

Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia

Synod 2021-2023

For a Synodal Church

Communion, Participation, and Mission



Facilitating Parish Synodal
Consultations



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. THE LOGO OF THE SYNOD



Understand the Logo:

The official logo is a large, majestic tree that covers and protects the people, providing a source a wisdom and light whilst reaching for the sky; This tree is indeed a sign of deep vitality and hope which represents the Cross of Christ. It carries the Eucharist, which shines like the sun reminding us that Jesus is the rising sun who leads us our journey of faith. The branches open like hands or wings similar to the nature of the Holy Spirit. The tree can also be seen as a Pillar, reminding us of God’s presence during Israel’s journey to the promised land, as a pillar of cloud during the day and pillar of fire in the night.

The people of God are not static: they are on the move, in direct reference to the etymology of the word synod, which means "walking together". The people are united by the same common dynamic that this “Tree of Life” breathes into them, from which they begin their walk.



The 15 silhouettes within the logo sum up our entire humanity in its diversity of life situations of generations and origins. This aspect is reinforced by the multiplicity of bright colours which are themselves signs of joy. There is no hierarchy between the people; they are all on the same level: young, old, men, women, teenagers, children, lay people, religious, parents, couples, singles; the bishop and the nun are not in front of them, but among them. Quite naturally, children and then adolescents start their walk, in reference to these words of Jesus in the Gospel: " I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children". (Mt 11:25)

The written message within the logo states: "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission" runs from left to right in the direction of this march, underlining and strengthening and underpinning the message of the Synod.

INTRODUCTION

Holy Father Pope Francis wants the whole Church to get into a mutual dialogue and discussion

- To hear about what is happening in our local parishes and the Church at large.
- To assist our Bishops and to the Pope to hear the voices of the people they shepherd
- To raise an awareness that will result in awakening of the baptised to be alert to our responsibilities within our Parishes that will support growth and greater communion of the faithful

The Holy Father has proposed the synodal process in the whole Church. Synod means "journeying together" and it involves listening to the Holy Spirit and to each other in order to discern the path we are called to walk together.

The Synod "is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people's hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission." Synod Handbook

Our basic question is:

What is the Holy Spirit saying to our Church today?

• LIVING AS A SYNODAL CHURCH

According to the International Theological Commission, synodality is “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* (way of living and operating) of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission” [*Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, No. 6]. The idea of synod is not new; synodal way existed in the early Church. Therefore, the synod on synodality or the synodal process is not simply another project or a new initiative of the Church but simply is the way of being the Church in the third millennium.

• THE TEN KEY ELEMENTS OF SYNODALITY- FROM SYNOD HANDBOOK

1. Be companions to each other on the journey
2. Listening to each other and in turn listen to the Holy Spirit
3. Speaking out without any hesitance and prejudice
4. Celebrating together our faith and our communion
5. Sharing responsibility for our common mission
6. Joining dialogue in Church and in wider society
7. Participating in ecumenism [Other Christian denominations]
8. Each claiming their proper authority and participation
9. Being part of discerning and deciding for the future of the Church
10. Forming ourselves in synodality.

• BEING A SYNODAL CHURCH

The practice of living as a synodal Church means:

- Engaging into conversations that lead to conversion to Christ and commitment to active participation in the mission given by Christ — **Communion**
- The people of God talk with one another and listen to one another in a reflective manner about questions that matter — **Participation**
- The communion exists for a common purpose; mission flows naturally from the experience of communion — **Mission.**

Synodal Requirements

1. Addressing the basic questions together
2. Listening to the Holy Spirit
3. Remaining open to the perspectives of other people
4. “Progressively maturing” the fruits of the Holy Spirit over time.

