

Dear Parish Priests, PPC Chairs and Synod Champions

The Synod Steering Committee has produced a booklet as a guide to the archdiocesan consultation phase for the Synod on Synodality in 2023. A summary of the booklet is below.

Part 1: Some historical context is given to Synods. What are they, and what is their function?

Part 2: We review briefly the outcomes of the archdiocesan synod of 2019, and point out overlapping themes with the 10 thematic nuclei of the 2023 synod.

Part 3: We then look at the call to the 2023 Synod of Bishops that Pope Francis has convened. Synodality is a constitutive element of the Church. He points out that encounter and listening lead to discernment, a better living out of the mission of the Church.

The outcome of the 2023 Synod will be an answer to the following fundamental questions:

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”? (Preparatory Document, 26)

Part 4: If the Synodal process is rooted in listening, to whom do we listen? We listen to the Church, but also to those on the margins of the Church, and to those people beyond the Church that we are called to minister to. Pope Francis calls us to pay attention to the voices on the margins, which is a call that was also made in our own 2019 Synod.

Part 5: Another important question is, how do we listen? The Synod of Bishops has recommended a methodology which uses “listening circles” and this section gives a brief description of what they are.

Part 6: This is the most technical of the parts and describes the operation of the listening groups. Groups leaders/facilitators from each parish will need to be trained in this skill. It is important to emphasize that these are “listening groups” and not “discussion groups” or catechetical groups. The three rounds of sharing entail listening to our own experience, listening to the experience of others, and then listening to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Part 7: Guidelines for participants and groups leaders are given.

Part 8: This section has the focus questions for the listening groups. They are based on the questions from the Synod of Bishops. It is important to note at the very beginning that not every parish needs to do every focus question. Some areas will simply not be applicable, or impossible to do. The important thing is for each parish to simply do what it can and leave to other parishes or groups the questions that it can't. For example, not every parish will have a large enough community of refugees and migrants to have listening groups, or a community of people with disabilities, and maybe some parishes will not have a ministry to the homeless. It is possible that for whatever reason members of the LGBT community will not feel comfortable or safe participating in parish-based groups. We simply do what we can, within our limitations.

The Synod Steering Committee will establish mechanisms for reaching out to and listening to members of marginalized groups not catered for in our traditional parish structures.

Section 9: the timetable for the process is given.

By the end of December, we would like to have had training for PPC Chairs, Synod Champions, and any others that need to be trained in listening circle methodology. They can then train other group leaders in parishes.

From January to March parishes run listening circles and by the end of March provide feedback to the Synod Steering committee. This will again be an online feedback mechanism. A final discussion document will then be prepared for a pre-synod meeting to be held in the Archdiocese in April.

Our own summary document, no more than 10 pages, must be submitted to the SACBC in May. They will then produce a summary document of all conference submissions. Different continental groupings then work together for a summary of submissions from all conferences to send to Rome, which then produces a final working document for the Synod on Synodality.

Section 10: Pope Francis and the Synod of Bishops have made abundantly clear that this is above all a spiritual process of listening. We should pray for the process, using the Synod prayer, and direct our parishioners to other spiritual resources, which can be found on the Vatican Website.

Yours in Christ

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