

Discerning the path for your diocese

The Synod is an invitation for every diocese to embark on a path of profound renewal as inspired by the grace of God's Spirit. As stated in the Preparatory Document, the Synod considers a main question: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together." How is this "journeying together" happening today in your particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?

The *sensus fidei*, the spiritual discernment of the People of God, is sought on this question. Since each diocese has a unique context, its path for seeking, promoting, and reaping the fruits of this *sensus fidei* will be unique. Overall, the Synod guidelines remind us that:

- The goal is to ensure the participation of *the greatest number possible*, in order to listen to *the living voice of the entire People of God*.
- This is not 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, marginalized, vulnerable, and excluded*, in order to listen to their voices and experiences.
- The Synodal Process must be *simple, accessible, and welcoming for all*.

Planning for such a process is already the beginning of synodal conversion! Below are some suggested points you can use in discerning the path for your diocese. The Diocesan Contact Person(s) and Synodal Team together with the Bishop could discuss them together:

1. After reading the Preparatory Document and Vademecum in a prayerful and reflective way, which points move or stir us most deeply? Why?
2. Who are the groups of people in our diocese to whom we feel the need to make a special effort to reach?

3. What are some effective ways to reach them? Who can we partner with?
4. What is the level of experience in synodality or the readiness and skills of people? What are the relevant processes in the recent past, if any?
5. What existing structures are available in our diocese to facilitate participation? What improvements might be needed in these structures to make them more effective for synodality?
6. What might be some new or creative structures and processes that we can try?
7. What are the significant factors in our local context that will affect our Synodal Process? (e.g. Severe pandemic situation, political conflict, natural disaster, recent local synodal processes, etc.)
8. Which aspects of the Synod question should we focus on, if any? Why? What might be some aspects of synodal conversion which the Holy Spirit is inviting the diocese to undergo?

Some dioceses are already engaged in synodal processes either at the local, national, or continental level. The Synod 2021-2023 is not meant to supplant but to complement these existing celebrations and synodal processes. After all, it is the same Spirit of God leading and transforming the Church, whether at the local, regional, or global level. The Diocesan Phase of the Synodal Process 2021-2023 is thus an opportunity to listen more deeply to the voice of the Spirit, enhance participation and outreach, improve the quality of dialogue, discern about further issues, strengthen conversion in attitudes and skills, and animate people's sense of connection between the local, regional, and global church. The following are some reflection questions that can aid discernment of the process for dioceses that have been undergoing pastoral planning, diocesan synods, or other similar consultation processes:

- What was the extent of participation?



- What graces and fruits were experienced?
- What can be improved? What were the gaps?
- What decisions, proposals, suggestions or key points emerging from the recent process would benefit from further reflection, dialogue, elaboration and reception among people?
- What new questions or further issues need to be reflected upon especially with regard to the theme of communion, participation, and mission?
- What new ways of dialogue and communal discernment can people learn and put into further practice?
- What other groups of people can be reached out to, especially at the grassroots and peripheries?
- In what other ways might the Diocesan Phase of the Synod 2021-2023 be a good opportunity to progress in the calls we heard from God's Spirit in our recent process?

* *Note:* In the *Vademecum* and all of the accompanying appendices and resources, the term "diocese" refers to local Churches in general, and can be substituted with the terms *eparchy*, *ordinariate*, or any other equivalent ecclesial body.



SYNOD OF BISHOPS