Who Moderates the Synodal Consultations:

• Choosing Moderators

Moderating is key to the success of the process. One must be able to listen and steer and guide the topic of conversation in a meaningful and non-biased way. It is important to select and train excellent facilitators for this listening process. Strong facilitators are people who:

- Are willing to sacrifice time and energy for the synodal process
- Capable of having a view of the synod beyond their personal identity
- Can focus a conversation and control the group
- Can connect participants with each other without projecting oneself.
- Have good interpersonal skills
- Have effective communication skills with good command over English

Additionally, as this is a Catholic Process, other attributes to serve within parishes includes

- Are of strong Catholic faith
- Deeply rooted in Catholic Traditions
- Are prayerful and reflective
- Person of Integrity and well accepted across the parish community.
- Have strong interpersonal skills
- Have effective communication skills with good command over English

It is important to select moderators with the experience and competencies needed, depending on the nature and makeup of the sub-groups.

- Faithful can volunteer to moderate language groups or other groups in a synodal consultations within a parish
- A highly skilled moderator may be required to facilitate special groups that represent a marginalised sector: persons with disabilities, with less or no educational background, blue collared workers, people involved in unethical trade, those who have left the Church or those who are angry with the Church and religious leaders etc.) or when special interest groups are participating in a particular consultation
- All facilitators need preparation and training on the synodal approach, the synodal purpose, and the synodal process.

FACILITATING A SYNODAL CONSULTATION

It is good to have synodal discussions in person however, in the given situation of the pandemic, it is left to the discretion of the parish Priest and the synodal team to discern the best and safe method for synodal gathering. The parishes may choose to have online meeting but, in such cases, it is important to have the clear instructions of the ethics and a norm to be followed in an online meeting.

If the meetings are online, there should be a moderator and a secretary for the meeting.

- All should keep their videos on
- All keep their audio muted except when they are given time to speak
- No one is allowed to record the meeting except the moderator.

The Moderator will be asked to:

- Establish clear boundaries of time and topic for speakers
- Gently interrupt a speaker who talks disproportionately more than others
- Gently interrupt and redirect a speaker who gets off topic
- Gently re-focus a speaker who is preoccupied with an issue that is not pertinent to the topic or inhibits the participation of others in the group.

Practical Suggestions for Successful Moderation

1. It helps to set ground rules and expectations at the start of the consultation by emphasizing the need for broad participation and safety. Some examples of boundary-related ground rules are:
 - One person speaks at a time and the others listen attentively
 - Discernment means speaking, listening and prayerfully reflecting so pausing in silence between speakers to consider what is said is a good approach
 - Speak when you can add to the conversation, not when you are trying to intentionally end it
 - Stay on topic
 - Keep your comments reasonably brief so others have time to participate
 - This is a forward-leaning conversation, so lean toward solutions
 - If someone offers a comment in the form of a complaint, ask the person to reframe her/his comment in the form of a hope or aspiration.
2. If you have to interrupt a speaker, it helps to acknowledge their contribution by providing a brief synthesis of what you heard them say and thank them for their contribution.

Examples of Ground Rules for Synodal Consultations

1. This consultation is a safe place to talk — we will treat each other and what anyone says with reverence and respect.
2. One person speaks at a time.
3. We all will listen with an open mind.
4. We will be stopping the conversation at certain intervals to reflect and pray.
5. Our primary mode is dialogue: When we speak our purpose is to advance the conversation. Please avoid arguing or comments that seek to advance a personal agenda.
6. We limit how long we speak so that everyone has time to share.
7. We only speak once until everyone has had an opportunity to share.
8. We will be reporting the themes and experiences to the Vicariate and bishop's conference as they emerge from the consultation discussions without indicating the names of individual participants.

9. As participants, when we tell others of our experience of the consultation, we will not attribute anything we share to particular people or groups.

• **DIALOGUE, DISCUSSION AND DISCERNMENT FOR FACILITATORS**

Dialogue is the foundation of all synodal consultations. Dialogue does not happen when there is arguing or diatribe. However, conflicting perspectives may be presented. We may not all agree upon what is discussed in the synodal consultation, but we all acknowledge that what we discern through this process has the potential to be the will of God for the Church in the future.

It is helpful to distinguish between the different types of exchanges:

- Dialogue is two ways, cooperative, and its purpose is to build relationship and exchange perspectives between participants
- Discussion is a process of talking about something to reach a decision or to exchange ideas
- Debate is two way and competitive, where the purpose is to convince another
- Diatribe is one way, and its purpose is to browbeat, inspire, shame, or emote.

