



Synod on Synodality SUMMARY

Pope Francis has called for an Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023. An essential part of the preparation for this assembly is the participation of Catholics from around the world. To assist local churches in their response to the Holy Father's call for participation, the Vatican has released two key documents: a *Preparatory Document* and an official handbook called the *Vademecum*. This brief summary is intended to present the key points and themes of the Vatican documents, so that we can prepare for this season of discernment and reflect on how Catholics in western Oregon are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

As this is a Synod on Synodality, the *Vademecum* opens with a definition of synod:

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', and to the fact that Christians, His followers, were originally called 'followers of the Way'. 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.

"So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

– Ephesians 2:19-22

Far from being simply another program or initiative with a completion date, this synodal process reflects the pilgrim nature of the Church, as she moves towards the heavenly Jerusalem (*Lumen Gentium*, Ch. 7). But we are pilgrims with a proclamation – along the way, we are called to share with others the good news of where the journey is leading: *to abundant life in Christ*. This is why the documents make it very clear that the synodal process is inseparable from the Church's central mission of evangelization.

There are **three** dimensions of the synod: **Communion, Participation and Mission.** What follows is a description of each dimension as presented in the Vademecum:

COMMUNION By his gracious will, God gathers us together as diverse peoples of one faith, through the covenant that he offers to his people. 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 God's call for his people.

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, analyze, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will. Genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded.

MISSION The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centered on ourselves. Our mission is to witness the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deep 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 fulfill her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God's kingdom.

The Vademecum also provides a fundamental question to help guide us through these themes and create those environments in which we can be receptive to the Holy Spirit: *A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together." How is this "journeying together" happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?* The members of the Body of Christ are being asked to *recall our experiences, re-read these experiences in greater depth, and then gather the fruits to share*, so that we can discern what paths are opening up for our local Church.

For the synodal process to be fruitful, any exercise of listening and reflecting must, above all, be "root(ed) in meditation on Scripture, the liturgy, and prayer." How exactly this listening and discernment will look like across the universal Church will vary greatly. The documents present a wide range of possibilities, and it is important to note as well that the process will extend beyond the parish boundaries. But the thread running through all of these efforts is the spirit of authentic fellowship and a faithful openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Responding to the Holy Father's invitation will require "creativity and a certain audacity" but we also know that "whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Rev. 2:29).

To stay informed throughout the synodal process, be sure to visit archdpdx.org/synod for the latest updates.