles receive this  $\epsilon\acute{\xi}\theta\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$  from the risen Lord, who sends them to teach the nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe all he has commanded (cf. Matthew 28,19-20). By virtue of baptism, every member of the People of God is given a share in this authority, having received the “anointing of the Holy Spirit” (cf. 1 John 2, 20. 27), having been taught by God (cf. John 6, 45) and having been guided “to the complete truth” (cf. John 16, 13). (ITC, Syn., no. 17)

There is to be no distance or separation between the community and its Pastors - who are called to act in the name of the only Pastor - but a distinction between tasks in the reciprocity of communion. A synod, an assembly, a council cannot take decisions without its legitimate Pastors. The synodal process must take place at the heart of a hierarchically structured community. In a diocese, for example, it is necessary to distinguish between the process of decision-making through a joint exercise of discernment, consultation and cooperation, and decision-taking, which is within the competence of the bishop, the guarantor of apostolicity and Catholicity. Working things out is a synodal task; decision is a ministerial responsibility. A correct exercise of synodality must contribute to a better articulation of the ministry of the personal and collegial exercise of apostolic authority with the synodal exercise of discernment on the part of the community. (ITC, Syn., no. 69)

#### **Baptism and Confirmation**

Baptism is the sacrament by which we enter into the People of God, freed from original sin and adopted as sons and daughters of God in Christ. Baptism is the fundamental identity of all the faithful, including priests, religious and lay people. Pope Francis describes the mission of every baptized person as that of being a missionary disciple in the midst of the People of God, to bring the light of the Gospel to every corner of the world.

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”. If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!” (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him “because of the woman’s testimony” (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, “immediately proclaimed Jesus” (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for? (Evangelii Gaudium, no. 120) Confirmation is the sacrament by which the faithful receive the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In Confirmation, we become fully equipped for the mission entrusted to us at our baptism. The Spirit poured out upon us enables us to live ever more deeply our primordial vocation as sons and daughters of God who cry out “Abba, Father!” (Romans 8:15) We are not only called to live out our call as sons and daughters of God, but also to invite others into this filial relationship with the Father in Christ, of which the Holy Spirit makes us partakers.

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### **Charisms**

The Lord's ἐξουσία (authority) is expressed in the Church through the variety of spiritual gifts (τα πνευματικά) or charisms (τα χάρισματα) the Spirit shares out among the People of God for the upbuilding of the one Body of Christ. In exercising them we need to respect an objective τάξις, so that they can develop in harmony and bear the fruit they are meant to bear for the good of all (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,28-30; Ephesians 4,11-13). The Apostles have the first place among them - with a special and pre-eminent role being attributed by Jesus to Simon Peter (cf. Matthew 16,18f., John 21,15ff.): they, in fact, are entrusted with the ministry of guiding the Church in fidelity to the depositum fidei (1 Timothy 6,20; 2 Timothy 1,12.14). But the term χάρισμα also evokes the gratuitous and varying character of the free initiative of the Spirit, who grants each one his or her own gift with a view to the general good (cf. 1 Corinthians 12, 4- 11; 29-30; Ephesians 4,7), always in terms of mutual submission and service (cf. 1 Corinthians 12, 25); since the highest gift, the one that regulates them all, is love (cf. 1 Corinthians 12, 31). (ITC, Syn., no. 18)

### **Church**

Taking up the ecclesiological perspective of Vatican II, Pope Francis sketches the image of a synodal Church as "an inverted pyramid" which comprises the People of God and the College of Bishops, one of whose members, the Successor of Peter, has a specific ministry of unity. Here the summit is below the base. "Synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretative framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself... Jesus founded the Church by setting at her head the College of Apostles, in which the Apostle Peter is the 'rock' (cf. Matthew 16, 18), the one who must "confirm" his brethren in the faith (cf. Luke 22, 32). But in this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located below the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called 'ministers', because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all" [68]. (ITC, Syn., no. 57)

### **Consensus**

Consensus in the context of the Synodal Process does not mean uniformity or a democratic majority. This would ignore the fact that the Holy Spirit can speak through the words of one single member of the People of God or a small group. Rather, consensus in synodal key refers

to the process of listening to one another in order to discern the common path that God is calling us to in a spirit of communion, guided by the Holy Spirit.

