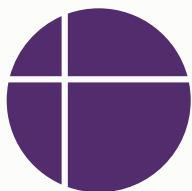


# For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission

## Process for *Reporting* Synodal Consultations



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**Synod  
2021  
2023**

For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission



# Process for Reporting Synodal Consultations

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# Process for Reporting Synodal Consultations

## Introduction

Pope Francis wants to hear from the whole Church about what is happening in local parishes and faith communities. He and the bishops would like to know what individuals think we should all be doing to help make our parishes better. The way he has proposed doing this is with a synodal process. Synod means “journeying together” and it involves listening to the Holy Spirit and to each other in order to discern the path we are called to walk together.

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.”

[Synod Handbook](#)

Our basic questions are:

**What are our experiences in the Church today?**

**And, what is the Holy Spirit saying to our Church today?**

At this stage of the synodal process, the proposed questions are exploratory and broad, rather than specific. This is intentional because the Holy Father wishes to allow a broad range of responses from participants.

This document offers guidance on how to capture what is said by participants during synodal consultations, wherever they may take place, so that

the results can be faithfully reported to the parish, diocese, and Vatican.

The role of the facilitator in synodal consultations is addressed in a companion guide: [Process for Facilitating Synodal Consultations](#). Those responsible for reporting on synodal consultations should also be familiar with the facilitation process.



# Process for Reporting Synodal Consultations

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## Living as a Synodal Church

According to the International Theological Commission in “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” no. 6, synodality is “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* [way of living and operating] of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active

part in her evangelizing mission.” The idea of synods is not something new; synods emerged from the early Church and the 2021-2023 synod process is not simply “another program” or a “new initiative.” Therefore, “having a synod” is just part of synodality. Synodality is a way of being Church, not just an event or program.

## The Ten Key Elements of Synodality— from [Synod Handbook](#)

- 1 Be companions to each other on the journey
- 2 Listening to the Spirit and each other
- 3 Speaking out
- 4 Celebrating together
- 5 Sharing responsibility for our common mission
- 6 Joining dialogue in Church and in wider society
- 7 Participating in ecumenism
- 8 Each claiming their proper authority and participation
- 9 Being part of discerning and deciding
- 10 Forming ourselves in synodality.





## Being a Synodal Church

The practice of living as a synodal Church means:

- The conversations lead to conversion to Christ and commitment to active participation in the mission given by Christ — **Communion**
- The people of God talk with one another and listen to one another about questions that matter — **Participation**
- The communion exists for a common purpose; mission flows naturally from the experience of communion — **Mission.**

## Synodal Requirements

- Addressing the basic questions together
- Listening to the Holy Spirit
- Remaining open to the perspectives of other people
- “Progressively maturing” the fruits of the Holy Spirit over time.

## Reporting on Synodal Consultations

The synod involves members of the Church coming together to listen to one another and discern the workings of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the work to report on synodal consultations should be initiated with prayer, with the realization that the work to be undertaken is holy in nature. It is important that what is said and experienced is faithfully captured in a complete yet concise way so it can be shared broadly, including with the parish, the diocese, the bishops' conference, and the Vatican. The role of the consultation scribe or reporter, therefore, is vital to the success of the synod process.

### Reporting the fruits of your synodal consultations

In keeping with the synod methodology of journeying together, reporting of the synod process is to be done to the participants and local community, to the diocese, to the national bishops' conference, and to the Holy Father via the Synod of Bishops in Rome. Following the synod consultation, the main facilitator should work with others to identify themes from the consultations and report that information back to participants, pastoral councils, pastoral staff, and the faith community as a whole. Using a standardized format or template (often provided by the diocese), this information can then be compiled into a final report to be sent to the diocese for inclusion in the diocesan report.

### What synod reports should include

The goal of these syntheses, at any level, is not to produce a generic summary of everything that was said or to carry out an academic exercise. Rather, the synthesis is an act of discernment in choosing and writing what will contribute to the next stage of the synodal process, by being sent to the diocese (in the case of consultation within the diocese) and eventually the episcopal conference (in the case of the synthesis written by the diocese).

In this sense, the synthesis does not only report common themes and points of convergence, but also highlights:

- Points that strike a chord, inspire an original point of view, or open a new horizon
- The voices of those who are not often heard and integrate what we could call the “minority report”
- Not only positive experiences but also challenging and negative experiences in order to reflect the reality of what has been shared
- The experience of the local gathering, including things like the attitudes of the participants, and the joys and challenges of engaging together in discernment.

