

Instructions on the Celebration of Parish Pre-Synodal Assembly

The Preparatory Phase of the Synod of Bishops has as its purpose **the consultation of the People of God** [EC Art 5]. This consultation of the People of God takes place in the particular Churches...In each particular Church, the Bishops carry out the consultation of the People of God **by recourse to the participatory bodies provided for by the law, without excluding other methods that they deem appropriate** [EC Art 6 § 1, *Vademecum* 1.5 § 1]. During the consultation, each listening phase will be adapted to local circumstances [*Vademecum* 1.5]. Even beyond this structure, the *Episcopalis Communio* gives the right to the faithful, individually or in association with others, to submit their contributions directly to the General Secretariat of the Synod [EC Art 7 § 1].

The *Vademecum* states that much of the richness of this consultation (listening phase) will come from discussions among parishes, lay movements, schools and universities, religious congregations, neighbourhood Christian communities, social action, ecumenical and inter-religious movements, and other groups. The aim is not to overwhelm dioceses and parishes, but rather **to integrate the Synodal Process into the life of the local Church in creative ways that promote deeper communion, fuller participation, and a more fruitful mission**...This diocesan phase is an opportunity **for parishes and dioceses** to encounter, experience, and live out the synodal journey together, thus **discovering or developing synodal tools and pathways that are best suited for their local context**, which will ultimately become the new style of the local Churches on the path of synodality. [*Vademecum* 3.1]. It further states that **encouraging gatherings after the consultation process with those who participated and others, to share what has been done to follow-up on the input provided, and to discern the next steps** for integrating the spirit and style of synodality on the local level [*Vademecum* Appendix A].

In the Archdiocese of Calcutta, the Diocesan Contact Person(s) and the Diocesan Synod Team have discerned and conceived a roadmap of 12 steps of parish phase of synodal consultations that concludes with a Parish Pre-Synodal Assembly, adapting from the synodal process that takes place at the universal, continental, and diocesan levels.

A Parish Pre-Synodal Assembly is a one day gathering of the parishioners. The objective is to culminate the parish phase of synodal consultation with a gathering to celebrate and reflect on the emerging realities and experience of the parish's journey of travelling together on the synodal path. It is at this gathering the main inputs gathered during consultations would be highlighted and presented in the form of a parish synthesis to the parishioners representing the diverse communities. It would be an opportunity for the clergy to listen to what God has been saying through the people, and to discern His will for the parish and the pathways He is inviting the parish to follow towards deeper communion, fuller participation and more fruitful mission. The gathering would bring out the best practices, new momentum and vitality towards being a synodal Parish.

The following instructions and guidelines are prepared adapting from the *Episcopalis Communio, Instruction on the celebration of Synodal Assemblies and on the activity of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, and the Vademecum (Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches)*:

PART I – PERSONS

The President

- The Parish Pre-Synodal Assembly is directly subjected to the authority of the Parish Priest, who administers the parish as a representative of the Local Ordinary. Therefore, he acts as the President of the Pre-Synodal Assembly.
- He convokes a Parish Pre-Synodal Assembly, which is the culmination of the parish phase of synodal consultation.
- He determines the suitable place, time and the theme to be taken for the Pre-Synodal Assembly. He must consult the Parish Contact Person(s) and Parish Synod Team for such an exercise.
- He ratifies the members of the Pre-Synodal Assembly selected by the Parish Contact Person(s)/Parish Synod Team and appoints other members as he deems fit.
- He presides over the Pre-Synodal Assembly personally or through others.
- He decides and ratifies on the Final Parish Synthesis.
- He may conclude, revise, transfer, suspend and to dissolve the Parish Pre-Synod Assembly in consultation with the Local Ordinary.
- The Parish Pre-Synod is suspended in case the office of the Parish Priest becomes vacant.

The Secretary and the Joint-Secretary (or Secretary I and Secretary II)

- One of the Parish Contact Persons acts as the Secretary and another as Joint-Secretary of the Pre-Synodal Assembly.
- They manage the program of the Pre-Synodal Assembly.
- They are to be assisted by the members of the Parish Synod Team who acts as its working and functional arm.
- They will communicate all the matters related to the Pre-Synodal Assembly to the President who ratifies them.
- They will establish and oversee the preparation of the parish synthesis by the drafting team which will eventually become the Working Document for the Parish Pre-Synodal Assembly.
- They will communicate and invite all the ratified members for participation in the Pre-Synodal Assembly and will ensure that the Working Document is transmitted sufficiently in advance to the members of the Pre-Synodal Assembly.
- They may also nominate Experts or Special Guests in consultation with the President and the Parish Synod Team.
- They may draw up procedures, norms and regulations for the Pre-Synodal Assembly in consultation with the President and the Parish Synod Team.
- They will have to ensure that the procedures, norms and regulations established are carefully observed during the Assembly. They will also promote active participation

of the members and oversee the adequate distribution of the tasks during the Assembly.

- In collaboration with the President and the Parish Synod Team they will promote the implementation of the recommendations of the Assembly.