### **Consultation**

In previous synods, consultation was sought by means of questionnaires that were circulated among the faithful prior to a gathering of the Synod of Bishops in Rome on a particular topic. This current Synod seeks to broaden the experience of "consultation" in order to move towards a more synodal Church that more fully listens to and engages the entire People of God. In this way, "consultation" is now taking the form of a wider "participation." The Synod of Bishops in Rome is no longer the sum total of the experience of synodality in the Church, but rather the culmination of a long process by which the voice of the Spirit resounds throughout the whole Church, at the diocesan, national, continental, and universal levels.

### **Communion**

Synodality is a living expression of the Catholicity of the Church as communion. In the Church, Christ is present as the Head united to His Body (Ephesians 1, 22-23) in such a way that she receives from him the fullness of the means of salvation. The Church is Catholic also because she is sent to all, in order to gather the entire human family in the richness of the plurality of cultural forms, under the lordship of Christ and in the unity of his spirit. The synodal path expresses and promotes her Catholicity in two ways: it shows the dynamic way in which the fullness of faith is shared by all members of the People of God and it assists in handing it on to all people and all peoples. (ITC, Syn., no. 58)

### **Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting**

Each local Church culminates the diocesan phase with a Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting. This gathering provides the 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 the feedback that has been raised, to dialogue about the current reality of the local Church and the signs of the times, and to discern the Spirit's call for the diocese in relation to its growth in synodal conversion. While much of the consultation process during the Diocesan Phase might have occurred within specific communities of the local Church, such as parishes, ministries, youth and other groups, the objective of the Diocesan Pre-Synodal

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Meeting is to bring together a representative crosssection of the whole diocese, including minority groups and those on the peripheries, and enable participants to listen, reflect and discern together. Thereafter the outcome of the meeting should be part of the diocesan synthesis, as described in Part 4 of the *Vademecum*.

### **Diocesan Synodal Team**

The role of the Synodal team is to implement, coordinate and oversee the diocesan phase of the Synodal Process under the leadership of the local bishop, collaborating with the Diocesan Contact Person(s). The synodal team must plan the listening sessions to be carried out on the local level to ensure the widest participation possible including those on the margins. Special efforts must be made to engage those who are seldom listened to in the Church. The Synodal team organizes any gatherings, events and meetings that coincide with the Synodal Process. The goal is to create an authentic experience of synodality at the local level. Upon the completion of the listening sessions, the Synodal team is responsible for elaborating the diocesan synthesis on the basis of the experiences and feedback received from all those who participated.

### **Discernment**

The Synodal Process entails a discernment process oriented towards consensus. We listen to each other in order to discern what God is saying to all of us. This kind of discernment is not only a one-time event, but ultimately a way of life, grounded in Christ, following the lead of the Holy Spirit, living for the greater glory of God. Communal discernment helps to build flourishing and resilient communities for the mission of the Church today. Discernment is a grace from God, but it requires our human involvement in simple ways: praying, reflection, paying attention to one's inner disposition, listening and talking to one another in an authentic, meaningful and welcoming way. Discernment in this spiritual key plants seeds that can bear the fruits of fraternity, healing, communion, mission and more. God comes to lead and inspire us as we seek to discern his will.

