

XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Listening and Discernment Guide Session I



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 three dimensions of the Synod are **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.

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* [sense of faith] that we share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God’s call for his people.

The four areas covered within this theme are:

- **Companions on the journey**
- **Listening**
- **Speaking out**
- **Celebration**



If you are working in a group of five or more, you may need to set aside 1.5 hours to use this guide appropriately.

At the beginning of this session, you are invited to pray together.

You might like to read Scripture, use the words written below or just speak to God from your heart.

Prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*

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

**With 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.



STEP 02

READ AND REFLECT

Read and reflect on the following questions in silence. You may want to choose a few that speak to you the most.

Reflect on your personal experience of faith, life and the Church related to these questions.

Write a list of all the responses to these questions that come to mind.

Share aloud all of the responses you have written down, working together through Step 3.

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, marginalisation, 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?

ROUND 1: SHARING MY REFLECTION

- Speakers work in a clockwise direction. The facilitator may nominate someone to start, then participants can share one after the other.
- Everyone speaks for two to three minutes about what happened during their reflection time.
- Begin with the phrase: *“In my reflection today...”*
- When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart. The focus is to listen to others, rather than simply thinking about what you want to say.
- Between each person, there will be a 30-second pause to recall what was said.
- At the end, the group pauses for a period of prayer. This may help to absorb what was said and to take a break before beginning the second round.

ROUND 2: GATHERING WHAT I HEARD

- This round will be shorter than the first. Speaking order is clockwise, as before.
- Everyone speaks for one to two minutes.
- This is an opportunity to answer questions like:
 - *What consoled me or struck me as I listened to my companions?*
 - *What did I hear? What did I feel? What was the Spirit saying to me/us?*
 - *Was I especially touched by a particular sharing?*
- Begin with the phrase, *“In the group I heard...and it left me feeling...”*.
- When everyone finishes, the group pauses for a period of prayer.

ROUND 3: MOVING FORWARD

- In this round, participants are not obliged to speak, and can speak spontaneously without any particular order.
- This is an opportunity to reflect on questions like:
 - *Is there a common thread in what was shared? Is there something missing that you had expected would be said?*
 - *Have you received any particular insight or revelation? What is it?*
 - *Where did you experience a sense of harmony with others as you shared with one another?*
 - *What are the feelings of the group? Is there consensus or disagreement?*
 - *What is the way forward?*
- The leader helps summarise the discussion.

At this stage, the group begins to realise what unites them. It is here that signs of the action of the Holy Spirit in the group begin to manifest themselves, and the conversation becomes an experience of shared discernment.

STEP 04

PRAY AND RESPOND

PRAY At the end of the Spiritual Conversation, you are invited to pray together. You can use the words below, or you might like to say a prayer of gratitude in your own words. You may also choose to close with the prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*.

**Creator God, we thank you for the encounter with one another today.
We know that where two or three are gathered, you are in our midst.**

**Thank you for being with us and for the courage to speak boldly and
with passion, and the humility to listen with open hearts.**

**We ask you to continue to walk with us, as we discover the pathway
toward the future you are calling us to.**

Amen.

RESPOND Your voice is important as it conveys the main fruits of the discernment of the whole People of God across the world.

It is recommended that your group's response be captured in a short summary of no more than 250 words.

- The response should reflect the diversity of views and opinions expressed and pay particular attention to the lived experiences of participants, both positive and negative. It should be faithful to the people's voices and to whatever emerged from their discernment and dialogue, rather than a series of generalised or doctrinally correct statements.
- Views should not be excluded simply because they were expressed by a small minority of participants.
- Overall, the response should capture what the Holy Spirit has inspired the community to see regarding the current reality of synodality, including the present lights and shadows, and in what ways the Holy Spirit is inviting the community to grow in synodality.

Your response will become your submission to the Synod of Bishops and will be compiled and sent to your diocese. Please submit your response online between 20 October 2021 and 27 February 2022 at <https://www.catholic.org.au/synodalchurch> via the **SUBMISSION** link.



Thank you for contributing to the discernment process
of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

*Guided by the Holy Spirit, we make up the living
stones through whom God builds up the Church
that He desires for the third millennium (1 Peter 2:5).*



National Centre for Pastoral Research | Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
GPO Box 368 Canberra ACT 2601

E: ncpr@catholic.org.au | <https://www.catholic.org.au/synodalchurch>