## Who Reports on Synodal Consultations: Choosing Reporters

As local synod consultations take place, it will be important that each session have scribes to faithfully capture what is being shared. Good scribes are first of all good listeners. They should be able to put aside their own ideas and opinions and listen attentively to whomever is speaking and what they are saying. The scribe is in the background, allowing participants to freely express their thoughts without intimidation or concern that they may say something that could be perceived as wrong. The scribe must also be able to record what is being said in a concise way without inserting personal opinion or bias. Scribes may ask a participant to clarify or restate a comment where necessary for writing it down, but should not enter into discussion or commentary on what is being shared.

Ideally there should be two types of scribes. One, the “main scribe(s)” would capture what is said in general, plenary consultations of the whole group. If possible, each consultation should have two main scribes, since two sets of ears are better than one. After a session, the two main scribes can compare what they heard, since no one is completely free of personal opinion or bias. The consultation’s plenary conversations would be facilitated by the main facilitator and would include reporting back from table conversations to the full group.

The second type of scribes are “table scribes.” The job of a table scribe is to record what is being communicated in the small group setting. The main scribes can also serve as table scribes. Each small group should have a table scribe so that every participant’s contribution to the process may be recorded. If possible, parishes or other groups that will be holding consultations should hold a separate preliminary consultation session for all scribes and facilitators — hosted before the scheduled consultation(s) — so that the scribes and facilitators can experience the process and participate in sharing the fruits of their own discernment on the synod questions. This preliminary consultation should be facilitated by the main facilitator.

## Selecting and training scribes

It is important to select and train scribes for this listening process. While it is understood that the abilities of scribes will vary, it is important to select scribes with some basic skills and experience, if possible. Strong scribes are people who:

- Are at home with their Catholic faith
- Are prayerful and reflective
- Have strong listening skills
- Have strong writing skills
- Are able to capture and synthesize a conversation
- Are willing participants in the synodal process
- Are able to maintain a “big picture” view without injecting their personal agenda.



# Process for Reporting Synodal Consultations

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Depending on the nature and makeup of the group, there may be some additional things to consider.

- Most scribes will be volunteers who can effectively report on parish, diocesan, religious order, movements, or similar synodal consultations.
- Sometimes an experienced scribe — or someone else with higher-level reporting skills — may be needed for some consultations. These may include consultations where cultural, political, or other issues are likely to arise, or when accommodations to ensure full participation are needed. It may be necessary to offer a stipend or compensation for these scribes.
- All scribes need preparation and training on the synodal approach, the synodal purpose, and the synodal process.

## Things to do when reporting on a synodal consultation

- Use bullet points as much as possible
- Record the points people made in the consultation without adding your own biases
- Provide quotes where appropriate, without attribution to a particular person or group
- Pay special attention to the “quiet voices,” the input that is not coming from the mainstream in the group
- Record examples and data people used to support what they said
- Record areas of agreement, whether that agreement is formally or informally established
- Record examples of both positive and challenging or negative experiences
- Be sure to capture opinions expressed by small minorities of participants ([Synod Handbook](#), Appendix D).

## Things not to do when reporting on a synodal consultation

- Do **not** include everything that is said
- Do **not** attempt to capture a word-for-word account of the consultation
- Do **not** attribute comments to individual participants.

## How to prepare the report

After the consultation, the main scribes extract the points made by participants with particular attention to directions for the Church, actions steps the Church needs to take, and the characteristics that should be seen in a future Church. Views expressed only by a small minority of participants should not be excluded from the report. These contributions are referred to in the *Vademecum* as “minority reports” and it cautions that sometimes these perspectives can “be a prophetic witness to what God wants to say to the Church.” (Synod Handbook [Vademecum](#), Appendix D)





# Process for Reporting Synodal Consultations

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To create a final report of the consultation, the main scribes working together with the main facilitator and, if possible, the table scribes, will need to summarize the information from the consultation in order to report to the diocese. A helpful approach to summarizing the information would be to first consolidate it into general topics or themes.

The summary should be done with great respect and concern that the convictions of those who participated are faithfully represented in the final report. This work should be initiated with prayer, with recognition of its holy nature, and with every effort to not influence the final report through well-intentioned bias.

