

# Planning the participatory process

To reach various target groups, each diocese can make use of existing structures and platforms as well as explore new ones. For instance, since parishes are often the main point of contact with people in the local community, the consultation process can be done through parishes. Each parish can organize various means of consultation through its ministries, and even better, collaborate with one or two other parishes so that there is interaction among a greater diversity of people and experiences.

Complementing the parishes, other major entities in the diocese usually include religious congregations and associations of the lay faithful. These often have wide networks of communities, schools, pastoral ministries, charitable organizations, youth groups, and other institutions. They can be partnered with to organize consultations with people in their networks. Their own voices should also be included, either through these networks or through the parishes they belong to.

Similarly, other organizations in the diocese such as Caritas, family and youth offices, Catholic education offices, migrant associations, etc, can be tapped upon. There can also be platforms for priests, deacons, and other pastoral leaders to engage in the consultation process as participants.

A typical consultation session might comprise a gathering of people either physically or online if the Covid-19 situation is still prohibitive. A suggested outline of the program for such a gathering is provided in Appendix B of the Vademecum.

Other means of consultation might include focus groups, interviews, and platforms to submit individual inputs in the form of surveys, stories of personal experiences, or responses to reflection questions.

A central feature of synodality is the inclusion of people at the margins such as those living in poverty or those whose voices are seldom heard. Their participation is important in the Synod consultation; yet they are often unable to attend parish or other church gatherings because of their daily livelihood struggles, or they are hesitant to come forward for various reasons. Nevertheless, the diocese can consider how best to encourage their

participation. The following are some suggestions:

### Families facing livelihood struggles

The year-end or new year season is an opportune time to organize local community gatherings where meals can be shared and fellowship can be enjoyed. Even at other times of the year, such gatherings can be organized. A local NGO or parish neighborhood social committee that is familiar with the local residents could be engaged for this outreach. Using a local school hall, neighborhood center, or any other venue that is familiar and convenient to participants, there can be a shared meal, along with some social activities as well as an engaging liturgy, including a prayerful reading of a relevant passage of Scripture as well as a brief and simple explanation about the Synod.

In small groups, participants could be asked to reflect and share on questions about synodality in ways which they can relate to more directly, such as:

- What have been your family's greatest joys and struggles during this year?
- Recall a memorable or meaningful experience you had in your interactions with others in the church community.
- What does the church community mean to you? What makes you most happy about it? What makes you most sorrowful about it?
- How would you describe your role in the church community?
- What is your greatest wish for the church community? Why?
- How can we move forward better together?

Some ways to adapt the consultation questions are also available (see step 8 of the roadmap on [synod.va](http://synod.va)). Creative methods for reflection and dialogue are also available on the resources section of the website.

Children who are present at the gathering could form separate groups of their own and be led by volunteers through activities such as drawing, drama, and games to engage with the topic.

If the Covid-19 pandemic or other situation prohibits the gathering of



people in groups, some volunteers could be enlisted to conduct house-to-house visits. They might bring along basic provisions, check on the needs of vulnerable families, and at the same time carry out informal conversations with similar questions so that these families have a chance to participate in the synodal consultation and have their voices heard.

### People who have been distant from the church community

A special effort can be made to reach people who have been distant from the church community. For instance, every parishioner could be asked to forward the publicity about the consultation to 1-2 other persons they know who, for various reasons, have become relatively disengaged from the life of the church community. Other channels of outreach might include Catholic schools, neighborhood associations, social justice, ecology and climate change networks, and specialized ministries such as Landings which are in contact with persons who have left the church. Social media platforms might also be an effective channel of publicity and contact. The consultation questions could be adapted accordingly, and the need for attentive listening, hospitality, and dialogue is all the more important.

### Specific target groups

Various segments of the diocese could be reached through organizations that serve the youth, the elderly, indigenous communities, minority ethnic groups, people who live in remote areas, migrants, refugees, persons with disabilities, and other specific groups. Such organizations could even be encouraged to partner with each other so that there is mutual listening and sharing between diverse groups of people.

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\* *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