



Archdiocese of Calcutta PreSynodal Listening Sessions Participants Handbook

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Introduction: *Journeying Together*

The entire Catholic Church is called to participate in the upcoming Synod of Bishops! The upcoming Synod is entitled: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.”

Synod is a greek word (*synodos*) meaning a meeting or assembly. The two Greek words that make up Synod are **syn** meaning together and **hodos** meaning way or journey.

Pope Francis has called the entire People of God to journey together! This Synod is not just another meeting with oral presentations and written reports. This Synod is a process of journeying together. As the Church, we will listen to each other, dialogue with each other, pray together, discern together and make decisions together for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world!

Pope Francis is asking each local diocese to gather together- clergy, religious and laity- to first listen to each other’s joys and hopes, and griefs and anxieties (c.f. *Gaudium et Spes no. 1*). After we listen to each other, we are called to dialogue together on ways we can accompany each other as we seek to grow in holiness. Listening and speaking within the Church always involves prayer. We are listening, dialoguing and praying together so that we can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. The “goal” of this journeying together is not to create a new vision or pastoral plan with objectives. Rather, the goal of our journeying together is to be present with one another, to listen and learn with each other, and to grow closer to the Lord and His Church.

What is Synodality?

Throughout this process, we hear the words: Synod, Synodality, and Synodal process. What do these words mean? Do they mean the same thing?

A helpful short definition of the Synod of Bishops is a gathering of bishops that

1. Fosters closer unity between the bishops and Pope
2. Provides counsel to the Pope on matters of faith and morals, and discipline of the Church
3. Studies questions concerning the Church in the world (c.f. Code of Canon Law c. 342).

Voting in the Synod of Bishops is limited to bishops present at the Synod gathering. However, clergy, men and women religious, theologians, catechists, canon

lawyers, and lay experts all participate in the Synod gathering with bishops by providing their counsel.

Synodality and the Synodal process are not a gathering or meeting of bishops, nor are they the administrative arm of the Church. Rather, Synodality is the path and process of the Church as communion. It is the communion of all the baptised who are listening to each other, dialoguing with each other and praying together to hear the voice of Holy Spirit as we all seek holiness and proclaim the Gospel. Synodality involves clergy, religious and laity listening and speaking, praying and discerning together, and placing the hopes and concerns of the People of God at the foot of the bishops, who, united with the Pope, decide matters of faith and morals in order to preserve the faith and strengthen the Church throughout the world.

“Synodality, in this perspective, is much more than the celebration of ecclesial meetings and Bishops’ assemblies, or a matter of simple internal administration within the Church; it is ‘the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* [way of living and being] of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission” (Preparatory Document no. 10). “In fact, this People, gathered together by its Pastors, adheres to the sacred deposit of the Word of God entrusted to the Church, perseveres constantly in the teaching of the Apostles, in fraternal communion, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer, ‘so that holding to, practicing, and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the Bishops and Faithful a single common effort” (Preparatory Document no. 13).

Synodality and the Synodal process are not about engaging others for the purpose of deciding matters through a parliamentary vote. Nor is the primary purpose of Synodality to introduce democratic methods into the Church, where the majority determines how the Church will act. Synodality is also not about promulgating strategic plans or managing pastoral parish ministries through objectives. Synodality is about the entire People of God journeying together to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to become holy.