### **Ecclesial**

Synodality is the path of journeying together that corresponds to the deep nature of the Church. In this sense, any Synodal Process is deeply ecclesial since it is rooted in the nature of

the Church and necessarily involves the common journey of the People of God. Walking together in a synodal way calls us to deeper communion with one another, moving towards an ever fuller participation in the mission we share. For this journey together, a vital principle is “*sentire cum Ecclesia*: to feel sense and perceive in harmony with the Church. This is required not just of theologians, but of all the faithful; it unites all the members of the People of God as they make their pilgrim journey. It is the key to their ‘walking together.’” (ITC, Syn., no. 56) We do not walk the synodal path alone, as isolated individuals, parishes or dioceses. Rather, synodality is the journey of the entire Church all together, which is experienced and lived out across the whole of God's people.

### **Episcopal**

The Greek term *episkopos* is used in the New Testament to refer to one who has “oversight” of the flock of God. The leaders in the early Christian communities were the successors of the apostles, and this apostolic succession continues to this day in the bishops who are appointed in the Catholic Church. “Bishops exercise their specific apostolic authority in teaching, sanctifying and governing the particular Church entrusted to their pastoral care at the service of the mission of the People of God.” (ITC, Syn., no. 56) “Episcopal” thus refers to the mission of the bishop, who guides the flock of Christ entrusted to his care amid the communion of the entire Church. The bishop is not meant to be the summit of a pyramid, but rather the servant of the faithful entrusted to his care. Episcopal conferences are the collegial body of bishops at a national or international level to promote fraternity among bishops and unity across local Churches.

### **Instrumentum Laboris**

The *Instrumentum Laboris* is the “Working Document” that is used as the basis for the discussions, interventions and exchanges that take at the Synod of Bishops. It is a document published by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. Unlike previous Synods, the current Synodal process will involve two versions of the *Instrumentum Laboris*. One version will be published after the listening phase at the diocesan level has been synthesized at the national level. This first draft will then serve as the “Working Document” for the meetings that will take place at the continental level. Based on the work of the continental phase, a second draft of the *Instrumentum Laboris* will then be

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published, which will serve as the basis for the meeting of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023.

### **Local Church**

In the context of the Synodal Process, “local Church” refers to each diocese, eparchy, ordinariate and equivalent ecclesial body. The local Church is the first level on which synodality is exercised, encompassing parishes, ministries, movements and other communities. Here “the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation of all God’s holy People in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers” [90]. (ICT, Syn., no. 77)

The historical, linguistic and cultural links that mold interpersonal communication in the local Church and describe its particular features facilitate the adoption of a synodal style in its daily life and are the basis for effective missionary conversion. In the local Church Christian witness is embodied in specific human and social situations, which allows for an incisive initiation of synodal structures which serve mission. As Pope Francis has emphasized, “only to the extent that these organizations keep connected to the ‘base’ and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape” [91]. (ITC, Syn., no. 77)

### **Listening**

Pope Francis has affirmed that: “A synodal Church is a Church which listens. [...] The faithful People, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other; and all listening to the Holy Spirit.” The International Theological Commission explained this central role of listening as follows (ICT, Syn., no. 111): Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate where one speaker tries to get the better of the others or counters their positions with brusque arguments, but about expressing whatever seems to have been suggested by the Holy Spirit as useful for communal discernment, at the same time being open to accepting whatever has been suggested by the same Spirit in other people’s positions, “for the general good” (1 Corinthians 12,7).

### **Mission**

The dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* sets out a vision of the nature and mission of the Church as communion, with the theological presuppositions of a suitable re-launch of synodality: the mystical and sacramental conception of the Church; her nature as People of God on pilgrimage through history towards the heavenly homeland, in which all her members are by virtue of baptism honoured with the same dignity as children of God and appointed to the same mission; the doctrine of sacramentality of the episcopate and collegiality in hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome. (ITC, Syn., no. 40)

### **Parrhesia**

Parrhesia refers to the boldness that the coming of the Holy Spirit brought about in the hearts of the apostles at Pentecost. It is the inner courage that sent them out to proclaim the Good News that Jesus is Lord without fear in the days of the Early Church. The Spirit offers us this same boldness to carry out the mission of the Church today. Parrhesia is required in the Synodal Process so that we can speak boldly and listen humbly, inspired by the Holy Spirit as we journey forward towards this “new phase of evangelization” to which God calls us (cf. ITC, Syn., no. 121)