Dialogue comes before discussion in synodal exchanges. These two activities can lead to true discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying and leading.

- Dialogue expands possibilities and insight into possibilities
- Discussion holds those possibilities against one another, helping to reflect upon them, and narrowing toward realistic, doable solutions, and steps forward.

Practical Suggestions for Dialogue, Discernment, and Discussion

As moderator, you will help the group engage in dialogue on the topic until they make an explicit decision to move into discussion. It is okay for you as moderator to ask the group to stop talking for a short period of time in order to reflect and pray about the dialogue before moving to discussion.

1. A moderator can help stimulate discussion by offering to synthesize the comments made from time to time or when the flow of conversation seems to be stuck
2. A moderator helps the group by holding them in discussion until a pattern of recurring themes are emerging and making an explicit decision to move into prayerful discernment
3. Discernment begins in prayer: “Your will, not mine”
4. A moderator can call the group to prayer for guidance by the Spirit, to sharing reflections on what they see as emerging in the dialogue and discussion
5. A moderator can call upon the group to share the themes that they hear surfacing and that they believe should persist into the future of the local and universal Church as a result of this consultation
6. Likewise, a moderator can call upon the group to name ideas or topics they have heard that they believe should not persist into the future local and universal Church
7. A moderator can name any yet unresolved issues or topics that may need to remain unresolved
8. A moderator can call upon the participants to detail what sticks out to them as a result of the consultation, ways to be in stronger communion with one another, ways to participate more fully in the life of the Church, or ways to be more missionary.

STRUCTURE OF THE SYNODAL CONSULTATION

At the parish level, most synodal consultations should not exceed 90 to 120 minutes to avoid complacency and fatigue. Some groups may want to allow a longer time frame so that everyone’s voice can be heard and brought into the discussion however this can be decided by the Parish coordination team. A consultation at the Vicariate level may last up to 180 minutes or more. It is advisable to encourage informal meetings in small groups such as among neighbours or colleagues with a synodal consultation provided there is seriousness of the process and one of them volunteers to be the secretary to note down the feedback. They can follow the format given below. The moderator should add time frames to each part of the consultation. As much as possible, the focus should be on smaller, group discussions so that everyone has a chance to be heard.

Sample Template for a Synodal Consultation

1. Gathering Prayer and Faith Sharing

2. Short remarks (perhaps by video) by Bishop or Pastoral Leader
3. Explanation of the Purpose, Roles, and Process
4. Focus the Consultation with Questions
5. Smaller group Discussions
6. Large Group Feedback
7. Brief Evaluation
8. Sending Forth Prayer.

It is helpful for participants that the moderator allocates time/duration to each section of the consultation. This will facilitate time management and give the attendees an idea of the duration of the Consultation.

Sample Content Outline for a Synodal Consultation

1. Gathering Prayer and Faith Sharing

- Opening Song: We are one in the Spirit (or another appropriate hymn)
- Word of God: Acts 2: 1-11, 14-19 (or other Scripture passage from the Synod Handbook or Preparatory Document)
- Quiet reflection time: Experiences of the presence of Holy Spirit
- Prayer to the Holy Spirit. (Synodal Prayer)

2. Short remarks (perhaps by video) by Bishop or Pastoral Leader.

What is this Synod on Synodality, and why is it important? It should pose the basic question: What should we do to improve our parish (or other ecclesial community, etc.)?

3. Explanation of the Purpose, Roles, and Process

Explanation of the purpose

- This synodal journey is a special time of prayer, listening, dialogue, and recommendations.”
- This is your opportunity to respond to the request from Pope Francis to dream about the Church we are called to be.
- By gathering as a people of faith, we hope to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten

minds, to warm hearts, and to restore strength for our common mission.

- By the end of our time together we aim to capture your answers to the basic question: What is the Holy Spirit saying to our Church today?

Explanation of the roles

- Main Moderator – for large group
- Subgroup Moderator – for subgroups
- Main Secretary — reporting on the large group discussion
- Subgroup Secretary –noting and presenting the subgroup discussion.

