



For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission

General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops

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**From the Synod
on Young
People and the
Synod on the
Amazon to the
Synod on
Synodality**



“Synodality is the way of being the Church today according to the will of God, in a dynamic of discerning and listening together to the voice of the Holy Spirit.”

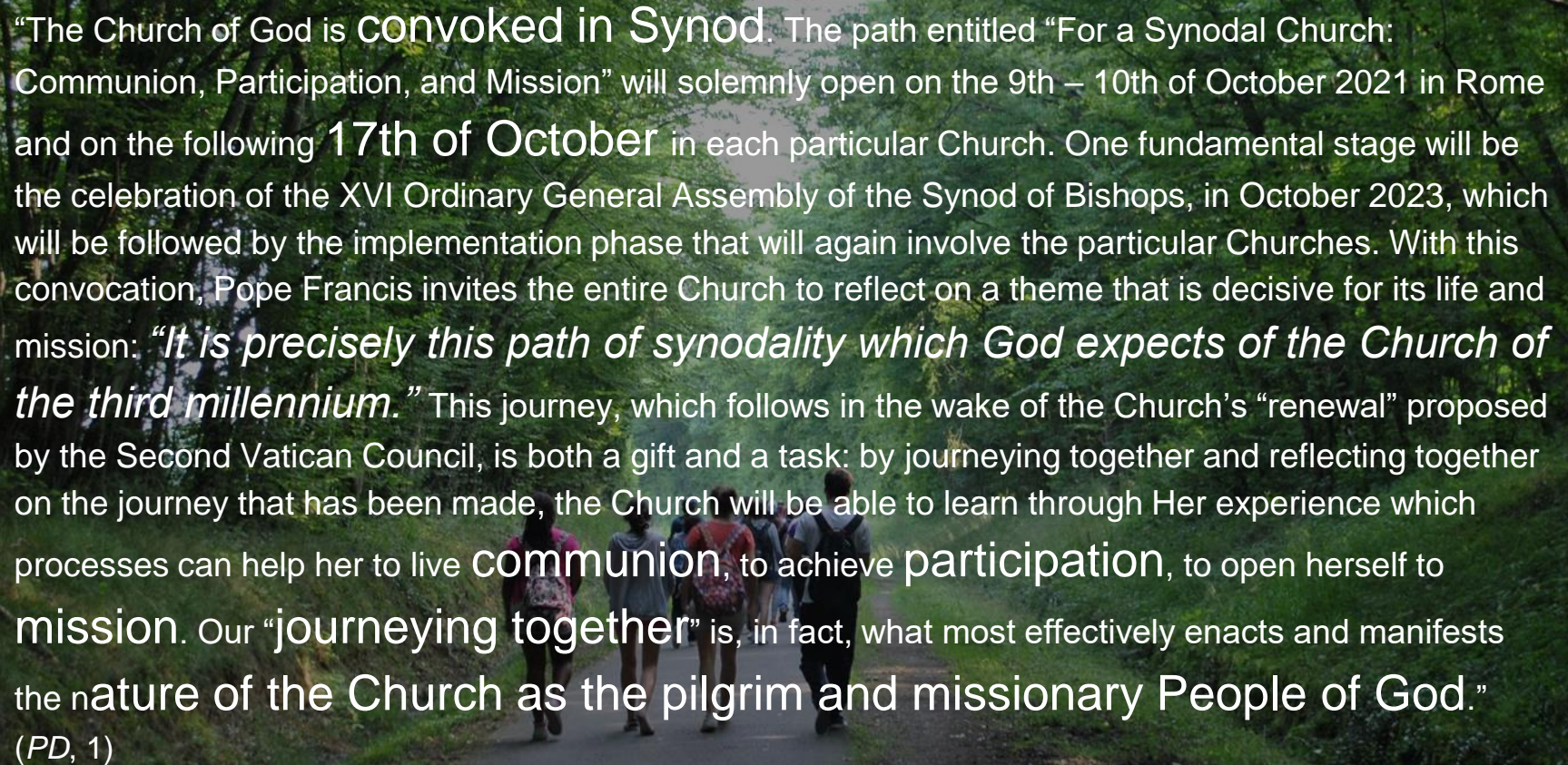
The Challenge of Synodality

- “What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word “**Synod.**”

Journeying together – laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome – is an **easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice.**”

Pope Francis

Address at the [Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops](#), October 17 2015

A group of people, seen from behind, are walking along a paved path that winds through a lush, green forest. The path is flanked by dense foliage and trees, with sunlight filtering through the leaves. The people are dressed in casual attire, and their movement suggests a journey or pilgrimage.