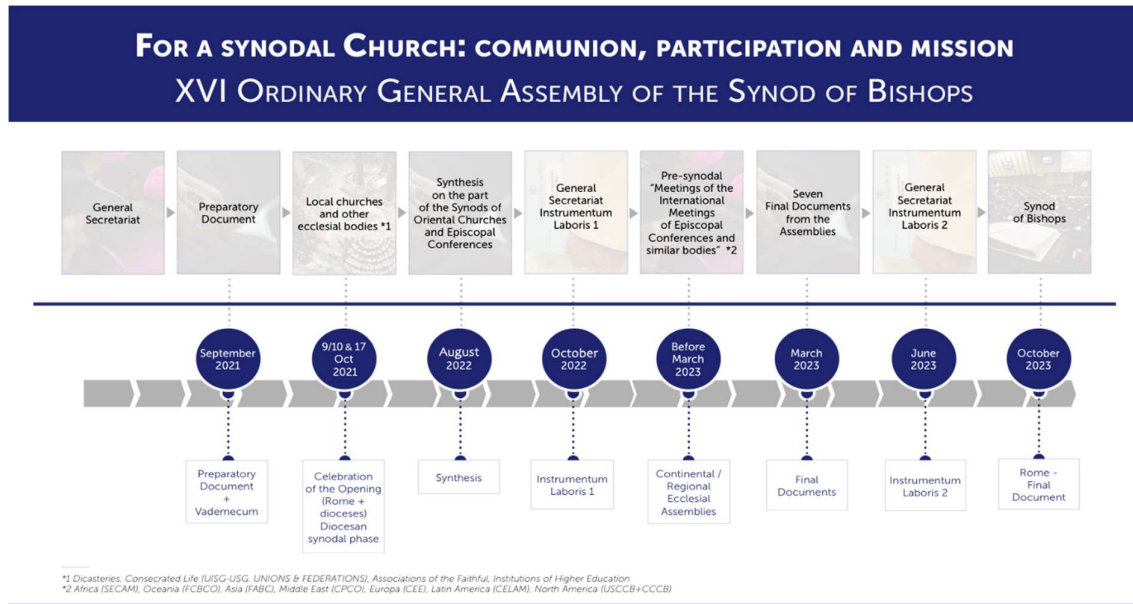
“The Pastors, established by God as ‘authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church,’ should not be afraid to listen to the Flock entrusted to them. The consultation of the People of God does not imply the assumption within the Church of the dynamics of democracy based on the principle of majority, because there is, at the basis of participation in every Synodal process, a shared passion for the common mission of evangelisation and not the representation of conflicting interests. In other words, this is an ecclesial process that can only take place ‘at the heart of a hierarchically structured community.’

Every Synodal process, in which the Bishops are called to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church, not by themselves but by listening to the People of God, who ‘shares also in Christ’s prophetic office’ (LG, no. 12), is an evident form of that “journeying together” which makes the

Church grow” (Preparatory Document, no. 14 see also c.f. *Lumen Gentium* no. 12; CCC nos. 91-93).

As we embark on this PreSynodal process as the local Church of Calcutta Archdiocese, let us remember the words of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good” (1 Thess. 5:19-21).

Timeline of the Universal Synod



Timeline of the Diocesan PreSynodal Process



Listening Meeting Timetable

My Parish name:

<i>Time</i>	<i>Agenda</i>
	<i>Welcome and Introduction</i>
	<i>Opening Prayer for Parish Listening Session</i>
	<i>Participant Ground Rules</i>
	<i>Overview of Synod Process - Reading</i>
	<i>Small Groups: The Fundamental Question</i>
	<i>Break</i>
	<i>Small Groups: The Ten Thematic Questions</i>
	<i>Closing</i>

Please fill the timings

Participant Ground Rules

Respectful Communication Guidelines

R: take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel, and speak with words others can hear and understand

E: use EMPATHETIC listening, not just words but also feelings being expressed, non-verbal language including silence

S: be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

P: PONDER on what you hear and feel before you speak

E: EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C: keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T: TRUST the process because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong but to experience true dialogue

*The “Invitation Method” is a way to include all people in the conversation in a very respectful atmosphere. While each person is speaking, the others listen. **No one may interrupt the speaker or jump in to speak without being invited by the Facilitator.***

Note on Facilitator & Notetaker Roles

The role of listening session Facilitators is to guide the conversations. Please listen to their instructions. There will be a separate Notetaker from among you to take notes of your sharing. The notes will be anonymous. The notes from all of the small groups at your parish listening session will be summarised into one parish report and used as the base documents for the Parish MiniSynod. With the gleaned pastoral recommendations highlighted, the summary will be sent to the Archdiocese as a report after it is refined at the MiniSynod. These summaries (also called “Synthesis”) from all parishes will be the foundation documents for the Diocesan PreSynodal Meeting to be held at Seva Kendra Calcutta in May this year.

Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus

Prayer of invocation to the Holy Spirit for an ecclesial assembly of governance or discernment (thus synodal).

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, the first words of the Latin original meaning, “We stand before You, Holy Spirit,” which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years, being attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 4 April 636). As we are called to embrace this synodal path of the Synod 2021 2023, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to operate within us so that we may be a community and a people of grace.

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,

as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,

make Yourself at home in our hearts;

*Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever. **Amen.***

The Fundamental Question

The Synod poses the following fundamental 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”?

(Preparatory Document no. 26)

Take a moment to write down your personal thoughts and reflection in your booklet. In your reflection on “journeying together,”:

- a) **RECALL YOUR EXPERIENCES:** Ask yourself, what experiences in our local Church come to mind when we talk about journeying together?
- b) **REREAD THESE EXPERIENCES MORE DEEPLY:** What joys did they bring? What difficulties and obstacles have they involved? What hurts has the journey involved? What insights have emerged?
- c) **GATHER THE FRUITS TO SHARE:** Where, in these experiences, can the Spirit be heard or seen? What is the Spirit asking of us? What are we doing well? What needs to change? What steps do we need to take? Where do we agree? What paths are opening up for us?

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- Share what you can in the Group.

Thematic Questions

Ten themes of lived synodality. The questions accompanying each of the following ten themes can be used as a starting point or helpful guideline. Your conversation and dialogue do not need to be limited to the following questions:

1. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road. In our local Church, who are those who “walk together”? Who are those who seem further apart? How are we called to grow as companions? What groups or individuals are left on the margins?

2. LISTENING

Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice. How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore? How are the laity listened to, especially women and young people? What facilitates or inhibits our listening? How well do we listen to those on the peripheries? How is the contribution of consecrated men and women integrated? What are some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than our own? What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?

3. SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity. What enables or hinders speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and in society? When and how do we manage to say what is important to us? How does the relationship with the local media work (not only Catholic media)? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

4. CELEBRATION

“Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy? What space is given to participating in the ministries of lector and acolyte?

5. SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION

Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is every baptised person called to participate in the mission of the Church? What hinders the baptised from being active in mission? What areas of mission are we neglecting? How does the community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment, etc.)? How does the Church help these members to live out their service to society in a missionary way? How is discernment about missionary choices made and by whom?

6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding. To what extent do diverse peoples in our community come together for dialogue? What are the places and means of dialogue within our local Church? How do we promote collaboration with neighbouring dioceses, religious communities in the area, lay associations and movements, etc.? How are divergences of vision, or conflicts and difficulties addressed? What particular issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to? What experiences of dialogue and collaboration do we have with believers of other religions and with those who have no religious

affiliation? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the spheres of politics, economics, culture, civil society, and people who live in poverty?

7. ECUMENISM

The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations? What do we share and how do we journey together? What fruits have we drawn from walking together? What are the difficulties? How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?

8. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued, the way to reach them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority or governance exercised within our local Church? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice? How are evaluations conducted and by whom? How are lay ministries and the responsibility of lay people promoted? Have we had fruitful experiences of synodality on a local level? How do synodal bodies function at the level of the local Church (Pastoral Councils in parishes and dioceses, Presbyteral Council, etc.)? How can we foster a more synodal approach in our participation and leadership?

9. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community. What methods and processes do we use in decision-making? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures? Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God? What is the relationship between consultation and decision-making, and how do we put these into practice? What tools and procedures do we use to promote transparency and accountability? How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment?

10. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning. How does our church community form people to be more capable of “walking together,” listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue? What formation is offered to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal way?

Contacts

- For the local Contact person call or text _____
- For the Diocesan Contact person, Call or WhatsApp +91 90380 94004
- For errors or clarifications on the booklet, email publish@archdioceseofcalcutta.in



- Notes -