



*For a Synodal Church:
communion, participation, and mission*

*XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops
to be held in Rome, October 2023*

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

Official launch dates:

10 October – Holy See

17 October – local churches

2021

Overview

The theme for the next Synod of Bishops in Rome, October 2023, is synodality:

‘For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.’

In keeping with Pope Francis’ programmatic vision for an inclusive, participatory, evangelising Church, the 2023 Synod involves a two-year preparatory period that allows the voices and energies of local Churches to be engaged and heard.

‘One listening to the others; and all listening to the Holy Spirit.’¹

In this way, synodality will be given renewed emphasis, exercised by the college of bishops along with the involvement of all the faithful in the synodal journey.

CICLSAL has issued a specific [invitation](#) to consecrated men and women to be involved in the synodal process, and to religious bodies such as CRA to coordinate the response, to be submitted to CICLSAL by March 2022.

[View this link](#) for the Vatican’s announcement of the Synodal journey.

The process

On 10 October 2021, Pope Francis officially opened the synodal journey which has three phases of consultations and discernment, culminating with the Synod Bishops in October 2023 in Rome. [\[Click here\]](#) for Francis’ homily where he briefly outlines the call to *encounter, listen, discern.*]

To make the synodality desired by Pope Francis concrete and visible, the 2023 Synod will be celebrated not only in the Vatican but in each particular Church of the five continents, following an itinerary divided into three phases: diocesan, continental and universal.

[View this link](#) for an overview of the process.

The fundamental question

The focal point for consultation and discernment revolves around this 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’?

[\[Preparatory Document, no.26, p.30\]](#)

¹ Discourse of Pope Francis on the Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015.

The timeline

[View the timeline](#) as an infographic.

9-10 Oct 2021: [Solemn Opening](#) by Pope Francis

17 Oct 2021: **Diocesan phase: consultation and participation of the People of God**

Under the leadership of Diocesan Bishop, the diocesan discernment will culminate in a 'Pre-Synodal Meeting.' The contributions will be sent to their own Episcopal Conference. The bishops, gathered in assembly for a period of discernment, will make a synthesis which they will send to the General Secretariat of the Synod. This first stage will be completed by April 2022.

Having obtained the material, the first *Instrumentum laboris* will be drafted, to be published and sent to the particular Churches in September 2022.

Sept 2022: **Continental phase: dialogue and discernment**

After engaging in a dialogue on the *Instrumentum laboris*, each continental grouping will draft a final document, to be sent to the General Secretariat in March 2023. The Secretariat will draft a second *Instrumentum laboris*, based on the responses. Publication is planned for June 2023.

Oct 2023: **Universal phase: the bishops of the world in Rome**

Note: To prepare for the next Synod, four commissions have been set up: one each for theology, for methodology, for spirituality, and a commission on communication.

Further links

The [Preparatory Document](#) for the global journey was issued last month.

The [Vademecum](#) (Handbook) accompanies the Preparatory Document and is of particular relevance to organisers of discernment processes.

The official website is ["For a Synodal Church 2021-2023"](#).

Suggested [tools](#) for reflecting on synodality and other resources are posted at the CRA website.

Involvement of Religious

In addition to the diocesan-based process, other ecclesial entities will be engaged, including national bodies such as episcopal conferences and peak bodies representing religious leaders.

CRA's response is outlined below.

CRA RESPONSE

Rationale

Why engage with this synodal journey?

There can be understandable feelings of ‘fatigue’ and ‘overload’ among church leaders at the thought of yet-another-thing that they are being asked to do. And, after all, don’t we already have the Plenary Council underway?

Could this be why we have not heard much about Pope Francis’ synodal journey to date? It is also no secret that there is [resistance](#) to Francis’ synodal emphasis in some parts of the Catholic community.

Our CRA working party has considered these realities. Our sense is that, however challenging the times and our workloads, it is important for religious leaders to support Pope Francis in his determined and timely efforts to dismantle deeply clericalist ways of operating and to move Catholic communities to a healthier way of relating as the people of God and discerning the gifts of the body of Christ. We won’t have Francis with us forever, and his time is ‘now’.

Our conclusion: let’s ‘get behind’ and support this synodal process. As far as each Member’s resources, energies and prayerful discernment realistically allow, we invite your response. A simple, flexible, invitational process for doing so is outlined below.

What are the benefits of engaging?

The opportunity to support Pope Francis in this synodal vision is one good reason to enter the journey towards the 2023 Synod of Bishops. There are other benefits too. It brings an added dimension to existing synodal processes in Australia. It is an opportunity to present a ‘face and voice’ of religious life in Australia. It is also a chance to feed on rich biblical and ecclesial themes, to learn from one another about the experience of ‘walking together’, and to draw in other voices as well, those at the ‘edges’ of the path, or on another path altogether.

In short, the synodal journey at hand is neither totally new nor separate from our current lives and ministries. It presents a concrete occasion to ‘look again’ through the particular lens Francis is offering, and to raise our voices, as the Spirit leads.

How might Australian Religious engage with this synodal journey?

CRA would like to propose the following as a simple, lean, flexible, invitational strategy.

Steps

1. INFORMATION SHARING

First, CRA will provide clear information about the synodal journey to Members. There is a good deal of material out there. We have done the work in locating key documents, distilling essential points, and providing links to resources. These are gathered at the [CRA website](#).

2. INVITATION TO REFLECT & RESPOND

We extend an open invitation to all Religious and Religious communities to address an open-ended question and to return their response by 29 November 2021:

*Tell us how you live synodality
...and how this living witness speaks (or could speak) to the wider Church/society.*

This twofold question (based on the 'fundamental question' above) is deliberately broad and open-ended. *You* decide how to interpret and answer it. For example:

Tell us how you live synodality. E.g., *in your personal life, in your ministry, as an individual, as a household, or as a congregation...*

And tell us how this living, synodal witness of yours speaks (or could speak) to the wider Church and society. E.g., *What can it teach us? What does it model for the whole Church, and how do you imagine this being implemented structurally? How does it challenge, lead, question, encourage? In what way might it be prophetic? What does it offer the wider human family?*

Another way to express this two-fold question:

- Tell us how you '*walk with*' others in your/their journey with God; and
- What *learnings* are in this experience? E.g., share the insights or modelling that is valuable, necessary, perhaps prophetic, for the wider community.

Mode of Response

What form should a response take?

Again, we leave that to you, given your level of engagement, time available, talents. For example:

- A response as an individual, or as a collective
- A written response – a few carefully chosen lines, a page, or many pages
- An audio or video recording – as brief or as long as you choose
- A scholarly response; an artistic expression; or a pastoral view.

The CRA secretariat will endeavour to collate whatever is offered into a creative, useful form – not only for CICALSAL, but to be shared with our Members and with the wider community.

Resources

CRA has gathered up a number of resources to support and stimulate the process of reflection and response. These can be found at the CRA website under headings such as:

Key documents | Conversation starters | Three Key Words | What is Synodality? | Articles of Interest

Getting started

Finally, to help 'kickstart' the process, a sample outline for a group reflection on synodality is included. It is only a starting point. Please adapt, or freely develop your own way of responding to the central question to suit your community and local situation.

Feeding back

Please send your completed submission, labelled as 'Synodal Journey Submission', to me at nationalexec@catholicreligious.org.au by Monday 29 November 2021. *Thank you.*

Kind regards,



Anne Walker
National Executive Director