

SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission

*A Path for Entering the Synodal Journey
as Catholic Religious in Australia*

October 2021

CONTENTS

These 1-2 page supplementary resources are offered to help 'break down' the task into a manageable form and to provide accessible background information for leaders and facilitators.

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I. Quick links

- The [official synod website](#)
- [Introduction](#) to the Synod process: includes 2-minute video and infographic (Vatican News website)
- Pope Francis, [Address](#) to the faithful of the Diocese of Rome, 18 September 2021. An outline of Francis' vision for the synodal process in accessible and pastoral language.
- Pope Francis' [homily](#) at the official launch of the synodal journey in which he briefly outlines the call to 'encounter, listen, discern'.
- Official [Preparatory Document](#) (for first phase of consultation)
 - Dimensions of synodality, *Preparatory Document*, no.2, pp.3-4
 - 'Listening to the Scriptures', *Preparatory Document*, nos.16-24, pp.19-27
 - The Fundamental Question, *Preparatory Document*, no.26, p.30
 - Different Articulations of Synodality, *Preparatory Document*, no.27, pp.31-33
 - Ten Thematic Nuclei to be Explored, *Preparatory Document*, no.30, pp.34-37
- [Tools for reflecting](#) on the fundamental question
- [Vademecum](#) (Handbook). This accompanies the Preparatory Document and is particularly relevant to those charged with organising consultative processes.
- Synod [Prayer](#) of invocation to the Holy Spirit (in various languages)
- CICALSAL [Letter](#) to all consecrated men and women (at Synod of Bishops [website](#))
- [Newsfeed](#) of the Vatican synod website – brief items, videos, interviews. This section is useful for highlighting specific themes in a concise format, and perhaps as 'conversation starters'.
- ITC, '[Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church](#)' (2018)
The International Theological Commission (ITC) undertook a study of synodality in the life and mission of the Church. The resulting document provides guidelines for unpacking the biblical and theological depths of 'synodality' and some pastoral implications for mission.
- Pope Francis on the practice of synodality (opening to the 2018 Synod of Bishops on 'young people, the faith, and vocational discernment'), [Vatican website](#).
- Australian Catholic Bishops [webpage](#), including 4½ minute [video](#) 'Introduction to Synod 2023'.

II. Three Key Words for the Synodal Journey¹

Communion, Participation, and Mission

The theme of the Synod is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.”

These three dimensions are profoundly interrelated. They are the vital pillars of a Synodal Church. There is no hierarchy between them. Rather, each one enriches and orients the other two. There is a dynamic relationship between the three that must be articulated with all three in mind.

communion

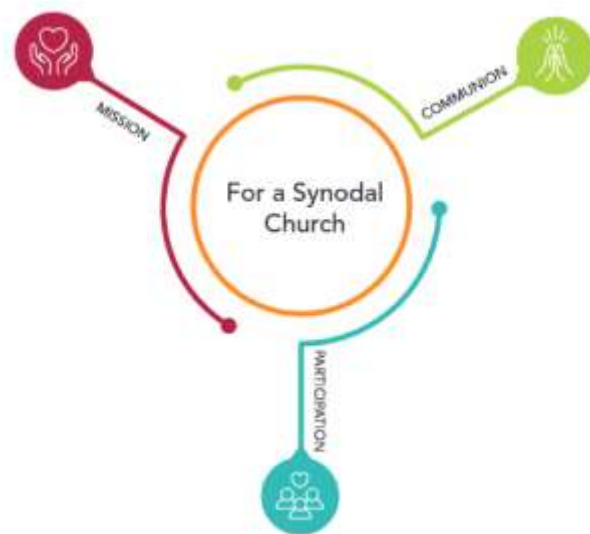
Communion: By God’s gracious will, we are gathered together as diverse peoples of one faith, through the covenant that God offers to the people of God. The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. It is Christ who reconciles us to the Father and unites us with each other in the Holy Spirit. Together, we are inspired by listening to the Word of God, through the living Tradition of the Church, and grounded in the *sensus fidei* that we share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out the divine call for God’s people.²

participation

Participation: A call for the involvement of all who belong to the People of God – laity, consecrated and ordained – to engage in the exercise of deep and respectful listening to one another. This listening creates space for us to hear the Holy Spirit together, and guides our aspirations for the Church of the Third Millennium. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and are called to serve one another through the gifts they have each received from the Holy Spirit. In a synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God’s will (ICT, Syn., 67-68). Genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded.

mission

Mission: The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centred on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world. In this way, synodality is a path by which the Church can more fruitfully fulfil her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God’s kingdom.



