

Appendix B

Suggested guide for organizing a synodal consultation meeting

Synodal consultation meetings can be organized among various groups in a parish or by bringing diverse peoples together from different parishes. Other diocesan bodies or religious and lay organizations can also collaborate to hold consultation meetings. The following is a general outline of the steps that can be taken.

1. An organizing team can be formed to plan and carry out the consultation process and gatherings on the local level, including discerning how to reach out to people and the most suitable methods for fostering dialogue and participation in an authentic synodal experience.
2. Participation can be encouraged through parish announcements, social media, letters, etc. With the help of local neighbourhoods as well as church institutions such as schools and social centres, a special effort can be made to identify and reach out to those who have not been in regular contact with the church community for some time. Care should be taken to involve those who are excluded or whose voices are often not taken into account.
3. Participants should ideally include people from a diversity of communities, experiences, cultures, ages, and walks of life. The total group size may depend on the available venue and the number of facilitators.
4. About 2-3 weeks before the gathering, preparatory materials for prayer and reflection should be sent to all participants. These can include a brief background reading on synodality, the main reflection question(s), and suggested ways of praying and discerning about these questions, including recommended Scripture passages. Participants should also be informed about the method to be used at the synodal meeting. They should set aside time for personal preparation using all these materials because this is crucial for a fruitful dialogue.
5. The main reflection questions should be relevant and brief. It is often better to have fewer questions which can be explored deeply, rather

than have many questions that would be covered superficially. This Synod poses the following fundamental question: *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”?* (PD, 26)

In responding to this question, we are invited to:

- *Recall our experiences:* What experiences of our local Church does this question call to mind?
- *Re-read these experiences in greater depth:* What joys did they bring? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered? What wounds did they reveal? What insights have they elicited?
- *Gather the fruits to share:* Where in these experiences does the voice of the Holy Spirit resound? What is the Spirit asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are opening up for our local Church?

It is often very fruitful for participants to reflect on the journey of their local community up until now. What has been the history of the faith life of the community? How has the community travelled to where they are now? How has God been present? Recollecting the past together often helps to build up the community and guide its path forward.

To help people explore this fundamental question more fully, ten themes have been developed to highlight significant aspects of “lived synodality” (PD, 30). The questions accompanying each of the ten themes can be used as a starting point or helpful guideline for enriching the consultation. These questions can be found in Part 5 of the *Vademecum* and a more detailed version is available in the accompanying materials on the Synod website.

6. It should be ensured that there are enough group facilitators according to the chosen method and format of the consultation gathering, and that they have been adequately prepared to conduct the process. The team of people who will prepare the synthesis of the consultation should also be identified.



7. At the gathering, communal prayer and liturgy will play a vital role. Listening to one another is grounded in listening to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Meaningful forms of prayer can be used to ask God's guidance and inspiration and let him deepen our communion with one another. The liturgy and meditating together on Scripture can be very helpful means in this regard.
8. A suitable method for group dialogue which resonates with the principles of synodality can be used. For instance, the Spiritual Conversation method promotes active participation, attentive listening, reflective speaking, and spiritual discernment. Participants form small groups of about 6-7 persons from diverse backgrounds. This method takes about at least an hour and comprises three rounds. In the first round, everyone takes equal turns to share the fruit of his or her prayer, in relation to the reflection questions circulated beforehand (see #5 of this Appendix). 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 oneself, within the person speaking, and in the group as a whole. This is followed by a time of silence to note one's interior movements. In the second round, participants share what struck them most 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. Once again this is followed by a time of silence. 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 conversation. Usually each small group will have a facilitator and note-taker. (A detailed description of this process is provided on the Synod website.)
9. Once the group dialogue has taken place, participants should review and share about their experience of the process within their small group. How was their experience? What were the ups and downs? What new and refreshing insights might they have discovered? What have they learned about the synodal way of proceeding? How was God present and at work during their time together?
10. Participants should then decide on the feedback they wish to communicate to the organizing/facilitation team. The guiding questions for the diocesan synthesis as outlined in Part 4 of the *Vademecum* can be used as a basis for this feedback on the local level (see also Appendix D).
11. All participants can then come together to conclude the gathering.

One representative from each small group can briefly share about the experience of the group. The participants should be informed about the next stage of the Synodal Process, so that they know how their input will contribute to the whole Church. It is recommended that the gathering conclude with a prayer or song of thanksgiving.

12. After the gathering, the organizing/facilitation team members can meet to review the whole experience and to prepare the synthesis based on the feedback submitted by all the small groups. They can then forward their synthesis to the Diocesan Contact Person(s).

13. 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, radio, or other appropriate means. It is important that we try our best to listen to the voices of everyone, especially those who are marginalized.

For more resources, please consult the Synod website.



SYNOD OF BISHOPS