The parrhesia of the Spirit required the People of God on its synodal journey is the trust, frankness and courage to “enter into the expanse of God’s horizon” in order to “ensure that a sacrament of unity exists in the world and that man is therefore not destined for dispersion and confusion”[169]. The lived and enduring experience of synodality is, for the People of God, a source of the joy promised by Jesus, a catalyst of new life, the springboard for a new phase of missionary commitment. (ITC, Syn., no. 121)

### **Participation**

A synodal Church is a Church of participation and coresponsibility. In exercising synodality she is called to give expression to the participation of all, according to each one’s calling, with the authority conferred by Christ on the College of Bishops headed by the Pope. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit. The authority of Pastors is a specific gift of the Spirit of Christ the Head for the building up of the entire Body, not a delegated and representative function of the

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people. (ITC, Syn., no. 67) The distinction between deliberative and consultative votes must not allow us to underrate the opinions expressed and votes made in various synodal assemblies and councils. The expression *votum tantum consultivum*, which indicates the weight of evaluations and proposals in such august assemblies, is inadequate if it is understood according to the means of civil law in its various expressions [81].

The consultation that takes place in synodal assemblies is actually different, because the members of the People of God who take part in them are responding to the summons of the Lord, listening as a community to what the Spirit is saying to the Church through the Word of God which resonates in their situation, and interpreting the signs of the times with the eyes of faith. In the 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 taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will. So, in coming to formulate their own decisions, pastors must listen carefully to the views and experiences of the faithful. Canon law stipulates that, in certain cases, they must act only after having sought and obtained the various opinions according to juridically established procedures [82]. (ICT, Syn., no. 68) At the same time, the path of synodality requires much wider participation than only that which is required by the law.

### **People of God**

The Second Vatican Council focused on the Church as the "People of God." This makes clear that the Church is not only a hierarchical structure, but a people on pilgrimage together, guided by God on its journey. God brings us into unity with one another as he draws us into union with himself: "God does not make men and women holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness." (Lumen Gentium, 9) This people was first made manifest in Israel, whom God chose as his own and with whom he established his first covenant. In Jesus Christ, entry into the People of God has been extended to every people and nation: "Go therefore, make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). God invites all peoples to be part of the people that is particularly his own: "You are a chosen people, a royal

priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10) The mission of the Church is to gather the People of God throughout its journey through history in view of the Kingdom of God. In this sense, the Church is the sign and instrument of "intimate union with God and the unity of the entire human race" (Lumen Gentium, 1). The Church is at the service of the mission of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who brings all of humanity together in himself: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:16)

### **Power**

The New Testament uses a specific term to express the power Jesus received from the Father to grant salvation, which he exercises over all creatures in the power (*δύναμις*) of the Holy Spirit: *ἐξουσία* (authority). It consists in imparting the grace that makes us "children of God" (cf. John 1,12). The Apostles receive this *ἐξουσία* from the risen Lord, who sends them to teach the nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe all he has commanded (cf. Matthew 28,19-20). By virtue of baptism, every member of the People of God is given a share in this authority, having received the "anointing of the Holy Spirit" (cf. 1 John 2,20.27), having been taught by God (cf. John 6,45) and having been guided "to the complete truth" (cf. John 16,13). (ITC, Syn., no. 17)

In terms of re-vitalizing synodal practice on the level of the universal Church, Blessed Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops. It is a "permanent Council of Bishops for the universal Church", directly and immediately subject to the power of the Pope, "providing information and offering advice", which "can also enjoy the power of making decisions when such power is conferred upon it by the Roman Pontiff"[41]. This institution aims to continue to extend to the People of God the benefits of communion lived during the Council. (ITC, Syn., no. 41)