¹ Source: *Vademecum* (Handbook), 1.4 <https://www.synod.va/en/documents/vademecum.html>

² This paragraph has been slightly adapted to allow for inclusive language.

III. Sample Reflection

Gather

Opening prayer

Prayer of Invocation to the Holy Spirit ([Synod prayer](#)):

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus ('We Stand Before You Holy Spirit')

Conversation-starter

[3min video clip](#): Without difference we die. Timothy Radcliffe OP: “Life and fertility depends on difference, and without it we are dead.”

Pair-share: Share a brief response with the person next to you.

Alternative ‘conversation starters’ - see CRA Resource Sheet IV.

Introduction

Brief presentation (to provide context)

- Overview of the Synodal Journey. Refer to ‘Overview’ in CRA introductory letter.
- Key words: *Communion, Participation, Mission*. Refer to CRA Resource Sheet II.

Invite comments, questions

Deep listening

Break open the word of God

Reflect together on a Scripture passage that can lead you into the biblical depths of what it means to be a ‘synodal’ Church. Some suggestions from the *Preparatory Document* follow:

Mk 10:46-52 (Jesus’ response to Bartimaeus); Lk 24:13-35 (Road to Emmaus); Jn 3:8 (the Spirit is like the wind that blows where it will); Jn 14:17 (listening to the ‘Spirit of truth’, cf. Jn 14:25–26; 15:26–27; 16:12–15); Mt 15:21–28 (Jesus and the Canaanite woman); Jn 4:1–42 (woman at the well); Acts 10 (Peter and Cornelius).

Explore the text together with the aid of a good commentary and/or a prayerful process such as *Lectio Divina* or Imaginative Contemplation, perhaps one connected with your charism.

Invite sharings, insights, experiences, reflections, questions.

Reflect on the synod question

In the light of the living word of God, we ask ourselves:

- How do I/we live synodality?
- How might this lived experience ‘speak’ to the wider Church and human family?

Pool your insights, reflections, stories, questions, sharings.

Going forward

What response do I/we feel moved to make?

- Through the written word; or by audio/video; a scholarly/artistic/pastoral contribution; etc.
- Is there a way to seek out the contributions of others with whom we live, work, minister?

To what action do I commit? By when will I get it done?

Give thanks

Closing prayer/song

Additional links and reference points for leader/facilitator:

- The Fundamental Question, [Preparatory Document](#), p.30.
- Further [tools](#) for reflecting on synodality (1½ pages).
- 'Listening to the Scriptures', [Preparatory Document](#) nos.16-24; pp.19-27. Summarised in Resource VII.
Find this and more resources on the [CRA website](#).

IV. Conversation Starters

- **Without difference we die**

[3min video clip](#): Timothy Radcliffe OP:

“Life and fertility depend on difference, and without it we are dead.”

- **No synodality without spirituality**

"We must be precise, when we speak of synodality, of synodal journey, of synodal experience. It is not a parliament (...) Synodality is not only the discussion of problems, of different things that there are in society (...) There cannot be synodality without the Spirit, and there is no Spirit without prayer."

- Pope Francis, April 30 2021, Audience with Catholic Action delegation, quoted in an [interview on this topic by Nathalie Becquart](#) XMCI, Under-Secretary of the Synod of Bishops

- **Tradition is a living reality**

“Tradition is a living reality and only a partial vision regards the ‘deposit of faith’ as something static. The word of God cannot be moth-balled like some old blanket in an attempt to keep insects at bay! No. The word of God is a dynamic and living reality that develops and grows because it is aimed at a fulfilment that none can halt.” - Pope Francis, [Address](#), Rome, 11 October 2017

- **Being inclusive of little ones**

Video clips modelling a pastoral response of compassion and inclusion of ‘little ones’

- [2½ min Video clip](#). Pope Francis and the Little boy in Yellow.
- [2min Video clip](#). Pope Francis allows an autistic girl to run free on stage during his general audience and asks people in the crowd to pray for her and her family.
- [5min Video clip](#): Pope Francis is asked by a boy, ‘Is my Dad in heaven?’

