



For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission

Archdiocese of Baltimore Synodal Process

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Synod?

“Synod” is an ancient word in the Tradition of the Church whose meaning indicates the path along which the People of God walk together. It also refers to the Lord Jesus and to the fact that Christians, His followers, were originally called “followers of the way” (cf. Acts 9,2; 19, 9:23; 22,4; 24, 14.22).

What is the current Synod and when does it take place?

The Church of God is convoked in Synod. Pope Francis has called the global Church to conduct an extensive connection and intentional “listening tour” on the parish level and beyond, to get direct feedback and hear from the people who make up the church communities. The path entitled “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission” will solemnly open on October 9 & 10 of 2021 in Rome and on October 17, in each particular Church (diocese). One fundamental stage will be the celebration of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in October 2023, which will be followed by the implementation phase that will again involve the particular Churches (cf. EC, arts. 19-21).

What is the aim of this Synod?

The aim of the Synod is to discern how we are “living the faith” and how, we as a Church, are achieving this together. A fundamental aspect of the Synodal Process is to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church and by answering one fundamental question: “How does this ‘journeying together’ take place today on different levels, allowing the Church to proclaim the Gospel and what steps is the Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?” (PD, 2). In responding to this question, we are invited to recall our experiences, re-read these experiences in greater depth, and gather the fruits to share. The Synodal Process aims at fostering a lived experience of discernment, participation, and co-responsibility, where a diversity of gifts is brought together for the Church’s mission in the world. The Synod is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people’s hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission (PD, 32). In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Synodal Process seeks to also build upon

and advance the goals envisioned by Archbishop Lori in his Pastoral Letter, [A Light Brightly Visible & A Light Brightly Visible 2.0](#).

Ultimately, this process seeks to achieve three major goals:

- Encouraging individuals and communities to participate in the life of the Church;
- Building communion through journeying and walking this path of faith together, and
- Building a foundation where committing to mission and fulfilling mission is encouraged and possible.

What is the theme of this Synod?

The theme of this Synod is: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” The three dimensions of the theme (communion participation, and mission) are profoundly interrelated. They are the vital pillars of a Synodal Church, with no hierarchy between them. Rather, one enriches and orients the other two. There is a dynamic relationship between the three that must be articulated with all three in mind.

What is the timeline for the Synod?

The first phase of the Synodal Process is a listening phase in local Churches and begins in each diocese on October 17, 2021. The Archdiocese of Baltimore will formally initiate its Synodal Process with an Opening Liturgy (for all the faithful) on Sunday, October 17 at 11:00 a.m. at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen. Local (parish level) listening sessions will take place in November, followed by regional (inter-parish) listening sessions in January and February. Diocesan-level conversations will take place in spring 2022, prior to the drafting and submission to the Holy See of a synthesis of all conversations by the faithful of the Archdiocese.

Who is able to participate in the Synodal Process?

The purpose of the first phase of the synodal journey is to foster a broad consultation process in a prayerful context in order to gather the wealth of the experiences of lived synodality involving the priests, deacons and lay faithful. Religious communities, lay movements, associations of the faithful, and other ecclesial groups are encouraged to participate in the Synodal Process. Each diocese is called to aim for the widest participation possible, including by those on the periphery who are often excluded and forgotten. The Diocesan listening phase is to include discussions among parishes, lay movements, schools and universities, religious congregations, neighborhood Christian communities, social action, ecumenical and inter-religious movements, and other groups.

How can the faithful participate in the Synodal Process?

The People of God of the Archdiocese can participate in the Synodal Process by engaging in parish level and other local conversations and by submitting summaries of those conversations through a special online submission form found on the [Archdiocesan website](#). Other sources of information and updates about parish conversations include the parish bulletin, Mass announcements, MyParish App, The Catholic Review, and parish and diocesan social media channels.

What are the parameters for the Synodal Process at the local level?

The unfolding of the Synodal Process at the local level must involve discernment, accessibility, cultural awareness, inclusion, partnership, respect, accurate syntheses, transparency and fairness. The process should also reflect Pope Francis' vision for the practice of synodality, including those attitudes outlined by the Holy Father as instrumental to promoting genuine listening and dialogue. Being synodal requires time for sharing; humility in listening must correspond to courage in speaking; dialogue leads us to newness, openness to conversion and change. Synods are an ecclesial exercise in discernment; we are signs of a Church that listens and journeys. We must leave behind prejudices and stereotypes, overcome the scourge of clericalism, cure the virus of self-sufficiency, overcome ideologies, and give rise to hope. Synods are a time to dream and "spend time with the future."

What is the role of the bishop, priests and deacons in the Synodal Process?

The fullness of the Synodal Process can only truly exist with the involvement of the local Churches, requiring the personal involvement of the diocesan bishop, whose primary role in this Synodal Process is to facilitate the synodal experience of the whole People of God on the journey towards a more Synodal Church. The bishop can seek feedback and participation wherever helpful in the organization process. The bishop is invited to communicate with the respective bodies, organizations, and structures in the diocese, including the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, the Presbyteral Council, parishes, religious communities, lay movements, various pastoral ministries (such as in schools and hospitals), and diocesan commissions to encourage their participation in the Synodal Process and to request their help as is fitting.

Priests and deacons can raise awareness about the synodal nature of the Church and the meaning of synodality in parishes, ministries, and movements that they serve. Priests and deacons are also called to support, encourage, promote, and enable the unfolding of the diocesan phase of the Synodal Process in the local Church.

How can people learn more about the Synod and remain updated on the Synodal Process?

The Archdiocese of Baltimore will compile resources, information and regular updates on its [website](#). As well, Archbishop Lori, Bishops Lewandowski and Madden, as well as members of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council will provide updates throughout the diocesan Synodal Process. Other sources of information and updates include the parish bulletin, Mass announcements, MyParish App, The Catholic Review, and parish and diocesan social media channels.

Abbreviations:

EC Francis, Apost. Const. *Episcopalis Communio* (15 September 2018)
PD *Preparatory Document*