



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
DARWIN



Synod
2021
2023

For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

For a Synodal Church

Diocese of Darwin

“Synodality starts with hearing from the whole People of God. A Church that teaches must be firstly a Church that listens. Consulting all members of the Church is vital because, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us, the faithful as a whole are anointed by the Holy Spirit...”

What characterizes a synodal path is the role of the Holy Spirit. We listen, we discuss in groups, but above all we pay attention to what the Spirit has to say to us. That is why I ask everyone to speak frankly and to listen carefully to others because there, too, the Spirit is speaking. Open to changes and new possibilities, the Synod is for everyone an experience of conversion.”

Pope Francis, Let us Dream 2020





CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
DARWIN

December 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As many of you have heard Pope Francis has called a Synod of Bishops to take place during 2023.

Representatives of Bishop's Conferences from around the world will gather in Rome. The topic is 'Synodical Church'. This means a Church that walks together in Faithfulness to Jesus where the voice of all is heard.

We are encouraged as a Diocese to contribute with the rest of the Australian Church to aspects of our Faith that could be gainfully discussed by the Synod of Bishops in Rome.

As part of this journey please prayerfully read the reflections and share your comments in the manner requested as enclosed. Every voice matters, God speaks to all His people.

Yours in Christ.

+Charles Gauci
Bishop of Darwin & NT



PRAYER FOR THE SYNOD

ADSUMUS SANCTE SPIRITUS

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer Adsumus Sancte Spiritus, the first word of the original Latin, meaning, “We stand before You, Holy Spirit,” which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years, and is attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 4 April 636). As we embrace this Synodal Process, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to be at work in us so that we may be a community and a people of grace.

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.

You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever.
Amen.



WHAT IS SYNODALITY?

BACKGROUND FOR THIS SYNOD

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.

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."*³ 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 our journey so far, the diverse members of the Church learn from one another's experiences and perspectives, guided by the Holy Spirit (PD, 1). Enlightened by God's Word and united in prayer, we will 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. This "walking together" is the most effective way of 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 by 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. (*Synod Vademecum 1.2*)

SYNOD 2021 – 2023

THE OVERALL PROCESS

This synodal journey will commence both in the Vatican and in the local churches, starting with the Official Opening with the Holy Father in the Vatican on 9-10 October 2021. This will then be followed by an Official Opening in each local church on Sunday 17 October 2021.

DIOCESAN PHASE

October 2021 - June 2022

The objective of this phase is to consult the People of God so that the synodal process is carried out through listening to all of the baptised. This consultation will conclude with a pre-synodal meeting, which will be the culmination of diocesan discernment. In the Southern Hemisphere, this process will take place between October 2021 and June 2022 with our responses invited up until late-March 2022.

DIOCESAN PHASE

Local churches and groups gather to discern and respond to the synod questions. These responses are submitted to the diocese.

NATIONAL / CONTINENTAL PHASE

June - August 2022

At the conclusion of the diocesan phase, each local church will submit their contributions to their local Bishops' Conference. A period of discernment will begin for the bishops gathered to listen to what the Spirit has inspired in the churches entrusted to them. Their synthesis will then be sent to the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops along with the contributions of each of the local churches. Each local Bishops' Conference synthesis will feed into a pre-Synodal Continental gathering before March 2023.

CONTINENTAL PHASE

Submissions are synthesised into a single Australian document, outlining responses received from each diocese. This document is then combined into an Oceanian document and submitted to the Synod of Bishops.

UNIVERSAL PHASE

September 2022 - October 2023

The documents from the seven continents will then become part of the 'Instrumentum Laboris', or 'working document' for the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2023.

UNIVERSAL PHASE

Each document is brought before the Synod of Bishops, where they discern the people's voice to decide the direction of the Church moving forward.



THE DIOCESAN PHASE

Everyone in the Diocese is invited to participate in the first phase of this global Synod consultation process. This booklet gives some background information on the fundamental question of the Synod and the ten main themes presented for reflection.

“...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.”