### **Sensus fidei**

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is manifested in the *sensus fidei* of the faithful [65]. "In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power

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of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The People of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible in *credo*. This means that it does not err in faith, even when it cannot find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of his mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith – *sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain *connaturalitas* with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively” [66]. This *connaturalitas* shows itself in a “*sensus cum Ecclesia*: to feel, sense and perceive in harmony with the Church. This is required not just of theologians, but of all the faithful; it unites all the members of the People of God as they make their pilgrim journey. It is the key to their ‘walking together.’”[67] (ITC, Syn., no. 56)

### **Signs of the times**

The Second Vatican Council took a decisive step forward towards the importance of the Church reading the “signs of the times.” This means that the Church does not carry out her mission in a vacuum, detached from the realities of the world around her. Rather, the Church is sent out in the midst of the world, in order to unite men and women of every time and place to God and one another. The Church must therefore be attentive to the needs, realities and concerns of the world in every era in order to carry out her mission in the service of humanity. The Church must thus read the signs of the times in the light of the faith, in order to discern how God is calling her to respond amid the circumstances and events of every period of time. Ultimately, reading the signs of the times is a means of realizing the profound solidarity between the Church and humanity: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.” (Gaudium et Spes, 1)

### **Synod**

The Synod is “the program of those synodal events in which the Church is called together by the competent authority in accordance with the specific procedures laid down by ecclesiastical discipline, involving the whole People of God in various ways on local, regional and universal levels, presided over by the bishops in collegial

communion with the Bishop of Rome, to discern the way forward and other particular questions, and to take particular decisions and directions with the aim of fulfilling its evangelizing mission.” (ITC, Syn., no.70)

### **Synodal Process**

Synodality is not so much an event but an ongoing path and process. The Synodal Process that is currently being undertaken by the Church involves the entire People of God. It begins with a diocesan phase, which has been detailed in this *Vademecum*, followed by a national phase, continental phase and finally a culminating phase of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome.

### **Synodality**

Synodality, as defined by the International Theological Commission in 2018, is “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.” Pope Francis describes a synodal Church as a “listening Church knowing that listening is more than feeling. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. We must all listen to the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Truth to know what the Spirit is saying to the Church. [...] This is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium.” (Address at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015)

Synodality creates the opportunity to listen to all and provide opportunities to listen to the Holy Spirit and the People of God in order to discern together and walk forward on a common path. Pope Francis understands this as walking together and accompanying each other on the spiritual journey to live out our call to mission in communion with one another.

### **Vocation of All the People of God**

This vocation of all the People of God, the community of believers in Jesus Christ, is to bring about the Kingdom of God. All members of the Church, laity, religious and clergy according to their proper charisms and roles collaborate in the responsibility for fulfilling its mission. Vatican Council II urged active involvement in the life of the Church by emphasizing the principles of collaborative responsibility, consultation and lay participation.

The laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church, their activity is so

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necessary within Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness. (Apostolicam Actuositatem, 10)

Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary, they understand that it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their service and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart. (Lumen Gentium, 30)

### **Vademecum**

The Vademecum is a handbook to support the efforts of all of the People of God to contribute to the listening and discernment that is the foundation for the Synod on Synodality. It is a stimulus and a practical guide offering ideas for

those appointed as a diocesan (or parish) contact person or team, mindful that each local Church has its own culture, traditions, recent history and resources.

### **Vatican II**

Pope John XXIII convoked the twenty-first ecumenical council in the history of the Church, which gathered all the bishops of the world between 1962 and 1965 at the Vatican. In the opening address of the Council, John XXIII characterized its purpose in this way: What is necessary today is that the whole of Christian doctrine, with no part of it lost, be received in our times by all with a new fervor, in serenity and peace, in that traditional and precise conceptuality and expression, which is especially displayed in the acts of the Councils.