



...Inspire, make hope flourish, stimulate trust, bind up wounds, build bridges, enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands.

– Pope Francis (Vatican Preparation Document)

SYNOD 2023 PREPARATION GUIDE

This preparation guide will assist you in preparing for the synod sessions as part of a Lenten Journey. It includes some information around the synod, prayer recommendations, the questions, and the ten themes around journeying together.

Why participate? Pope Francis stated at the beginning of his Papacy that the Church has embraced and effected only 50% of the Second Vatican Council's Vision and Values, if that. This synod is something different than previous synods because it is Francis leading us as church into a new wave of instituting the promises of the Second Vatican Council. The Vatican preparation documents for this synod speak of the need to move away from the culture of clericalism we inherited and into a church that journeys together.

What will we be doing? Pope Francis is inviting all people of good will to dream a path to a better future where we journey together in all the ways that are important as church. At the same time, by implementing a synod that includes the laity, people on the margins, people who have left the church and people from other denominations, he is actually helping to create this new reality in the very process of doing this synod. His bold vision is that this is how we will operate from now on: **implementing the rest of the Vatican II vision – together.**

Synodality: “synodality enables the entire People of God to walk forward together, listening to the Holy Spirit speaking” in each other as well as 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” – *Excerpts from the Synod 2023 Preparatory Document*

Synod as Prayer

The Synod itself is a form of prayer...holy conversation between us and God individually and collectively. The Servants' Entrance Prayer is provided as something you might consider using.

Servants' Entrance Prayer

The Servants' Entrance is the doorway of our church or home that we exit out and enter into the world ready to serve as loving disciples of Jesus.

Most loving God,

We thank you for our calling and for nurturing in each of us a disciple's heart, a heart that rejoices in your promptings, a heart sustained by your Spirit and a heart encouraged by the support and love of our sisters and brothers.

God, you offer us new beginnings. Fill us with confidence in our work and may our efforts extend beyond the threshold of our homes, out through the Servants' Entrance, to a world so desperately in need of hope and healing.

Dream your dream in us, that in this house-church your vision and direction will take shape in us and we will be transformed by your Spirit.

May your presence in what we do encourage us to dare and may solidarity and togetherness be our strength.

We make this prayer in your name, with Jesus the Christ, and your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Facing Our Joys and Sorrows

The Vatican Preparatory Document is striking in both its joyful, hopeful language, but also in its courage in stating the stark realities we face as the People of God. Here is a section that demonstrates the humility Pope Francis continues to model in terms of reflecting on our current state as a People of God.

“A global tragedy such as the COVID-19 pandemic “momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person’s problems are the problems of all. Once more we realized that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together” – [FT, no. 32]

This situation, which, despite great differences, unites the entire human family, challenges the Church’s ability to accompany individuals and communities to reread experiences of mourning and suffering that have unmasked many false certainties, and to cultivate hope and faith in the goodness of the Creator and his creation.

However, we cannot hide from the fact that the Church herself must face the lack of faith and the corruption even within herself. In particular, we cannot forget the suffering experienced by minors and vulnerable people “due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons.”[1] ... For too long the cry of the victims has been a cry that the Church has not been able to hear sufficiently. These are deep wounds that are difficult to heal, for which forgiveness can never be asked for enough and which constitute obstacles, sometimes imposing ones, to advancing in the direction of “journeying together.” The whole Church is called to deal with the weight of a culture imbued with clericalism that she inherits from her history, and with those forms of exercising authority on which the different types of abuse (power, economic, conscience, sexual) are grafted.

It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God’s People:”[1] together let us ask the Lord for “the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageously to combat them.”[1]”

[FT- Francis, Enc. Lett. Fratelli tutti (3 October 2020)]

[1 - FRANCIS, Letter to the People of God (20 August 2018)]

Avoiding the Pitfalls

A synod is not a survey of all the good points and challenges in the church for some strategic planning session. The focus of this synod is for us listen to how we are called to grow in how we journey together. So while we will reflect on our joys and sorrows from our lived experience of journeying together, the focus is to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying inside you (and then later to us collectively) as to the steps we are called to take in journeying together going forward. Not to get lost in the temptation of conflict and division and ideologies, but to look for that we dream for in the future. And to be open to seeing the big picture and not just what is our immediate issues: deepening the ecumenical journey, with people on the margins, respectful dialogue across ideologies.

Unpacking the Questions

We will explore the two core questions that Pope Francis has asked us to consider and let this prayer work in us as we participate with our brothers and sisters across the globe to come together to create something new. To fulfill the promises made at the second Vatican council to shift from a church still suffering from what the Pope calls the “scourge of clericalism” into a fully participatory church - where we journey together with one another in accompaniment and listening, each step of the way.