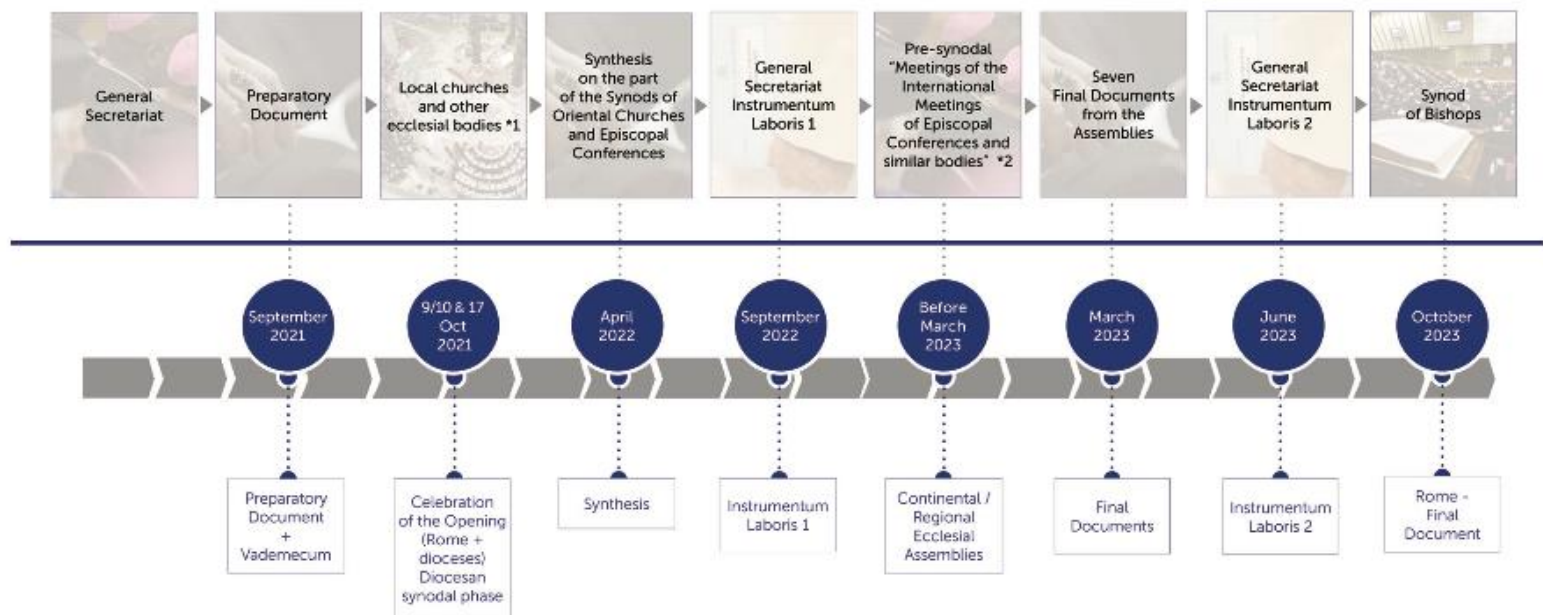
“The Church of God is **convoked in Synod**. The path entitled “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission” will solemnly open on the 9th – 10th of October 2021 in Rome and on the following **17th of October** in each particular Church. One fundamental stage will be the celebration of 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. With this convocation, Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission: *“It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”* This journey, which follows in the wake of the Church’s “renewal” proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through Her experience which processes can help her to live **communion**, to achieve **participation**, to open herself to **mission**. Our “journeying together” is, in fact, what most effectively enacts and manifests the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God.”

(PD, 1)

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FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION AND MISSION

XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS



*1 Dioceses, Consecrated Life (IUSG-USG, UNIONS & FEDERATIONS), Associations of the Faithful, Institutions of Higher Education

*2 Africa (ISeCAM), Oceania (IFCBO), Asia (IABC), Middle East (ICPCO), Europe (ICCE), Latin America (CELAM), North America (USCCB + CCCB)