(Synod Vademecum 1.2)

DISCERNMENT

Whether the response to this document is from an individual or a group, it should be the product of **prayerful discernment**. Discernment is a process of making decisions or arriving at answers in a prayerful way. Many of you will be familiar with it in the context of The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. Pope Francis often talks about discernment:

“Discernment is one of the things that worked inside St. Ignatius. For him it is an instrument of struggle in order to know the Lord and follow him more closely... Discernment is always done in the presence of the Lord, looking at the signs, listening to the things that happen, the feeling of the people, especially the poor.”
Pope Francis, August 2013

Father James Martin SJ explains the essence of discernment:

“At heart, the process begins with the belief that God wants a person, or a group, to make good, healthy and life-giving decisions; and through the ‘discernment of spirits,’ that is, sorting out what is coming from God and what is not, one gains clarity about the best path. God therefore both wants and enables individuals and groups to arrive at good decisions.”

Our relationship with God is at the heart of discernment. God respects our freedom by acting very gently with us. This means that we need to continually fine-tune our listening to God. Listening to God amid the other interior and exterior voices in our lives is discernment.

How do we know that we are listening to God and following the movement of the Spirit within ourselves or in a group? Ask, *“Am I at peace with this? Am I at ease now, especially if what I had previously thought was the best course of action is not what I now think? Or am I uneasy or anxious?”*

A good discernment process brings clarity and inner peace. If there is unease or anxiety, personal issues are getting in the way.



INDIVIDUAL DISCERNMENT

If you wish to make an individual response, then this simple process may help you develop clarity about what you want to say.

1. Take some silent time to pray about how you will arrive at your response. Don't focus on the theme initially. Instead seek the freedom to follow where God leads, to let go of biases and negative feelings, and ask for the patience to allow your response to evolve over time.
2. After a time of prayer, reflect upon the words:
"A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together".
 - What is my first response to these words?
 - Am I led towards any particular theme?
3. When you come to consider one of the themes, be willing to first let thoughts and feelings which may be influencing your response to surface:
 - How do I feel about this theme?
 - Are my feelings the result of my experience? Are they influenced by other people?
 - What happens if I bring my imagination into play?
 - What is God saying to me about this theme?

Negative thoughts and emotions or feelings of anxiety triggered by the theme get in the way of hearing what God is saying. We know we are listening to God when our thoughts are refreshing, peaceful, generate new inspiration and ideas, and direct us beyond ourselves.

4. Make notes as you reflect for use in preparing your input to the consultation. Share your response in a group or send it directly to the Diocese using the online tool <https://darwin.catholic.org.au/synod-of-bishops/>

GROUP DISCERNMENT

A SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

A suitable method for group dialogue which resonates with the principles of synodality is the Spiritual Conversation method, which promotes active participation, attentive listening, reflective speaking, and spiritual discernment.

Participants form small groups of about 6-7 persons from diverse backgrounds. This method takes about an hour and comprises three rounds. It is a prayerful process.

In the first round, after a time of silent prayer everyone takes equal turns to share the fruit of his or her prayer, in relation to one of the reflection questions. There is no discussion in this round and all participants simply listen deeply to each person and attend to how the Holy Spirit is moving within oneself, within the person speaking, and in the group as a whole. This is followed by a time of silence to note one's thoughts and feelings.

In the second round, participants share what struck them most in the first round **that someone else has shared**, and what moved them during the time of silence. Some dialogue can also occur, and the same spiritual attentiveness is maintained. Once again this is followed by a time of silence.

Finally in the third round participants reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation and what moved them most deeply. New insights and even unresolved questions are also noted. Spontaneous prayers of gratitude can conclude the conversation. Usually each small group will have a facilitator and note-taker.

Once the group dialogue has taken place, participants should review and share about their experience of the process within their small group.

- How was their experience? What were the ups and downs?
- What new and refreshing insights might they have discovered?
- What have they learned about the synodal way of proceeding?
- How was God present and at work during their time together?

Participants should then decide on the feedback they wish to communicate. The guiding questions can be used as a basis for this feedback at the local level.

STEP ONE

Take turns to share the fruits of your prayer in relation to the reflection questions.

STEP TWO

Share what struck you most from what someone in the group has shared.

STEP THREE

Reflect on what is resonating in the conversation.

THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION

The Synod poses the following fundamental question:

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 our “journeying together”?



RECALL OUR EXPERIENCES:

Ask ourselves, what experiences in our local Church come to mind when we talk about journeying together?

RERead THESE EXPERIENCES MORE DEEPLY:

What joys did they bring? What difficulties and obstacles have they involved? What hurts has the journey involved? What insights have emerged?

GATHER THE FRUITS TO SHARE:

Where, in these experiences, can the Spirit be heard or seen? What is the Spirit asking of us? What are we doing well? What needs to change? What steps do we need to take? Where do we agree? What paths are opening up for us?

