



LIVING AS A SYNODAL CHURCH
COMMUNION. PARTICIPATION. MISSION.

Toolkit for Facilitating Synodal Consultations



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS | DECEMBER 2021

Toolkit for Facilitating Synodal Consultations

is a compilation of resources taken from the Preparatory Document and Vademecum by the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops and the Process for Facilitating Synodal Consultations from the Leadership Roundtable in partnership with the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

<https://www.synod.va/en.html>

<https://leadershiproundtable.org>

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The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio

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God's Word is planted in our hearts as seed which is sown. Synodality is the style through which the seed is sown in us by others and in them by us. And it is sown in the Church through our communion, as we dialogue to discern God's will.

”

Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, M.Sp.S.

*Homily during Assembly Convocation 2021:
Living as a Synodal Church
St. Matthew's Catholic Church
November 6, 2021*



#ListeningChurch



Welcoming Letter from Archbishop Gustavo

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

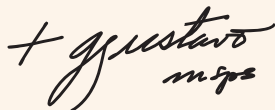
On the occasion of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality to be celebrated in Rome on 2023, the Holy Spirit gives our local Church the opportunity to reinvigorate the missionary zeal we are called to embody by virtue of our baptism. Our Church must be one which encounters Christ and one another; that finds herself united as Church around the table of the Eucharist; and is sent by the Spirit to proclaim the Good News of Salvation to all, especially those marginalized in society. These voices are easily and often overlooked in discussions. The Holy Spirit is moving their hearts also and we must listen to them.

As we embark on the first of three stages of this Synod on Synodality, the diocesan phase, I pray that each of you promote and become an ambassador in this time by prayer, discernment, and dialogue. We are called to listen. Although these listening sessions with parishes, groups, and organizations will be held through May 2022, it is my wholehearted desire that dialogues continue beyond that date. Join me and implore assistance of the Holy Spirit to whom we have consecrated the Archdiocese. We pray that it will provide guidance and discernment to address the challenges that as a Church we must change in order to be “Transformed by Hope” so we can “rebuild our tomorrow”.

This booklet and every resource posted on the website www.archsa.org/synodality are given for facilitating the conversation. Feel free to write to synodality@archsa.org and share your opinions, ideas, or concerns. Pope Francis never tires of reminding us that the participation of all must be an “undeniable commitment of the whole Church”.

This process is not about answering a questionnaire or attending a meeting, but “Living as a Synodal Church.” That is, experiencing Church as walking with others.

Sincerely yours in Jesus,



Most Reverend Gustavo García-Siller, M.Sp.S.
Archbishop of San Antonio





“

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'?

”

Cardinal Mario Grech

Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops

November 23, 2021

Toolkit for Leaders

I. Background

WHY A SYNODAL PROCESS AND WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

Pope Francis has invited everyone in the Church to embark on a journey together. Through listening and discernment rooted in the Holy Spirit, the entire People of God are being called to contribute to this process—the synodal process—by which the Church deepens in understanding of her mission and looks toward the future. For more information, visit the **FAQ web page (QR Code #1, Page 13)**.

WHO IS PARTICIPATING AND WHY IS MY VOICE NEEDED?

Pope Francis is inviting all the baptized to participate. These include parish groups and Catholic organizations, along with persons with special needs and their families, those living in poverty, the incarcerated, migrants and refugees, as well as other marginalized groups. The full voice of all People of God is needed for true discernment as we listen to one another in the Holy Spirit.

II. Preparation

CHOOSE A SPACE WHERE THOSE INVITED CAN GATHER IN GROUPS OF 6–8 PERSONS.

1. Set aside at least 90 minutes for this process.
2. Invite your group and ask for their participation. You may choose to use any of the templates provided by the Vatican to prepare a flyer or an email invitation. Give two weeks' notice to your group if possible. **Templates from the Vatican** can be found by scanning **QR Code #2, Page 13**.
3. Download copies of the **Prayer for Synodality** for yourself and each participant, **QR Code #3, Page 13**.
4. Download copies of the **Reflection Sheet (QR Code #4, Page 13)**, **Approaches for Dialogue (QR Code #5, Page 13)**, and **Ten Possible Themes (QR Code #6, Page 13)** for yourself and for each table of participants.
5. Prior to the planned discussion session, have the **Prayer for Synodality** for each participant. At each table, have a copy of the **Reflection Sheet**, **Approaches for Dialogue**, and **Ten Possible Themes** along with a **working pen**. Also, be sure to have **extra lined paper** at each table for those who wish to take extra notes.