Explanation of the process

- Main Moderator explains the questions
- Gather in small groups with the subgroup moderator and secretary
- Meaningful exchanges between participants about the questions
- Regather in the large group to report back from small group discussions
- Gathering of the feedback and summary
- Conclusion and sending forth.
- Subgroup Secretary – reporting on group discussion
- Feedback – commentary/questions from within the large group.

4. Focus the Consultation with Questions

The main moderator explains that the guiding theme of the discussions is a synodal Church, a Church that “journeys together.” Participants should share their meaningful experiences (not opinions on each other’s experiences) of the local Catholic “journeying together” in ministry. For example, outreach to the poor and vulnerable, prayer and reflection together, liturgical celebration, RCIA experiences, conversion experiences, and faith sharing experiences.

The small group discussions should focus on specific questions. The Vicariate has provided questions for this exercise. The main moderator introduces these questions and explains that one good approach is to focus on experiences.

Sample Focusing Questions

(Our Vicariate has provided specific questions for the synodal consultations)

1. How is this “journeying together” to announce the Gospel happening today in our local parish with so many language and cultural groups?
2. Who else do we need to reach out to, listen to and learn from, or to include in our synodal consultations and in our faith community? Whose voices are currently not being heard? Who is absent from these discussions?
3. What do you think would make our parish (or ecclesial community) better?
4. What can each of us do and what can we do collectively to make it better?
5. “Synodality” asks us to be energetic and involved ambassadors of our faith through conscientious listening and sharing of insights to advance Jesus’ mission in the world. How do we see our parishioners becoming more aware of how much their faith and insights count — and need to be heard?
6. What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together?

5. Table Discussions

Participants should be assigned to diverse small groups of approximately ten members using a random method. Each subgroup should have an assigned subgroup moderator and secretary who are also invited to enter the discussion. If possible, the group should be seated at a table together for the small group facilitated conversation.

The group moderator reintroduces the questions and then invites each person to respond. The moderator proposes the recalling of experiences method (described below) as a useful way to guide the discussion. Between 45 minutes to an hour can be dedicated to this process.

Using “Recalling of Our Experiences” Approach

a) Focus the re-collection

- What are our experiences of journeying together in communion, participation, mission (Synodality) in our local Church?
- What joys did those experiences bring?
- What difficulties and obstacles have we encountered?

- What wounds did those experiences reveal?
- What insights have those experiences elicited?

b) Gather the fruits to share

- What paths forward are opening up for our local Church?
- Where in these experiences does the voice of the Holy Spirit resound?
- What are the areas for change for our Church and what steps can be taken?

6. Large Group Feedback

The smaller groups should be called back to a general consultation by the main moderator. The secretary of each subgroup should be asked to give a summary of the group's conversation. After this is done, and depending on the time remaining, the main moderator can invite individuals to give their personal feedback to the larger group. The main moderator can suggest specific formats for feedback such as

- After listening to my group, I am wondering...
- The question that emerged for me from listening in my group was...
- An interesting diversity of views that emerged in my group was...

Gathering of the feedback and summary

The main moderator explains that the information from the groups will be combined into a report which will be sent to the parish coordination team. Every effort will be made to faithfully report what was expressed (including any contentious or complex issues) as to respect the trust and communion experienced during the time together.

7. Brief Evaluation

Participants should be asked to complete a brief evaluation of the process. It can be done before leaving the consultation or online immediately afterward. Evaluation questions should be limited to no more than 5 questions and could include:

- How well has this consultation allowed you the opportunity to listen and share your own experience of Church?
- What are your hopes for the Church as we “journey together” in terms of communion, participation and mission?

- What practical suggestions do you have for your faith community to continue the synodal journey and be a more listening, discerning, and participatory Church?

8. Sending Forth Prayer

Sample:

Leader: Let us take a moment of quiet as we reflect on what we have done here today...

Reader: A reading from the Letter of St. James Jas 1:27
Dearest brothers and sisters: Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you...[and] Be doers of the word and not hearers only.

Leader: Come Holy Spirit, we ask you, that by your inspiration, may all of our prayer and actions always begin from you and inspire others to know you more deeply. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen

Leader: Let us go forth sharing a sign of peace.

