

## **WHAT IS A SYNOD?**

The word “synod” has its roots in a Greek word that means “coming together or “traveling together”. The bishops of our catholic church have been coming together in synods since 1965, to discuss the business of the church. Synod 2021-2023 is different as it will involve the whole church – not only bishops. It will be a journey of sharing, reflecting and listening to each other and the Holy Spirit, and in this way learn how God is calling us to be church in these times. Our Synod consultations will run from January to August 2022.

## **EXPLAINING THE SYNOD THEME**

**“For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”** Communion is about diverse peoples, from all walks of life, all backgrounds, all races, coming together as one people of faith and working in unity to build up the body of Christ. Participation: Our Baptism makes us children of God and we are called to be active members of the Church, put our gifts at the service of one another and to be involved through prayer and listening. Mission: The Church exists to evangelize. Our mission is to bear witness to the love of God by being salt, light and leaven in the midst of the world. We must be fired up with missionary zeal for His kingdom.

## **A SYNODAL CHURCH**

Synodality is journeying or travelling together as a pilgrim and missionary people of God. It is also about coming together and listening to one another as we journey. As a Synodal Church, this ought to be our style of living, our way of life, as the people of God.

In Synod 2021 – 2023, all of us are called to meet, talk and listen to one another, as we share our reflections on the following:

1. A Synodal Church in announcing the gospel, journeys together. How is this “journeying together” happening today in our local church?
2. What is the Holy Spirit asking us to do, in order to grow as a Synodal church? The Synodal consultations and listening process will begin in two weeks time.

## **WHAT IS SYNODALITY?**

### **Part I**

**Background for this Synod:**

By convening this Synod, 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.”**

**Following in the wake of the renewal of the Church proposed by the Second Vatican Council, this common journey together is both a gift and a task. By reflecting together on the journey that has been made so far, the diverse members of the Church will be able to learn from one another’s experiences and perspectives, guided by the Holy Spirit (PD, 1).**

**Enlightened by the Word of God and united in prayer, we will be able to discern the processes to seek God’s will and pursue the pathways to which God calls us – towards deeper communion, fuller participation, and greater openness to fulfilling our mission in the world. The International Theological Commission (ITC) describes synodality this way:**

**‘Synod’ is an ancient and venerable word in the Tradition of the Church, whose meaning draws on the deepest themes of Revelation [...] It indicates the path along which the People of God walk together. Equally, it refers to the Lord Jesus, who presents Himself as ‘the way, the truth and the life’ (Jn 14,6), 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).**

**First and foremost, synodality denotes the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel.**

**Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church’s ordinary way of living and working.**

**In this sense, synodality enables the entire People of God to walk forward together, listening to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, to participate in the mission of the Church in the communion that Christ establishes between us.**

**Ultimately, this path of walking together is the most effective way of manifesting and putting into practice the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God (PD, 1).**

**The entire People of God shares a common dignity and vocation through Baptism. All of us are called in virtue of our Baptism to be active participants in the life of the Church. In parishes, small Christian communities, lay movements, religious communities, and other forms of communion, women and men, young people and the elderly, we are all invited to listen to one another in order to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who comes to guide our human efforts, breathing life and vitality into the Church and leading us into deeper communion for our mission in the world.**

**As the Church embarks on this synodal journey, we must strive to ground ourselves in experiences of authentic listening and discernment on the path of becoming the Church that God calls us to be.**

## **WHAT IS SYNODALITY?**

### **Part II**

#### **WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS SYNOD?**

##### **Objectives of the Synodal Process:**

**The Church recognizes that synodality is an integral part of her very nature. Being a synodal Church finds expression in ecumenical councils, Synods of Bishops, diocesan Synods, and diocesan and parish councils.**

**There are many ways by which we experience forms of “synodality” already across the Church. Yet being a synodal Church is not limited to these existing institutions. Indeed, synodality is not so much an event or a slogan as a style and a way of being by which the Church lives out her mission in the world. The mission of the Church requires the entire People of God to be on a journey together, with each member playing his or her crucial role, united with each other.**

**A synodal Church walks forward in communion to pursue a common mission through the participation of each and every one of her members. The objective of this Synodal Process is not to provide a temporary or one-time experience of synodality, but rather to provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term.**