III. Sample Schedule

- 3 Mins.** Welcome, Introductions, Prayer: Use the ***Prayer for Synodality*** together
- 5 Mins.** Give a short Background to the Synodal Process:
Use material in ***1. Background (Page 3)***.
- 7 Mins.** Review the ***Approaches for Dialogue*** out loud with participants.
Have each table choose a ***Scribe*** who will take notes on the ***Reflection Sheet*** provided.
Have each table choose a ***Discussion Leader*** to moderate and keep conversation going (could be the same person as the ***Scribe***).
- 15 Mins.** Begin discussing ***Reflection Sheet, Question #1***. As discussion begins, ask that participants be honest, open, and respectful. Ensure each ***Scribe*** takes careful notes. Keep track of the time given for each question.
- 15 Mins.** After the allotted time, move to ***Reflection Sheet, Question #2*** with participants, asking them to discuss honestly, openly, and respectfully. Again, ensure each ***Scribe*** takes careful notes.
- 10 Mins.** Review the ***Ten Possible Themes*** out loud with participants. Each table may **choose two of the ten** for their consideration. This should be done by consensus at each table. (*This section is optional. Feel free to spend more time on the ***Reflection Sheet Questions***).*
- 15 Mins.** Discuss the ***First Chosen Theme***:
Discussion Leader moderates and ***Scribe*** takes careful notes.
- 15 Mins.** Discuss the ***Second Chosen Theme***:
Discussion Leader moderates and ***Scribe*** takes careful notes.
- 3 Mins.** Concluding Remarks, Thank You's, End of Session

IV. Submit Reflection Sheet to the Archdiocese of San Antonio

Leader of Synodal Process session then submits ***Reflection Sheet*** without delay. To simplify the submission of the summary of your synodal conversation, you are going to need to download the "Rocketbook" app on your smartphone:

For iPhone: Scan ***QR Code #7, Page 13*** | For Android: Scan ***QR Code #8, Page 13***

Create a Rocketbook account using your email address. When prompted for a "destination", type the email address "synodality@archsa.org". Using your camera, scan your ***Reflection Sheet*** to send them to the destination "synodality@archsa.org". If you need assistance, email synodality@archsa.org.

Approaches that Enable Genuine Listening and Dialogue as We Participate in the Synodal Process

- We are invited to speak with authenticity and honesty. Everyone can grow in understanding through dialogue.
- We can often be resistant to what the Holy Spirit is inspiring us to consider. We are called to set aside attitudes of complacency and comfort.
- Move forward with the conviction of faith. We are called to be beacons of hope, not prophets of doom.
- Keep in mind that Synodality is a spiritual process led by the Holy Spirit. We are pilgrims & servants on the path marked out for us by God.
- Avoid the temptation to focus solely on personal concerns. The Synodal Process is an opportunity to look beyond ourselves and see the needs and concerns of others.
- Avoid the temptation to only see "problems." The challenges, difficulties, and hardships facing our world and our Church are many. We can miss the light if we focus only on the darkness.
- Don't take any comment personally. Everyone is doing their best given the circumstances.
- As we proceed along the journey of the Synod, keep in mind that the goal is to discern how God calls us to walk forward together. No one Synodal Process will resolve all our concerns and problems.
- Remember that Synodality is an attitude and an approach of moving forward in a co-responsible way that is open to welcoming God's inspiration over time.

AT LEAST TWO FRUITS WILL RESULT FROM THIS SYNODAL PROCESS:

First, our pastors and bishops will have the opportunity to listen carefully to what the People of God have to say about our local Church, which will allow them, in turn, to discern what the Holy Spirit wants from all of us here and now. Pope Francis will do the same in 2023 when the Synod on Synodality takes place in Rome.

Second, we will all have the opportunity to experience the joy that comes from meeting with our brothers and sisters in Christ, learn more about each other, and discover through such an encounter what God wants from each one of us, our parishes, and organizations here and now.