- **Your favourite biblical passage for synodality?**

Synod comes from the Greek *syn* and *odos* (meaning “with” and “path”) and refers to a way of living or working together. My favourite biblical passage for synodality is that of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, where Cleopas and his companion are joined by the resurrected Jesus, who walks with them and explains the scriptures to them. The biblical passage ends with a meal in which they finally recognize him in the breaking of the bread. Synodality is about walking together in a shared search for Christ in scripture, prayer, and common life. (Nicholas Jesson, writing for [Salt & Light Media](#), 29 September 2021)

What is your favourite biblical passage for synodality? And, why?

- **The heart of the Franciscan reform**

In 2013, just a few months after the start of Pope Francis’ pontificate, *America* magazine had noted that Francis’ interest in synodality had ‘emerged as a centrepiece of his ministry’. Drew Christiansen SJ ([America](#), 1 July 2013) wrote, ‘Keep alert. Listen for this word, “synodality”. It looks to be the heart of the Franciscan reform of the church.’

V. What is Synodality? Background for this Synod

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 the journey that has been made so far, the diverse members of the Church will be able to learn from one another’s experiences and perspectives, guided by the Holy Spirit (PD, 1). Enlightened by the Word of God and united in prayer, we will be able to 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. 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 (PD, 1).

The entire People of God shares a common dignity and vocation through Baptism. All of us are called in 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

Source: *Vademecum* (Handbook), 1.2 | <https://www.synod.va/en/documents/vademecum.html>

³ Pope Francis, Address for the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015)

VI. Approaching Scripture

Reflection on the synod question flows from an encounter with the living word of God.

The *Preparatory Document* offers a lens for viewing suggested Gospel texts, identifying a ‘fundamental structure’ comprised of three actors:

Jesus | the crowd | the apostles | plus a fourth actor, the ‘antagonist’.

See ‘Listening to the Scriptures’, [Preparatory Document](#) nos.16-24; pp.19-27 - summarised below.

Whichever way you choose to approach the Scriptural component, can we suggest that you give this step focused attention, drawing on the wealth of scholarly and pastoral insights that are available for ‘breaking open the word’, often thanks to the gifts of Catholic religious men and women in our own Australian community.

Listening to the Scriptures

Excerpts from the [Preparatory Document](#), nos. 17-24; pp.20-27

Jesus, the Crowd, the Apostles

17. An original scene appears, in its fundamental structure, as the constant of the way in which Jesus reveals himself throughout the Gospel, as he announces the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Essentially, three actors (plus one) are involved:

Jesus

The first, of course, is Jesus, the absolute protagonist who takes the initiative, sowing the words and signs of the coming of the Kingdom without “showing partiality” (cf. Acts 10:34). . . .

The crowd

18. In fact, the work of evangelization and the message of salvation would not be comprehensible without Jesus’ constant openness to the widest possible audience, which the Gospels refer to as the crowd, that is, all the people who follow him along the path, and at times even pursue him in the hope of a sign and a word of salvation: this is the second actor on the scene of Revelation. . . .

The apostles

19. The third actor’s entrance on the scene occurs not thanks to a cure or a conversion, but because it coincides with Jesus’ call. The election of the apostles is not the privilege of an exclusive position of power and separation but the grace of an inclusive ministry of blessing and fellowship. . . .

20. Jesus, the crowd in its diversity, the apostles: this is the imagery and the mystery that must be constantly contemplated and explored in depth so that the Church may increasingly become what she is. None of the three actors can leave the scene. . . .

The “extra” actor

21. Then, there is the “extra” actor, the antagonist, who brings to the scene the diabolical separation of the other three... In order to escape the deceptions of the “fourth actor,” continuous conversion is necessary.

A Double Dynamic of Conversion: Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10)

See *Preparatory Document* (nos. 22-24; pp.25-27).

VI. Listening to the Scriptures

Excerpt from: [Vademecum](#) (Handbook), 4.1

The Preparatory Document outlines two “images” from Scripture to inspire our journey of building a synodal Church.