The Members

The members are the registered parishioners of the parish (with the exception of Experts and Special Guests) nominated by the Parish Synod Team and ratified by the President. The following categories of persons may be nominated:

- The curates/asst. parish priests of the parish.
- The Parish Synod Team
- The representatives of the members of the Institutes of Consecrated life.
- The representatives of the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Committee.
- The representatives of the parish pastoral cells.
- The representatives of the action bodies and pious associations.
- The parishioners directly appointed by the President.
- The people who represent the diversity of the parish and its geographical areas. Efforts should be made to include people whose voices are often inadequately heard, such as those who experience poverty, the elderly, minority groups, isolated persons, people with disabilities, migrants, refugees, indigenous communities, etc.
- The representatives of the schools in the parish.
- The representatives of women.
- The local community leaders.
- The representatives of youth.
- The representatives of young couple.
- The interested ecumenical and interreligious delegates as Special Guests (and others who may not be Catholic but who can contribute helpful perspectives for the Church).
- The Experts, who have specialized skills (pastoral or theological or methodological) required for the meeting, including facilitators.

Tasks and Bodies during the Pre-Synodal Assembly

The President-Delegate(s)

- The President may delegate one or several persons to preside over the sessions of the Assembly. They exercise their office in turns according to the established order. Their function ceases with the conclusion of the sessions.

The Relator

- The Relator along with a drafting team prepares the Parish Synthesis (Working Document) before and during the Parish Pre-Synodal Assembly. The Relator, who heads the drafting team, is at the disposal of the President, the Secretary and the Joint-Secretary for preparing the Parish Synthesis. His/her office ceases with the dissolution of the Assembly.

The Drafting Team

- The Drafting Team may be members of the Parish Synod Team, people associated with the synodal process of the parish and experts on the subject. They assist the Relator to draft the Parish Synthesis (Working Document) from the inputs gathered during the parish consultations. It should be a report of not more than 10 pages, maintaining the format provided by the Diocesan Contact Person(s)/Team. During the Pre-Synodal Assembly they gather the inputs and interventions and redact the Final Document.

PART II – PROCEDURES

Liturgy

The Pre-Synodal Assembly opens and/or closes with a solemn celebration of the Eucharist (the source and summit of Christian life), the enthronement of the Book of the Gospels (following an ancient synodal tradition, symbolically reminding all the participants of the need for docility to the Divine Word) and singing of the hymn *Veni, Creator Spiritus* (to invoke the gifts of discernment and harmony upon the members of the Assembly).

Language

The official languages of the Assembly will be that which are predominantly used during the Eucharistic celebrations in the parish.

Discussion on the Parish Synthesis (Working Document)

General Body Meeting

There are two General Body Meetings. After the liturgical celebrations, the Secretary presents the Parish Synthesis (Working Document) to the first General Body of the Pre-Synodal Assembly. The President or the President-Delegate presides over the general body and moderates the presentations, discussions and interventions. The members may make their interventions on Parish Synthesis according to particular norms and regulations established for the discussions. The members who speak are expected to refer explicitly to the presentations given by the groups. The members will adhere to the maximum duration of the individual interventions as established by the President-Delegate.

The second General Body Meeting takes place after the small group discussions, where group reports are presented by the Reporter. The President-Delegate can grant permission to the members who deem it necessary to make additions, amendments or explanations regarding the content of the reports. The President-Delegate may promote a discussion in the General Body on the proposals of the small groups. All discussions and interventions are documented by the Relator and the Drafting Team.

Small Group Discussion

In addition to the general body meeting, a further detailed discussion may take place in small groups established by the President and the Secretary. In small groups, led by moderators, a free exchange of views takes place among the members on the matters under discussion [EC Art 15]. The views expressed in small groups are gathered and presented by the group reporters in the succeeding general body meeting, which are documented to be added to the Final Parish Synthesis (Final Document). Small Groups can also be established to discuss matters according to the convenience of languages.

Moderator, Reporter and Guide

In each Small Group, the members elect from among themselves a Moderator and a Reporter.

The Moderator presides over the Small Group, announces the topics assigned, guide the discussion and ensures that the discussion does not digress from the topic and questions assigned. He/she will promote active participation of the members. He/she will decide how much time should be given for interventions.

The Reporter summarizes the opinions expressed at the end of each small group session, both pro and con, and oversees the formulation that reflects the prevailing opinions of group members. He/she will prepare a report at the end of the discussion containing all opinions expressed to be presented to the general body.

The Guide of each Small Group is to be a member of the Parish Synod Team. The Guide assists the Moderator and the Reporter to fulfil any requests on the part of the members of the group. He/she will draw up a written report on the proceedings of the small group to be submitted to the Secretary/Relator.

The Final Document

The conclusions of the General Body Meeting are brought together in a Final Document (Parish Synthesis). The redaction of the Final Document is done by the Relator along with the Drafting Team and if needed some experts, taking into accounts the interventions of the members. This Final Synthesis is then submitted to the President, the Secretary, the Joint-Secretary and Parish Synod Team for the approval. If situation permits and redaction is complete, then it should be presented to the General Body of the Pre-Synodal Assembly, with a view to obtaining moral unanimity insofar as this is possible [EC Art 17].

Final Fulfilments

As much as possible, everyone should feel that his or her voice has been represented in the Final Synthesis. As a model of transparency, the Relator and the members of the Drafting Team as well as the process of synthesizing the feedback can be made known to all. It is strongly recommended that the Final Synthesis be made public once it has been approved, as a touchstone for the journey of the parish along the path of synodality.