TO BEGIN THE PROCESS, WE ARE INVITED TO REFLECT ON TWO QUESTIONS THAT THE VATICAN HAS PROPOSED:

1. A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "*journeys together*." How is this "*journeying together*" happening today in your local Church?
2. What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "*journeying together*"?

Before we begin our dialogue, you will notice that both questions are centered on the idea of "*journeying together*", which for this process can be summarized in three steps:

1. Listening & sharing
2. Understanding what God wants—What is meant when we talk about "*discernment*"
3. Acting as Missionary Disciples as we serve one another in the name of Christ

As you move forth in your conversation with others, remember that if we open ourselves up to the action of the Spirit, this listening and sharing exercise will have a transformative effect in our lives and the life of our Church.

After your dialogue on the first two questions, your table group will have the opportunity to choose two of the ten possible themes the Vatican has proposed to help explore the previous questions more fully. Make your choices by group consensus.

You may wish to write down your own personal and common discoveries, so that you can benefit from all the discussions that will be taking place throughout our Archdiocese in the coming months. You may be asked to participate in more than one Synodality dialogue.

Please begin your discussions. You will have 15 minutes for each question.

Ten Possible Themes

To help us explore the **Reflection Sheet Questions** more fully, the Vatican has provided the following ten themes for consideration. The questions accompanying each of them are not necessarily to be answered individually, but can be used as a guide for your discussions.

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 remain on the margins and what can we do to include them?

2. LISTENING

Listening requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice. How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore? What facilitates or inhibits our listening? Do we listen to those who have views different from our own? What space is there for the voice of those who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?

3. SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage, 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? 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?

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 baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church? What hinders the baptized from being active in mission? What areas of mission are we neglecting?

6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding. What are the places and means of dialogue within our local Church? 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 denominations, 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? 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

Synodality is exercised in making 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?

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?

Discuss Two of the Ten Themes

This section is **optional** and should not substitute the main **Reflection Sheet Questions**.

Theme # _____



Theme # _____

Who Facilitates Synodal Consultations

CHOOSING FACILITATORS

Good facilitation has participants engaging with one another in meaningful dialogue on the given topic or question. The facilitator is not the center of conversation but rather a guide for the conversation. It is important to select and train excellent facilitators for this listening process. **Strong Facilitators are people who:**

- Are at home with their Catholic faith
- Are prayerful and reflective
- Have strong interpersonal skills
- Have effective communication skills
- Are willing participants in the Synodal Process
- Are able to maintain a "*big picture*" view without injecting their personal agenda
- Can focus a conversation
- Can connect participants with each other without becoming the center of the conversation.

It is important to select facilitators with the experience and competencies needed, depending on the nature and makeup of the group.

- Volunteers can usually facilitate parish, diocesan, religious order, movements, or similar synodal consultations.
- A Catholic professional facilitator—or someone else with higher level facilitation skills—may be needed on occasion when participants come from marginalized groups (e.g., different ethnic or cultural groups, abuse survivors, youth, LGBTQ , persons with disabilities, migrants/refugees, etc.) or when special interest groups are participating in a particular consultation.
- All facilitators need preparation and training on the synodal approach, the synodal purpose, and the Synodal Process.

Facilitating a Synodal Consultation

As **Facilitator**, you will be asked to:

- Establish clear boundaries of time and topic for speakers.
- Gently interrupt a speaker who talks disproportionately more than others.
- Gently interrupt and redirect a speaker who gets off topic.
- Gently re-focus a speaker who is preoccupied with an issue that is not pertinent to the topic or inhibits the participation of others in the group.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL FACILITATION

It helps to set ground rules and expectations at the start of the consultation by emphasizing the need for broad participation and safety. Some examples of boundary-related ground rules are:

1. One person speaks at a time and the others listen attentively.
2. Discernment means speaking, listening and prayerfully reflecting. For this reason, pausing in silence between speakers to consider what is said is a good approach.
3. Speak when you can add to the conversation, not when you are trying to intentionally end it.
4. Stay on topic.
5. Keep your comments reasonably brief so others have time to participate.
6. This is a forward-leaning conversation, so lean toward solutions.
7. If someone offers a comment in the form of a complaint, ask the person to reframe her/his comment in the form of a hope or aspiration.
8. If you have to interrupt a speaker, it helps to acknowledge their contribution by providing a brief synthesis of what you heard them say and thank them for their contribution.