LIVED SYNODALITY

The following themes highlight significant aspects of our 'lived synodality'. In responding to these questions, it is helpful to remember that "journeying together" occurs in two deeply interconnected ways. First, we journey together with one another as the People of God. Next, we journey together as the People of God with the entire human family. These two perspectives enrich one another and are helpful for our common discernment towards deeper communion and more fruitful mission.

Input to the participation process is welcome from both individuals and from groups. Your response can cover all the themes, just one theme or a selection of them.

The questions accompanying each of the following ten themes can be used as a starting point or helpful guideline. Your response to the theme should not be limited by the questions.

As on any journey, we need to be aware of possible pitfalls that could hamper our progress during this time of synodality. The following are common temptations that must be avoided in order to promote the vitality and fruitfulness of the Synodal Process.

1. The temptation to want to lead ourselves instead of being led by God.
2. The temptation to focus on ourselves and our immediate concerns.
3. The temptation to only see "problems."
4. The temptation to focus only on structures.
5. The temptation not to look beyond the visible confines of the Church.
6. The temptation to lose focus on the objectives of the Synodal Process.
7. The temptation of conflict and division.
8. The temptation to treat the Synod as a kind of a parliament.
9. The temptation to listen only to those who are already involved in Church activities.

HOW YOU CAN RESPOND

Input to the participation process is welcome from both individuals and from groups. Your response can cover all the themes, just one theme or a selection of them. The questions accompanying each of the themes can be used as a starting point or helpful guideline. Your response to the theme should not be limited by the questions.

ONLINE SUBMISSION: <https://darwin.catholic.org.au/synod-of-bishops/>

EMAIL OR HANDWRITTEN SUBMISSION: Download the pdf version of the submission document from <https://darwin.catholic.org.au/synod-of-bishops/> or get a copy from your Parish Office, complete it and either email it to synod@darwin.catholic.org.au or hand it in to your Parish office or Church.



COMMUNION

Questions to guide your reflection.

1. COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

Jesus wants us to walk together, side by side in God's Creation.

What and who enables us to share in the integration of our life and faith journey in families and the communities in which we live, work and pray?

2. OUR LISTENING

Listening is the first step - it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice.

What and who is being listened to in our families and the communities in which we live, work, and pray?

3. OUR SPEAKING OUT

Everyone is invited to speak boldly and courageously in the freedom, truth, and love of Christ.

What and who enables our voice to be heard about what matters to us as baptised Catholics?

4. OUR CELEBRATION

For Catholics, 'togetherness' is based on gathering to explore the Gospels (Word) and to break bread (Eucharist).

What and who enables us to explore and experience meaningful celebrations of the Word of God and Eucharist in our daily lives?

Communion Reflection Question:

How can we better journey together in listening, speaking out and celebrating?





PARTICIPATION

Questions to guide your reflection.

5. SHARING AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Our Church is all about participation and shared responsibility.

Who identifies the goals for our church community and how to achieve them?

How is our church community balanced in terms of teamwork, responsibility, and participation opportunities for all?

6. OUR DISCERNMENT AND DECISION-MAKING

Our aim is to make decisions by discerning what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community.

What methods or processes do we as catholic communities use to discern decisions?

Do you feel included in the decision-making process? How can we ensure all levels of the church are included?

7. BEING FORMED TO JOURNEY TOGETHER

All of us need to be open to change and receive ongoing learning and formation to be Synodal.

If the goal is for our community to be 'walking together' what formation/learning could be offered?

What practices/processes could we implement to enact change and wider discernment?

Participation Reflection Question:

How can we better participate in the life of the Church?





MISSION

Questions to guide your reflection.

8. OUR COMMON MISSION

Walking together enables us all to accept our mission to share the Good News.

How do we as Church members walk together and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ?

What stops us from being active in mission?

9. Our Conversations

Genuine conversation requires perseverance and patience and leads to understanding.

Good dialogue leads to collaboration – how, and how well, do we collaborate as Catholics in our local community?

In what ways could we dialogue and collaborate better with all people in society (e.g. in politics, economics, culture, civil society, and those who are poor or disadvantaged?)

10. 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?

How can we take the next step in walking forward with other Christian traditions and denominations?

Mission Reflection Question:

How can we better journey together in a shared Mission?





CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
DARWIN



...the purpose of the Synod is not to produce documents, but to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.

Synod Preparatory Document 32

<https://darwin.catholic.org.au/synod-of-bishops/>