The first image emerges from the “community scene” that constantly accompanies the journey of evangelization, since the preaching ministry of Jesus: everyone finds their place – the crowd, the apostles, and the Lord (PD, 17-21).

The second image refers to the experience of the Holy Spirit in which Peter and the early community recognize the risk of placing unjustified limits on sharing the faith (PD, 22-24). We encourage you to reflect on these two images as a source of nourishment and inspiration in the Synodal Process.

The Gospel witnesses to Jesus’ constant approach of reaching out to people who are excluded, marginalized, and forgotten. A common trait throughout Jesus’ ministry is that faith always emerges when people are valued: their plea is heard, they are aided in their difficulty, their availability is appreciated, their dignity is confirmed by God’s gaze and restored within the community.

As Peter was changed by his experience with Cornelius, so too we must allow ourselves to be transformed by what God is inviting us to. Through the Synodal Process, God leads us on the common path of conversion by what we experience with one another. God reaches us through others and he reaches others through us, often in surprising ways.

International Theological Commission

Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church, nos. 11-23

The International Theological Commission (ITC) undertook a study of synodality in the life and mission of the Church. The resulting document, published in 2018, provides some useful guidelines for unpacking the biblical and theological depths of ‘synodality’, as well as some pastoral orientations regarding implications for mission.

To explore the biblical aspects of the ITC’s study, see Chapter 1, nos.11-23 of [‘Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church’](#).

VII. Fruits of synodal conversion

See [Preparatory Document](#), no.2, pp.3-4

What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church? These include:

- recalling how the Spirit has guided the Church’s journey through history and, today, calls us to be, together, witnesses of God’s love;
- living a participative and inclusive ecclesial process that offers everyone—especially those who for various reasons find themselves on the margins—the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard in order to contribute to the edification of the People of God;
- recognizing and appreciating the wealth and the variety of the gifts and charisms that the Spirit liberally bestows for the good of the community and the benefit of the entire human family;
- exploring participatory ways of exercising responsibility in the proclamation of the Gospel and in the effort to build a more beautiful and habitable world;
- examining how responsibility and power are lived in the Church as well as the structures by which they are managed, bringing to light and trying to convert prejudices and distorted practices that are not rooted in the Gospel;
- accrediting the Christian community as a credible subject and reliable partner in paths of social dialogue, healing, reconciliation, inclusion and participation, the reconstruction of democracy, the promotion of fraternity and social friendship;
- regenerating relationships among members of Christian communities as well as between communities and other social groups, e.g., communities of believers of other denominations and religions, civil society organizations, popular movements, etc.;
- fostering the appreciation and appropriation of the fruits of recent synodal experiences on the universal, regional, national, and local levels.

Ten Thematic Nuclei

See [Preparatory Document](#), no.30, pp.34-37

The Preparatory Document presents ten thematic nuclei articulating different facets of ‘lived synodality’.

They are headed:

1. The Journeying Companions | 2. Listening | 3. Speaking out | 4. Celebrating | 5. Co-Responsible in the Mission | 6. Dialogue in Church and Society | 7. With the Other Christian Denominations | 8. Authority and Participation | 9. Discerning and Deciding | 10. Forming Ourselves in Synodality

Here (and also in the *Handbook*, 5.3) these themes are unpacked in ‘Questionnaire’ style: a series of questions invites reflection on how these aspects of ‘synodality’ are experienced in living, local contexts.

These questions can help to elaborate and ‘flesh out’ the fundamental/core question for discernment.

VIII. The synodal journey – further thoughts

Synodality and the mystery of the Triune God

Synodality is to be understood as referring to the very nature of the Church, which is relational and dialogical, anchored in the ‘love-life’ of the triune God. Synodality is more than an institutional response, even if it must find organisational expression.

James Hanvey SJ makes this point:

Synodality, then, is not just one particular model according to which the Church could be organised in a more efficient, consultative and managerial way; it is the expression of the Church’s existence and mission grounded in the triune mystery of the divine life. It points to the ultimate ‘communio’ of all creation which cannot happen without the communio of humanity. Ultimately, as the opening hymn of Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians expresses it, Christ is the one who not only brings all things together but sustains them in their unity (Eph 1:10).

