

Synod on Synodality: The Archdiocesan Phase

“To Journey and to Listen”

Pope Francis has announced a Synod on Synodality, to be held in 2023. The local churches have been invited to participate in the initial process, which begins in October and concludes with a pre-Synod meeting of representatives from the Archdiocese in April 2022.

The Synod proposes as its focus the following: *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 your “journeying together”?*

The Archbishop has decided to use this as an opportunity to deepen our reflection on the outcomes of the 2019 Archdiocesan Synod, using as a lens the Synodal themes of listening and journeying. One way for us to do this is to look for commonalities between the 2023 Synod themes and the outcomes of our 2019 Synod. Put differently, when we place the 2023 Synod themes in dialogue with the 2019 Synod outcomes, what might they have to say to one another?

In the table below the themes and significant outcomes of the 2019 Synod are listed in parallel with the thematic nuclei of the 2023 Synod. They are taken from paragraph 30 of the Synod 2023 Preparatory Document which can be obtained at www.synod.va

2019 Themes	2023 Thematic Nuclei
Renewal of Community	The journeying companions
Renewal of Liturgy	Listening
Renewal of Catechesis	Speaking out
Renewal of Communications	Celebrating
Missionary Discipleship	Co-responsible in mission
Youth	Dialogue in Church and Society
Marriage and Family Life	With the other Christian denominations
Listening to the voices of the marginalised	Authority and participation
Promoting the role of women in decision making processes in the Church	Discerning and deciding
	Forming ourselves in Synodality

The comparison above reveals significant commonalities, as well areas which the people of the archdiocese did not raise as issues they wished to focus on during the 2019 Synod. For example, the 2023 Synod proposes as a discussion topic dialogue with other Christians. While this is a very important theme in the life of the universal Church, this has not emerged as a significant area in our archdiocese.

The preparatory committee of Synod 2023 was quite clear in saying that the list of 10 areas was not exhaustive or prescriptive, simply starting points for discussion. The committee has also said that not every topic can be covered in depth at the local level and that the local church must be selective in what it focuses on. It is in this spirit of freedom that the Archbishop has made the choice that he has, to deepen and enrich our living out of the 2019 Synod resolutions, using the 2023 synodal themes of journeying and listening as interpretive lenses.

The Archbishop has appointed Fr Bruce Botha SJ as the Archdiocese Synod Contact Person, and he has also tasked the Synod Monitoring and Implementation Committee with the responsibility for managing this process.

Key aspects of this process are:

1. Identifying and articulating clearly the focus areas for reflection
2. Agreeing on how the process will unfold, a timeline, and the roles and functions of various role-players
3. Agreeing on a methodology for the functioning of listening circles
4. Establishing listening circles within parishes
5. Reaching out to and engaging with those on the margins of Church and Society
 - a. Women
 - b. The homeless
 - c. Migrants and refugees
 - d. LGBTQI+
 - e. People with disabilities
6. Engaging with the religious orders active within the archdiocese
7. The gathering and collating of feedback from listening circles and beginning to develop a *sensus fidei*.
8. Formulating a final discussion document for the April pre-Synod meeting

The 2023 Synod Preparatory Document

The fundamental question that guides this consultation of the People of God, as mentioned at the beginning, is the following:

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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 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?

I. THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS

In the Church and in society, we are side by side on the same road. In your local Church, who are the ones “journeying together”? When we say: “our Church,” who is part of it? Who is asking us to journey together? Who are the road companions, including those outside the ecclesial perimeter? What persons or groups are left on the margins, expressly or in fact?

II. LISTENING

Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices. To whom does our particular Church “need to listen to”? How are the Laity, especially young people and women, listened to? How do we integrate the contribution of Consecrated Men and Women? What space is there for the voice of minorities, the discarded, and the excluded? Do we identify prejudices and stereotypes that hinder our listening? How do we listen to the social and cultural context in which we live?

III. SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, integrating freedom, truth, and charity. How do we promote a free and authentic style of communication within the community and its organizations, without duplicity and opportunism? And in relation to the society of which we are a part? When and how do we manage to say what is important to us? How does the relationship with the media system (not only Catholic media) work? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

IV. CELEBRATING

“Journeying 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 celebration inspire and direct our “journeying together”? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the Faithful in the liturgy and the exercise of the sanctifying function? What space is given to the exercise of the ministries of the reader and acolyte?

V. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

Synodality is at the service of the Church’s mission, in which all her members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is each Baptized person called to be a protagonist in the mission? How does the community support its members committed to service in society (social and political commitment, in scientific research and teaching, in the promotion of social justice, in the protection of human rights, and in caring for the Common home, etc.)? How do you help them to live out these commitments in a logic of mission? How is discernment about mission-related choices made, and who participates in it? How are the different traditions that constitute the patrimony of many Churches, especially the Oriental ones, integrated and adapted, with respect to the synodal style, in view of an effective Christian witness? How does collaboration work in territories where different *sui iuris* Churches are present?

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. What are the places and modes of dialogue within our particular Church? How are divergences of vision, the conflicts, the difficulties addressed? How do we promote collaboration with neighboring Dioceses, with and among religious communities in the area, with and among lay associations and movements, etc.? What experiences of dialogue and shared commitment do we have with believers of other religions and with non-believers? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the world of politics, economics, culture, civil society, the poor...?

VII. WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one Baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relations do we have with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations? What areas do they concern? What fruits have we drawn from this “journeying together”? What are the difficulties?

VIII. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How do we identify the goals to be pursued, the way to achieve them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority exercised within our particular Church? What are the practices of teamwork and co-responsibility? How are lay ministries and the assumption of responsibility by the Faithful

promoted? How do synodal bodies function at the level of the particular Church? Are they a fruitful experience?

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. By what procedures and methods do we discern together and make decisions? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchically structured communities? How do we articulate the consultative phase with the deliberative one, the process of *decision-making* with the moment of *decision-taking*? How and with what tools do we promote transparency and accountability?*

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. How do we form people, especially those who hold roles of responsibility within the Christian community, to make them more capable of “journeying together,” listening to one another and engaging in dialogue? What formation do we offer for discernment and the exercise of authority? What tools help us to read the dynamics of the culture in which we are immersed and their impact on our style of Church?