**One of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council was the institution of the Synod of Bishops. While the Synod of Bishops has taken place up until now as a gathering of bishops with and under the authority of the Pope, the Church increasingly realizes that synodality is the path for the entire People of God. Hence the Synodal Process is no longer only an assembly of bishops but a journey for all the faithful, in which every local Church has an integral part to play.**

## **WHAT IS SYNODALITY?**

### **Part III**

#### **WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS SYNOD?**

**The Second Vatican Council reinvigorated the sense that all the baptised, both the hierarchy and the laity, are called to be active participants in the saving**

mission of the Church (LG, 32-33). The faithful have received the Holy Spirit in baptism and confirmation and are endowed with diverse gifts and charisms for the renewal and building up of the Church, as members of the Body of Christ. Thus the teaching authority of the Pope and the bishops is in dialogue with the *sensus fidelium*, the living voice of the People of God (cf. *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, 74).

The path of synodality seeks to make pastoral decisions that reflect the will of God as closely as possible, grounding them in the living voice of the People of God (ICT, Syn., 68). It is noted that collaborating with theologians – lay, ordained, and religious – can be a helpful support in articulating the voice of the People of God expressing the reality of the faith on the basis of lived experience. While recent Synods have examined themes such as the new evangelization, the family, young people, and the Amazon, the present Synod focuses on the topic of synodality itself.

The current Synodal Process we are undertaking is guided by a fundamental question:

How does this “journeying together” take place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), 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 this light, the objective of the current Synod is to listen, as the entire People of God, to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church. We do so by listening together to the Word of God in Scripture and the living Tradition of the Church, and then by listening to one another, and especially to those at the margins, discerning the signs of the times. In fact, the whole Synodal Process aims at fostering a lived experience of discernment, participation, and coresponsibility, where a diversity of gifts is brought together for the Church’s mission in the world.

In this sense, it is clear that the purpose of this Synod is not to produce more documents. Rather, it 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). Thus the objective of this Synodal Process is not only a series of exercises that start and stop, but rather a journey of growing authentically towards the communion and mission that God calls the Church to live out in the third millennium.

This journey together will call on us to renew our mentalities and our ecclesial structures in order to live out God’s call for the Church amid the present signs of the times.

## **WHAT IS SYNODALITY?**

### **Part IV**

**Listening to the entire People of God will help the Church to make pastoral decisions that correspond as closely as possible to God's will (ITC, Syn., 68) The ultimate perspective to orient this synodal path of the Church is to serve the dialogue of God with humanity (DV, 2) and to journey together the kingdom of God (cf. LG, 9; RM, 20). In the end, this Synodal Process seeks to move towards a Church that is more fruitfully at the service of the coming of the kingdom of heaven.**

#### **▪ THE THEME OF THIS SYNOD**

**For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission**

**In the ceremony to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015, Pope Francis declared that “the world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission.”**

**This call to cooperate in the mission of the Church is addressed to the entire People of God.**

**Pope Francis made this clear when he issued a direct invitation to all the People of God to contribute to Church efforts towards healing: “every one of the baptised should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need. This change calls for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does.”**

**In April 2021, Pope Francis initiated a synodal journey of the whole People of God, to begin in October 2021 in each local Church and culminating in October 2023 in the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.**

## **WHAT IS SYNODALITY?**

### **Part IV**

**The three dimensions of the theme are communion, participation, and mission. These three dimensions are profoundly interrelated. They are the vital pillars of a Synodal Church.**

#### **• COMMUNION:**

**By his gracious will, God gathers us together as diverse peoples of one faith, through the covenant that he offers to his people. The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. It is Christ who reconciles us to the Father and unites us with each other in the Holy Spirit. Together, we are inspired by listening to the Word of God, through the living Tradition of the Church, and grounded in the consensus Fidei that we share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God's call for his people.**

- **PARTICIPATION:**

**A call for the involvement of all who belong to the People of God – laity, consecrated and ordained – to engage in the exercise of deep and respectful listening to one another. This listening creates space for us to hear the Holy Spirit together, and guides our aspirations for the Church of the Third Millennium.**

**Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and are called to serve one another through the gifts they have each received from the Holy Spirit.**

**In a synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will (ICT, Syn., 67-68). Genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded.**

- **MISSION:**

**The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centered on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family.**

**This Synodal Process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world. In this way, synodality is a path by which the Church can more fruitfully fulfil her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God's kingdom.**