The aim of the Synod

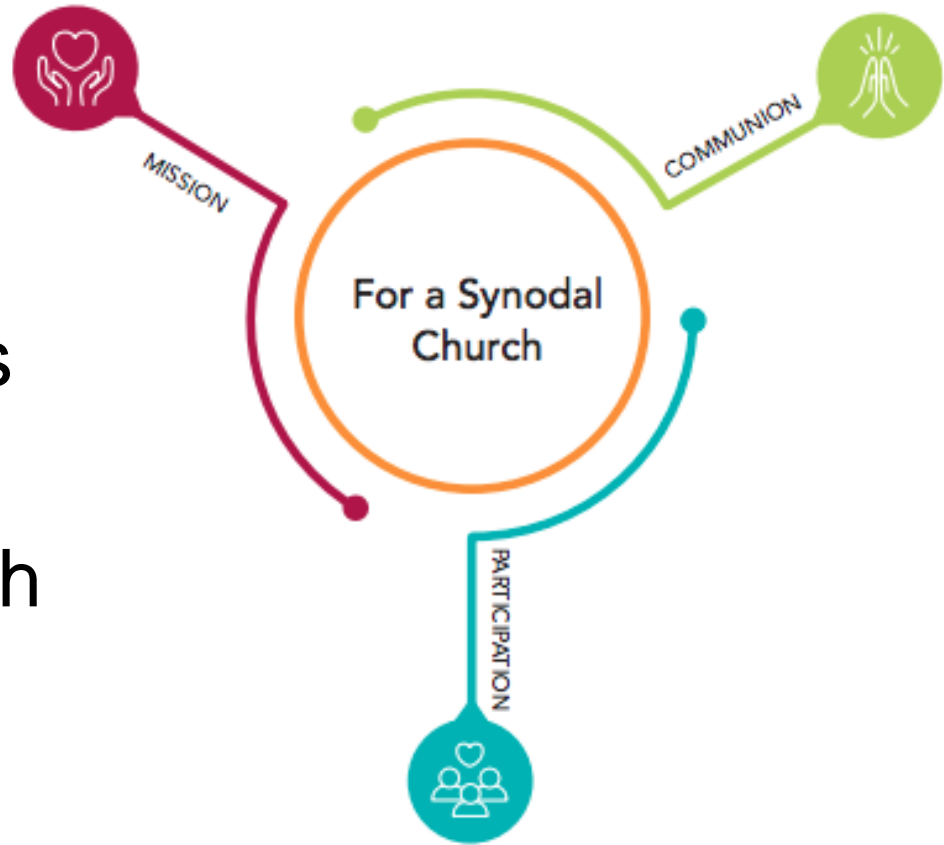
To learn synodality

Reread and Practice

→ The Synodal conversion of the Church

*Putting into practice the Synodal nature
of the entire Church*

Communion, Participation and Mission – 3 inseparable keys at the heart of a Synodal Church





From an event to a process

- What's new in *Episcopalis Communio*

Article 4: *Phases of the Synodal Assembly*

Each Synodal Assembly unfolds in a series of phases:

1. The preparatory phase
2. The discussion phase (also known as the phase of celebration)
3. The implementation phase

***Episcopalis Communio* emphasizes the local phase**

- 6. The Synod of Bishops must increasingly become a privileged instrument for ***listening to the People of God***.
- 7. The history of the Church bears ample witness to the **importance of consultation** for ascertaining the views of the Bishops and the faithful in matters pertaining to the Good of the Church. Hence, even in the preparation of Synodal Assemblies, it is very important that the consultation of all the particular Churches be given special attention.
- **The synodal process not only has its point of departure but also its point of arrival in the People of God**, upon whom the gifts of grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit through the gathering of Bishops in Assembly must be poured out.

***Episcopalis Communio* emphasizes the local phase**

- Article 6: *Consultation of the People of God*
- § 1. The 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.

