



The Synod on Synodality: Journeying Together



Background for Synod Sessions

Synodality represents the main road for the Church, called to renew herself under the action of the Spirit and by listening to the Word. The ability to imagine a different future for the Church depends largely on the decision to initiate processes of listening, dialogue, and community discernment, in which each and every person can participate and contribute.” *Preparatory Document, #9*

Purpose and Timeline of Synod Sessions

In response to the call for all Catholics to gather in dialogue and to discern together the needs and the future of the Church, Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) has organized sessions that may be used in your parish, your diocese, or an organization to which you belong.

For those participating in our Voice of the Faithful sessions, your discernment will be included in the report that VOTF (as a recognized lay organization within the Church) sends to the General Secretariat of the Synod.

The timeline for the Synod follows three stages:

- ❖ Phase 1, the Diocesan phase, includes all global consultations with the People of God. It ends in August 2022.
- ❖ Phase 2 is when dioceses summarize their sessions and forward their reports to the Continental phase. The seven continental summaries will then be summarized with all other reports the General Secretariat may receive.
- ❖ The final stage, Phase 3, will begin in Rome, October 2023, with the Synod of Bishops.

Most importantly, following the General Assembly in 2023 there will begin an implementation phase, involving again “all the particular churches” and the people.

Structure of VOTF Synod Sessions

The initial schedule will include two sessions, 1½ hours each, with an optional third as well as additional sessions available should the participants wish. Participation in each group will be limited to a maximum of 12, including a facilitator and a scribe, to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak freely. However, we will schedule as many sessions as needed to include everyone; there is no limit on total participation.

Flow of the Sessions

Each session will follow this general format:

- ❖ Welcome
- ❖ Opening Prayer
- ❖ Overview of the Synod process (omitted for 2nd session and any follow-ups)
- ❖ Participants each respond to the Synod Questions (page 3)
- ❖ Final comments
- ❖ Distribution of handouts for next session; reminder of next meeting date
- ❖ Closing Prayer

Ground Rules

- ❖ Everyone is invited to contribute. To give everyone time to share, try not to speak twice until all have had a chance to speak once—but don't feel compelled to speak until you are ready. Try to be concise and not talk more than three or four minutes each time you speak.
- ❖ Respect each other's opinions and contributions.
- ❖ Focus on "I" statements, as in "I think," "I feel," "this is my experience."
- ❖ Listen. Deeply.
- ❖ "The heart of the synodal experience is listening to God through listening to one another, inspired by the Word of God. We listen to each other ... to better hear the voice of Holy Spirit speaking in our world today." – *Vademecum*
- ❖ There are no right or wrong answers; we are gathered to hear all thoughts and all ideas and all experiences, hopes, and dreams.

Questions for the Synod Sessions

The [Preparatory Document](#) and the [Vademecum](#) for the Synod on Synodality pose one fundamental question to the People of God:

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”?

You are asked to consider this question through two perspectives: the life of the local Church around you, and the universal scope of how the People of God journey together within the entire human family. There also are 10 “thematic nuclei” for this discernment.

We have distilled these aspects into questions manageable within the timeframes available. (Note: Facilitators may use slightly different phrasing in some questions, but the meaning will be the same.)

Session 1 Questions: The Big Picture

1. Guided by the Holy Spirit, what for me is most meaningful about belonging to a local faith community?
 - What are my dreams for the Church? What do I yearn for more of?
 - What frustrates me? What do I wish would change?
2. For me, what is most meaningful about being part of the universal Church?
 - What are my dreams for the Church? What do I yearn for more of?
 - What frustrates me? What do I wish would change?

Session 2: Digging Deeper, Moving Towards Action

1. What issues in the Church do we need to pay more attention to?
2. Who is left out or suffering today? Who are at the margins?
3. If I could change one thing in the universal Church that I think would help us all better follow Christ, it would be _____
4. What actions can each of us take and what can we do collectively to make our Church better?

Optional Questions for Use Between Sessions 1 and 2

We know that many former Catholics and our own adult children may not attend Synod sessions despite our invitations. Such invitations are encouraged in the Synod documents, but practically speaking those who feel they are on the margins of the Church or who no longer practice the faith may not accept them. As an optional exercise after Session 1, and a way of hearing other voices, some participants may be willing to have a dialogue between session 1 and session 2 with their adult children or other people close to them. Here are two questions that could initiate that dialogue.

Both participants answer each question. Duration 30 minutes total, 15 minutes each

1. What gives meaning to my life?
2. What effect has the church had on my life? Good, bad, a little bit of both?

Potential Follow-On Meeting Questions After Session 2

1. What should we improve or change in our communities? (This is a repeat of Question 3 in the second session, but it may be a good starter for moving towards action.)
2. Are there additional concerns that have not yet been raised that are important to me?
For example:
 - What are people who attach themselves to other religious expressions looking for that the Catholic Church is not offering? Is it crucial?
 - What can people who have left the Church and those who have no formal religious affiliation teach us about WHY one might affiliate with a church?
How can we respond to their spiritual instincts?
3. Which of the concerns/needs are most important right now?
4. What can we individually and together do about it?

A Final Thought

Synodality does not end with the completion of Phase 1 of this Synod, nor even with Phase 3. Instead, it should become the way of life for the Church in this third millennium.