May we enter into this, not expecting instant changes, but ready and open to be part of a global movement, led by Pope Francis to fundamentally change “HOW” we do church. To demonstrate how to journey together right here, right now and live out the Synod vision:.

To inspire, make hope flourish, stimulate trust, bind up wounds, build bridges, enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands.

Key Words to Consider:

Church: We are going to use the word “church” in our conversations. For you, church can be experienced within a parish, a particular community, ministry, campus ministry, university/school, youth group, religious congregation, or other gathering of the Body of Christ that you might have participated in during your life.

Journeying together: Please see the Ten Themes at the end of the document that help describe some areas of Journeying together. Themes such as celebrating, co-responsibility in mission and decision-making, accompaniment, listening, and speaking up.

The Core Questions:

The first question is:

#1 - What has been your experience of “journeying together” in the church?

Tap into your memory and imagination...When you hear the word “Church”, what comes to mind? What is the earliest memory you associate with “Church”? How does that differ from what you associate with “Church” now? What is the truest image, memory, or feeling that you have that defines what Church means to you?

Where have you seen this journeying together working well and what joys have you experienced?

- When did you feel the joy of inclusion and walking together in church?
- In what ways have you seen an invitation to all baptized Catholics? To those who feel left out...how have they been invited into active life of the community, especially Sunday Mass?

What challenges or sorrows have you experienced in journeying together?

- Who has been left out in the journeying together? Who is missing? What hinders us from walking together?

Reflect:

Take a moment to sit with what has come up for you that is most powerful? What joys and wounds did they reveal? What insights have they elicited?

Take a moment to pray for the Holy Spirit to take those memory’s and have them fuel your dreams

“God, you offer us new beginnings. Fill us with confidence in our work and may our efforts extend beyond the threshold of our homes, out through the Servants’ Entrance, to a world so desperately in need of hope and healing.

Dream your dream in us, that your vision and direction will take shape in us and we will be transformed by your Spirit.”

The Second Question we are asked involves both what you consider your “local church” and also the “universal church”:

#2 - What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?

Local Church

- What is your dream for a local church that journeys together? What would it look like?
- How do we reach those no longer participating? How do we understand them?
- What steps are required to take to reach your dream?

Universal Church

- What is your dream for a universal church that journeys together? What would it look like?
- How do we reach those no longer participating? How do we understand them?
- What steps are required to take to reach your dream?

Ten Themes to consider in “Journeying together”

1. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road. In our local Church, who are those who “walk together”? Who are those who seem further apart? How are we called to grow as companions? What groups or individuals are left on the margins?

2. LISTENING

Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice. How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore? How are the laity listened to, especially women and young people? What facilitates or inhibits our listening? How well do we listen to those on the peripheries? How is the contribution of consecrated men and women integrated? What are some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than our own? What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?

3. SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity. What enables or hinders speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and in society? When and how do we manage to say what is important to us? How does the relationship with the local media work (not only Catholic media)? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

4. CELEBRATION

“Walking 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 celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy? What space is given to participating in the ministries of lector and acolyte?

5. 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. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is every baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church? What hinders the baptized from being active in mission? What areas of mission are we neglecting? How does the community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment, etc.)? How does the Church help these members to live out their service to society in a missionary way? How is discernment about missionary choices made and by whom?

6. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding. To what extent do diverse peoples in our community come together for dialogue? What are the places and means of dialogue within our local Church? How do we promote collaboration with neighboring dioceses, religious communities in the area, lay associations and movements, etc.? How are divergences of vision, or conflicts and difficulties addressed? What particular issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to? What experiences of dialogue and collaboration do we have with believers of other religions and with those who have no religious affiliation? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the spheres of politics, economics, culture, civil society, and people who live in poverty?

7. ECUMENISM

The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations? What do we share and how do we journey together? What fruits have we drawn from walking together? What are the difficulties? How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?

8. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued, the way to reach them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority or governance exercised within our local Church? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice? How are evaluations conducted and by whom? How are lay ministries and the responsibility of lay people promoted? Have we had fruitful experiences of synodality on a local level? How do synodal bodies function at the level of the local Church (Pastoral Councils in parishes and dioceses, Presbyteral Council, etc.)? How can we foster a more synodal approach in our participation and leadership?

9. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community. What methods and processes do we use in decision-making? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures? Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God? What is the relationship between consultation and decision-making, and how do we put these into practice? What tools and procedures do we use to promote transparency and accountability? How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment?

10. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning. How does our church community form people to be more capable of “walking together,” listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue? What formation is offered to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal way? The Synod website provides suggestions on how to pose these questions to various groups of people in simple and engaging ways. Each diocese, parish, or ecclesial group should not aim to cover all the questions but should discern and focus on those aspects of synodality most pertinent to its context. Participants are encouraged to share with honesty and openness about their real-life experiences, and to reflect together on what the Holy Spirit might be revealing through what they share with one another.