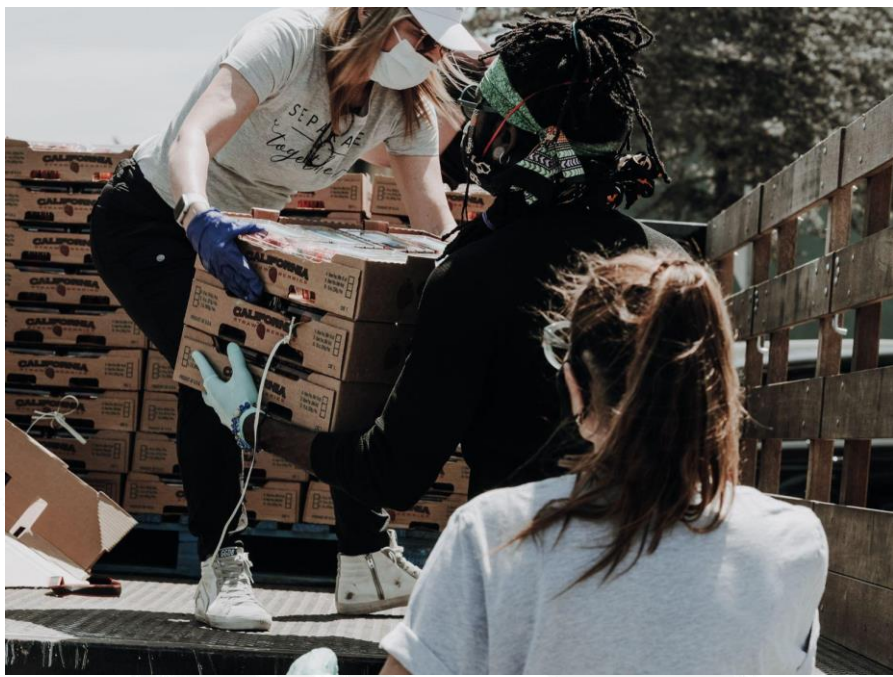
Basic Question of the Synodal Process

A basic question prompts and guides us: How does this “journeying together,” which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church? (PD, 2)

The fundamental question for the consultation of the People of God

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together:” How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”? (PD, 26)





“The **purpose of the Synod**, and therefore of this consultation, is not to produce documents, but “to plant dreams, **draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to be nourished**, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and **create a bright resourcefulness** that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.”” (PD, 32)





Synod
2021
2023

For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

Preparatory Document

- I. The Call to Journey Together
- II. A Constitutively Synodal Church
- III. Listening to the Scriptures
 - I. Jesus, the Crowd, the Apostles
 - II. A Double Dynamic of Conversion: Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10)
- IV. Synodality in Action: Pathways for Consulting the People of God

Vademecum

- I. Introduction
- II. Principles of a Synodal Process
- III. The Process of the Synod
- IV. Travelling the Synodal Path in Dioceses
- V. Resources for organizing the Synodal Process

+ Appendices, materials, and tools (biblical, liturgical, methodological, and practical resources, etc.)

The Objectives of the Synod (*PD*, 2)

- **recalling how the Spirit has guided the Church's journey** through history and, today, calls us to be, together, witnesses of God's love;
- **living a participative and inclusive ecclesial process that offers everyone—**especially those who for various reasons find themselves on the margins—the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard in order to contribute to the edification of the People of God;
- **recognizing and appreciating the wealth and the variety of the gifts and charisms** that the Spirit liberally bestows for the good of the community and the benefit of the entire human family;
- **exploring participatory ways of exercising responsibility** in the proclamation of the Gospel and in the effort to build a more beautiful and habitable world;



The Objectives of the Synod (*PD*, 2)

- **examining how responsibility and power are lived in the Church as well as the structures by which they are managed**, bringing to light and trying to convert prejudices and distorted practices that are not rooted in the Gospel;
- **accrediting the Christian community as a credible subject and reliable partner** in paths of social dialogue, healing, reconciliation, inclusion and participation, the reconstruction of democracy, the promotion of fraternity and social friendship;
- **regenerating relationships among members of Christian communities as well as between communities and other social groups**, e.g., communities of believers of other denominations and religions, civil society organizations, popular movements, etc.;
- **fostering the appreciation and appropriation of the fruits of recent synodal experiences** on the universal, regional, national, and local levels.

Key convictions for a Synodal Church

- Listen to one another in order to listen to the Holy Spirit
- In a spirit of prayer, grounded in the liturgy and the Word of God
- An experience shared with one another, not just filling out a questionnaire
- A process, not a one-time event
- Discerning together so that the decisions made are for the good of all



Together, listening to the Holy Spirit, let us be led by God

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; ^[SEP]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 ^[SEP]and
what is right.

All this we ask of You, ^[SEP]who are at work
in every place and time, in the
communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever. Amen.





Discerning the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel

“The synodal journey unfolds within a historical context marked by epochal changes in society and by a crucial transition in the life of the Church, which cannot be ignored: it is within the folds of the complexity of this context, in its tensions and contradictions, that we are called to “scrutinize the **signs of the times** and interpret them in the **light of the Gospel**” (GS, 4).” (PD, 4)

1. The global tragedy of the **COVID-19 pandemic**
1. **Inequalities and injustices:** massification, fragmentation, the conditions faced by migrants, divisions across the family of humanity
2. The cry of the **poor** and the cry of the **earth**

We are all in the same boat...