The summary should be presented in a final report that can include examples of information captured during the consultation. The final report should be given to the consultation facilitator or person responsible for the local synod process to be transmitted to the diocese.

## Drafting the report

To help draft and focus the report, scribes may use some or all of the following questions, which are suggested and offered here as guides to be used when reviewing information collected during the consultation:

1. Recall the experiences shared by participants
  - What were some of the experiences of synodality in the local Church?
  - Use direct quotes if possible, without attribution to a particular person or group
  - What were 3-4 experiences each that reflect communion, participation, and mission?
  - What were some of the discussion points that seemed to unite people?
  - What were some of the discussion points that seemed to divide people?
  - What opinions were expressed by a small minority of participants?
2. To capture what you heard, report these experiences in greater depth:
  - What joys did those experiences evoke from participants?
  - What difficulties and obstacles were encountered?
  - What wounds were revealed?
  - What insights have they elicited?
3. Gather the fruits to share:
  - What are the points of convergence?
  - What are the points of divergence?
  - What paths are opening up for the local Church?
  - What points emerged that could help people focus on the mission of the Church?



# Process for Reporting Synodal Consultations

## Appendix 1

### Sample Template for Reporting a Synodal Consultation

A report from the local consultation will need to be sent to the diocese. It would be advisable, if possible, for the diocese to provide an electronic method to submit the report. Below is a suggested template of a method to report the information gathered from the consultation. The Synod Handbook encourages sending “other materials such as images, videos, stories, artistic expressions, and personal testimonies can be submitted as attachments, insofar as they help to bring out the experience and input of participants” (Synod Handbook [Vademecum](#), Appendix D). These can be listed in the template in the “Support Provided for Main Points” column on the template.

The diocese will further synthesize the reports from all the local consultations into a ten-page report for the local episcopal conference.

Template for Reporting a Synodal Consultation		
Date (Enter Date Here)	Location (Parish or organization) (Enter Location Here)	<b>INSTRUCTIONS</b>  ** READ FIRST **  1. This template comes with space to record 3 items in each of the sections below.  2. To add additional rows, RIGHT CLICK on the row number of the last row in that section (along the left side)  3. Select “+ Insert 1 Row Below.”
Group Number (for multiple groups in a parish or organization) (Enter Group Number Here)	Main Facilitator (Enter Main Facilitator Here)	
Number of Participants	(Enter Number of Participants Here)	
	Report from the Consultation	Support Provided for Main Points
Main Points	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	3.	3.
Points of Convergence	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	3.	3.
Points of Divergence	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	3.	3.
Actions the Church Can Take	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	3.	3.
Minority Views Expressed	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	3.	3.
Paths Opening for the Local Church	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	3.	3.
Points to Help Focus on the Mission of the Church	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	3.	3.

CLICK TABLE TO DOWNLOAD THE TEMPLATE

## Appendix 2

### Resources and Helpful Links

- [Vatican Synod Website](#)
- [Vatican Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops](#)
- [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Synod Website](#)
- [Fifth National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry \(English\)](#) and [Español](#)
- [Journeying Together: A National Catholic Intercultural Encounter for Ministries with Youth and Young Adults](#)
- [Creating a Culture of Encounter: A Guide for Joyful Missionary Disciples \(Bilingual\)](#)

### Dioceses

Below are links that are samples of diocesan websites and resources set up for communications about the implementation of the synodal process. If your parish, diocese or organization would like to use or adapt any of the resources, please contact the person named to receive permissions, design files, etc.

- [Archdiocese of Washington synod website](#) and [parish resources](#)  
(Contact: Paula Gwynn Grant, [grantp@adw.org](mailto:grantp@adw.org))
- [Archdiocese of Newark synod website](#)
- [Archdiocese of Baltimore synod website](#)
- [Diocese of Charleston synod website](#) and [parish resources](#)
- [Archdiocese of Denver synod website](#)
- [Diocese of Sacramento synod website](#)
- [Dicoese of Brownsville synod website](#)

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Many pastoral leaders are working diligently at the parish, diocesan, and national level to implement the synodal process and engage as broad a range of participants in synodal listening consultations. Leadership Roundtable would like to thank the following for their contributions to this reporting resource:

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