• POST SYNODAL CONSULTATION

Reporting the fruits of your synodal consultations:

Reporting is both horizontal — reporting to the participants and community — and vertical — reporting to the Vicariate of Southern Arabia, the Bishops Conference of the Middle East (CELRA), to the Synod of Bishops in Rome and to the Holy Father. It would be helpful if the main moderator could work with others to pull out some themes from the consultation and report that information back to participants, pastoral councils, pastoral staff, and the faith community as a whole. Final Report is to be sent to the Vicariate using the same standardized format of the questionnaire provided by the Vicariate.

- The final report of the parish should not exceed 4500 words or ten pages whichever comes first.
- The parish can have a parish pre-synodal meeting of select members or existing synodal bodies like parish council and language group leaders to finalise the report.
- The report should be submitted both in soft copy in the MS Word format and a hard copy with the parish seal and signed both by the parish priest and the parish synod coordinator/s.

- The Final report of the parish should reach the vicariate office by 25 March 2022.

Facilitating Potentially Difficult Synodal Consultations

As facilitator you may find some consultations are difficult because of people who have traumatic experience in the Church through abuse, people who (often unknowingly) attempt to hijack a consultation for their own agenda, or who have few effective filters for what they might say. There are some ways to mitigate or respond to those situations.

1. Preparation and clarity of purpose

- Set clear expectations, process and purpose early and keep on topic.
- Set the tone as prayerful and reflective.
- What may be reported out of the synodal consultation is **not what we all agree upon, but what we discern** as having potential to be the **Will of God** for the Church in the future. Even conflicting perspectives can be reported.
- Be clear that the synodal consultations are not equipped to provide solutions to those who suffered any kind of hurt or abuse, but it is to listen to their concern and discern and suggest better options to the Church to win over and reconcile with our brethren.
- Be clear that our purpose is to help form a more synodal and listening Church and that means keeping an open mind so the Spirit can work in all of us. Don't let our personal agendas limit our conversations.

2 Responding to people with “hidden” or other agenda

It may happen that either individuals or groups attend synodal consultations and come with particular agendas/ideology that are not in line with the Synodal Process. Once the Moderator recognizes this, there are methods that may help keep the conversation on track.

- When an individual or group expresses absolute certainty, a moderator can respond with curiosity: “Help me understand...,” “I am wondering whether/if...,” or “I have a question...”
- When an individual or group blames others, a moderator can respond by inviting other perspectives and developing consensus: “How could any of us make a difference here?” “Are

there some steps we would agree together that would be helpful here?” “How could all of us be part of the solution?”

Sometimes it is also necessary to restate the purpose and nature of the synodal consultation. “The synodal consultation is forward looking, envisioning the Church of the future, and we are approaching this in a reflective, prayerful manner, keeping an open mind so the Spirit can surface the direction forward for our Church.

Let us all please take a moment to place ourselves in an internal space where we can constructively participate by how we listen and how we speak.”

- **Responding to people with no filters**

Some people of goodwill speak without awareness of the impact they have on others by how they speak or the words that they say. It is more than just abrupt; it is doing harm to others even if they see it as “just being honest” or something similar.

The facilitator may need a graduated response to such people:

- Gently interrupt the speaker and remind them that we need to be respectful of others.
- Gently tell the speaker the impact they are having on some people in the room.
- Call upon the group to share how this speaker is impacting them (If you think they will speak up and if they are willing to share that through you as the moderator).
- Ask the speaker to change how they are speaking (e.g., softer, more aware of how people are hearing them, focus on the question not the person).
- Suggest a break or a time for reflection and quietly approach the speaker and ask for a change in delivery or tell the speaker the group will be moving on after the break.

- **RESOURCES AND HELPFUL LINKS**

- [Vatican Synod Website](#)
- [Vatican Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops](#)
- [Website of the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia – www.avosa.org](http://www.avosa.org)



• **VICARIATE SYNODAL COORDINATION TEAM:**

- Bishop Paul Hinder OFM Cap – President of the Vicariate Synod
- Fr. Darick Paul Dsouza OFM Cap - Coordinator
- Mr. Mathew Thomas
- Dr. Bibian Ofoegbu
- Ms. Vickey Najas
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