*We are one human family living in our common home.
(Laudato Si' and Fratelli Tutti)*



“Within this context,
synodality represents the main road for the Church,
called to renew herself under the action of the Spirit and
by listening to the Word.” (*PD*, 9)

- Imagining a different future for the Church
- Being a prophetic witness to the human family, which needs to be united around a common goal



Listening to the Scriptures

Jesus, the Crowd, and the Apostles

“The work of evangelization and the message of salvation would not be comprehensible without Jesus’ constant openness to the widest possible audience, which the Gospels refer to as the *crowd*, that is, all the people who follow him along the path, and at times even pursue him in the hope of a sign and a word of salvation: this is the second actor on the scene of Revelation. The proclamation of the Gospel is not addressed only to an enlightened or chosen few.” (PD, 18) → **In order for the Church to be herself, and for her mission to bear fruit, all three must always be present: Jesus, the crowd, and the apostles!**

A Double Dynamic of Conversion: Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10)

“It is in the encounter with people, welcoming them, journeying with them, and entering their homes, that he realizes the meaning of his vision: no human being is unworthy in the eyes of God, and the difference established by election does not imply exclusive preference but service and witnessing of a universal breadth.” (PD, 23)



Synodality in action: pathways for consulting the People of God (*PD*, 26)

- In order to respond, you are invited to:
 - a) ask yourselves what experiences in your particular Church the fundamental question calls to mind;
 - b) reread these experiences of “journeying together” in greater depth: What joys did they provoke? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered? What wounds have they brought to light? What insights have they elicited?
 - c) gather the fruits to share: Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound? What is he asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are opening up for our particular Church?

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Ten Themes to Explore

I. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

In the Church and in society, we are side by side on the same road.

II. LISTENING

Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudice.

III. SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, integrating freedom, truth, and charity.

IV. CELEBRATION

“Journeying together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.

V. 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.

VI. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Dialogue is a path of perseverance that also includes silences and sufferings, but which is capable of gathering the experience of persons and peoples.

VII. ECUMENISM

The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey.

VIII. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church.

IX. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit.

X. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

The spirituality of journeying together is called to become an educational principle for the formation of the human person and of the Christian, of the families, and of the communities.

Reinvigorating Collegial Bodies

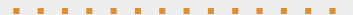
- Episcopalis Communio, 7. “In the Church the purpose of any collegial body, whether consultative or deliberative, is always the search for truth or the good of the Church. When it is therefore a question involving the faith itself, the *consensus ecclesiae* is not determined by the tallying of votes, but is the outcome of the working of the Spirit, the soul of the one Church of Christ.”

Giving New Life to Synodal Institutions

- *The Synod of Bishops and Diocesan Synods*
- *Pastoral Councils, on the Diocesan and Parish levels, and the Presbyteral Council*
- *A Local, Provincial, or General Chapter for Religious Communities*
- *General Assemblies and Councils of Movements in the Church*

A key objective of the *Vademecum*: promoting adaptation to the local context

The *Vademecum* handbook is offered as a guide to support each local Church's efforts, not as a rulebook. Those who are responsible for organizing the process of listening and dialogue at the local level are encouraged to be sensitive to their own culture and context, resources, and constraints, and to discern how to implement this diocesan synodal phase, guided by their diocesan Bishop. We encourage you to take useful ideas from this guide, but also to have your own local circumstances as your starting point. New and creative pathways may be found for working together among parishes and dioceses in order to bring this Synodal Process to fruition. This Synodal Process need not be seen as an overwhelming burden that competes with local pastoral care. Rather, it is an opportunity to foster the synodal and pastoral conversion of each local Church so as to be more fruitful in mission.



FOSTERING WIDE PARTICIPATION IN THE SYNODAL PROCESS

The goal is to ensure the participation of the greatest number possible, in order to listen to the *living voice of the entire People of God*.

- This is not possible unless we make special efforts to **actively reach out to people where they're at**, especially those who are often excluded or who are not involved in the life of the Church.
- There must be a clear focus on the **participation of the poor, marginalized, vulnerable, and excluded**, in order to listen to their voices and experiences.
- The Synodal Process must be **simple, accessible, and welcoming** for all.



CREATING A SYNODAL EXPERIENCE AND GATHERING THE FRUITS



- The *Vademecum* aims to promote the **practice of synodality on the local level**: the goal is not simply to provide responses to pre-determined questions, but to open a space for sharing a **synodal experience** with one another at the local level.
- To foster a synodal experience, the *Vademecum* proposes diverse methodologies and tools that can be adapted locally.
- The diocesan synthesis should **collect the fruits and honest feedback of participants** from the local synodal experience, rather than transmitting generic summaries.



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Thank you!