However, even though synodality has such theological ground and depth it must also be given operational form and expression in the charisms, offices and life of the Church at all levels.⁴

A Church responsive to the living word of God

The synodal journey is not meant to be a launching pad for a ‘lobby’ or ‘campaign’ for one’s personal opinions about this or that hot topic of debate. It requires humility and depth, as we come together to draw deeply from the word of God, listening and discerning with the Scriptures within the living tradition in which they are proclaimed.

A Church that listens and journeys with the ‘youngest’, the ‘smallest’, and the most ‘distant’

A synodal journey involves everyone. Religious so often minister with/to those on the margins of church and society. This synodal journey presents an opportunity to facilitate the Church’s encounter with ‘small’ or ‘peripheral’ voices.

[I]t will be of fundamental importance that the voice of the poor and excluded also find a place, not only that of those who have some role or responsibility within the particular Churches.⁵

‘Walking the way’ – a biblical image that invites a concrete response

The image of ‘walking the way’ is deeply embedded in Jewish and Christian traditions. It is a recurring reference to the relationship between human beings and God. In Scripture, the word of the Lord is described as ‘a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’ (Ps 119:105); Jesus says, ‘I am the way’ (Jn 14:6); the early disciples of Jesus were known as followers of ‘the Way’ (Acts 9:2). Still today, Jewish law is referred to as *halakha*, a Hebrew term which could be translated as ‘the path that one walks’.

The ‘physicality’ of the image of ‘walking’ is helpful. It can prevent ‘synodality’ from becoming an abstraction, a head-trip or a pious idea. The image suggests multiple points of entry to the journey and to the conversation. With the Holy Spirit, how can we work and ‘play’ with this image? What does a Church that *walks together* ‘look’ like, ‘sound’ like, ‘feel’ like in ‘real life’, in concrete terms?

⁴ James Hanvey SJ (Secretary for the Service of the Faith for the Society of Jesus in Britain), ‘The Journey of Synodality’, *Thinking Faith* (1 July 2021), <https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/journey-synodality>

⁵ [Preparatory Document](#), no.31; p.38

IX. Items of interest

'Australia has helped shape Synod of Bishops', [ACBC Media Blog](#) (8 October 2021).

'National committee begins work on Synod of Bishops process', [ACBC Media Blog](#) (21 September 2021).

Nicholas Jesson, 'A primer on synodality', One Body, [Salt & Light Media](#) (29 September 2021).

Ormond Rush, 'Plenary Council Participation and Reception: Synodality and Discerning the *Sensus Fidelium*', documents of the [Plenary Council](#) in Australia (2017).

James Hanvey SJ, 'The Journey of Synodality', [Thinking Faith](#) (1 July 2021).

Massimo Faggioli, 'The "synodal process" is supposed to begin next month: is anything happening?' [Le Croix](#) (7 September 2021),

Junno Arocho Esteves, 'Synodality must be based on reality, not fashionable ideas', [Crux](#) (30 April 2021).

Céline Hoyeau, 'Pope sees no alternative to synodality', [Le Croix](#) (21 September 2021).

Upcoming CRA event: *Synodality & Co-Responsibility* is the second online conversation in the *Light from the Southern Cross - Catalyst for Conversation* series. Synodality and Co-Responsibility are key themes in the Report. Monday, November 1, 2021. 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. [Refer to CRA website for details.](#)

Hymn ideas

(Some of these express the personal 'I' experience of walking with Jesus; others the ecclesial 'we' dimension of a journey made together. They may stimulate your own ideas for musical options.)

- [Walking with the Lord](#) | Vocals: Eugene Pinto; Instrumentals courtesy of Ron Mascarenhas
- [Gather Us In](#) | By Marty Haugen
- Companions on the Journey | By Carey Landry (performed by a small grassroots [virtual choir](#))
- [O For a Closer Walk with God](#) | Sung by St Martin's Voices - St Martin-in-the-Fields, London. Words: William Cowper (1731-1800). Music: 'Caithness', from 'Scottish Psalter' (1635).
- [Just a Closer Walk With Thee](#) | Performed by The Worship Team



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