EXAMPLES OF GROUND RULES FOR SYNODAL CONSULTATIONS

1. This consultation is a safe place to talk. We will treat each other and what anyone says with reverence and respect.
2. One person speaks at a time.
3. We all will listen with an open mind.
4. We will be stopping the conversation at certain intervals to reflect and pray.

5. Our primary mode is dialogue: When we speak, our purpose is to advance the conversation. Please avoid arguing or comments that seek to advance a personal agenda.
6. We limit how long we speak so that everyone has time to share.
7. We only speak once until everyone has had an opportunity to share.
8. We will be reporting the themes and experiences to the (arch)diocese and bishop's conference as they emerge from the consultation discussions without indicating the names of individual participants.
9. As participants, when we tell others of our experience of the consultation, we will not attribute anything we share to particular people or groups.



A Final Word of Advice from the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops

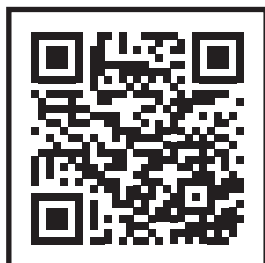
Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops said on November 23, 2021 that *"there is a risk—or perhaps a temptation—of wanting to overload the synodal process with other meanings and objective, of wanting to add things to be done to achieve further results, beyond the shared experience of listening to the People of God about synodality and the synodal Church."* There was no questionnaire included with the Synod on Synodality preparatory documents released last September, *"to avoid any misunderstanding about the consultation, which cannot and will never be a poll."*

The cardinal suggests to focus on only *"a single fundamental question"* to guide the consultative process: ***"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'?"***

Grech said that the other questions (themes) listed at the end of the handbook were only *"thematic points to be explored."* *"These are not 10 questions—then we would be back to the questionnaire—but aspects of the one fundamental question,"* he said. *"It is better that the People of God in our Churches confront themselves with the fundamental question, rather than talking about anything, without foundation and above all without direction,"* Grech emphasized.

QR Codes to Download Resources

QR Code #1
FAQ Web Page



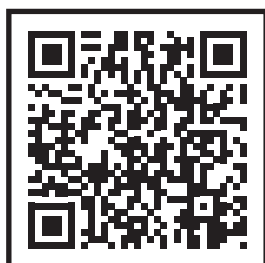
QR Code #2
Templates from the Vatican



QR Code #3
Prayer for Synodality



QR Code #4
Reflection Sheet



QR Code #5
Approaches for Dialogue



QR Code #6
Ten Possible Themes



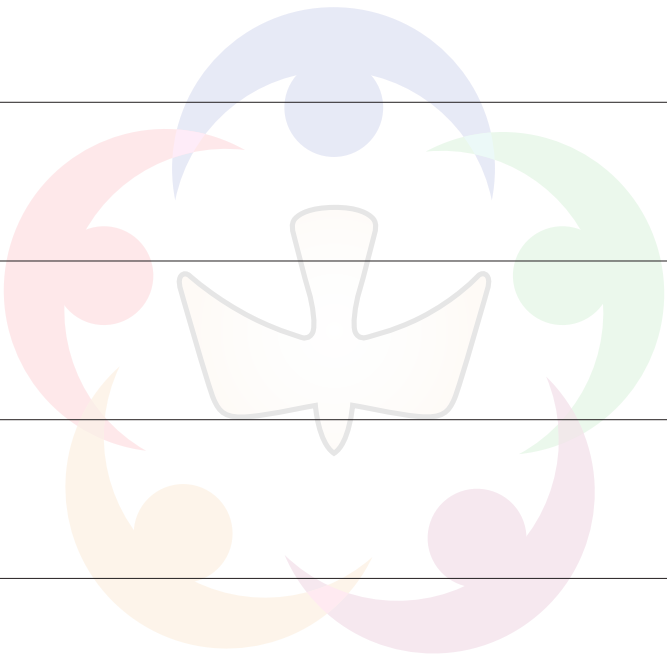
QR Code #7
Rocketbook for iPhone



QR Code #8
Rocketbook for Android



Notes



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As we initiate this process, we too are called to become experts in the art of encounter. Not so much by organizing events or theorizing about problems, as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another.

Pope Francis

*Homily during the Mass opening
the synod path
St. Peter's Basilica
October 10, 2021*

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