

# Engaging with the Synod process and Synthesis Document

## A guide for parishes

### Introduction



Last October, hundreds of bishops, theologians, and other experts gathered in Rome with Pope Francis for the next step on our Synod journey. They spent time sitting around tables, reflecting on the key topics that have been raised by synod conversations around the world listening attentively to each other using the conversation in the Spirit methodology.

The results of these conversations were then published in an interim report which covered many aspects of our community life, from seminary training and pastoral councils to digital mission and the ministry of listening. Local communities are invited to continue to be part of the synod journey, by discussing the question “How can we be a synodal Church in mission?” There are two ways to do this:

- Firstly, dioceses are asked to have a conversation about the effectiveness of our decision-making structures, to be completed by 17th March.
- Secondly, all communities are asked to “keep the synodal dynamism alive” by responding to any aspect of the interim report.

While we would encourage people to engage with the whole of the report, this resource puts forward a more accessible way to participate in the process.



### How to use this resource

We recommend that the organiser/s begin by reading the Synthesis Report and the ‘Towards October 2024’ guidance from the Synod secretariate.

Using the Synthesis Report Themes table (below), consult with others about which themes you will decide to cover. The worksheet invites parishes to ‘choose 3 priorities’ and ‘3 concrete initiatives to implement’.

We recommend choosing three of the themes below to engage with spread over three separate meetings to give time to consider the theme in relation to people’s own experiences and then think about any concrete action that could be planned or recommended.

Participants should engage with preparatory reading and reflection in advance. We recommend giving each theme 45-60 minutes for small groups to discuss the two questions, so a meeting of 90 minutes should ensure time for prayer and listening.

Each theme should be considered in two different ways. The first question should help people reflect upon the theme based on their own experience, and the second should help people consider responses in the form of concrete initiatives or recommendations. Some optional questions are included in the table below, but these aren’t exhaustive.

# Meeting Structure

## Preparatory Reading

Before the meeting, participants should read the 'Letter of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to the People of God' and the first section of the document that has been chosen to reflect on. In subsequent meetings, the preparatory reading is just the section chosen for that week. Each section is between one and two pages.

## Opening Prayer

Lectio Devina (see separate School for Synodality resource for help in this at [schoolforsynodality.org.uk/resources](https://schoolforsynodality.org.uk/resources))

Some helpful passages:

- Matthew 10: 46-52 Jesus show us how to listen
- Ephesians 4: 1-7, 11-13 Becoming a Christian community
- Luke 21: 1-4 The widow's mite
- Luke 10: 1-2 The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few
- Matthew 13:1-8 The parable of the sower

## Introduction to the Synthesis Sessions

We are now nearing the final stages of the three-year-long global Synod process. During the diocesan phase back in January 2022, we undertook local listening processes in our parishes and communities. Diocesan reports fed into national syntheses, which were then brought together in the beautiful document, Enlarge the Space of your Tent. Seven continental reports gave distinct flavours of our global church, forming the basis of the Instrumentum Laboris, which gave the terms for the Assembly meeting in Rome 2023. Finally, the Assembly produced an interim report, which offered the Church the next steps for reflection on our Synod journey. All this listening and discerning must translate into concrete change as we take up Pope Francis' challenge to become a synodal church. These sessions are designed to help your community reflect on the overarching question: "How can we be a synodal Church in mission?". Out of the eighteen areas laid out in the Assembly report, what has arisen most clearly in your local listening, and what practical steps could you take?

NB all these documents can be found here: [synod.va/en/resources/official-documents.html](https://synod.va/en/resources/official-documents.html)

## Small groups with two questions

1. Reflecting on your own experience of this theme.
2. How can our community respond? What plans, initiatives or recommendations can be made?

## Plenary

sharing reflections of the small groups

## Closing prayer

### Reminder of the Spiritual Conversation Process

Begin with a few moments of silence to allow ourselves to ponder the question.

First round of conversation: Each person has a chance to speak. There is no discussion in this round, and there is a time of silence to allow for reflection.

Second round of conversation: Share what struck you most or what resonated for you in the first round and what moved you during the time of silence. Once again this is followed by a pause for reflection.

Third round of conversation: Finally reflect on what moved you most deeply. What new insights arise? What are the common themes or fruits of the conversation? How was God present and at work during their time together? Your note-taker should jot down the main themes that have arisen through the conversation.

# Synthesis Report Theme Tables

<i>Theme</i>	<b>Widening Participation</b>
<i>Synthesis Report Section</i>	<b>1. Synodality: Experiences and Understanding</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has it felt to be actively involved in discussions about the future of the Church?</li> <li>• When have you experienced the Church as "less bureaucratic and more relational"?</li> <li>• What about synodality do you feel you understand, and what do you feel you need to learn more about?</li> <li>• Are there aspects of synodality that make you hopeful and things that make you anxious?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we help more people participate in discussions and planning how we can become a more synodal Church? What are the obstacles, and how can we overcome them?</li> <li>• How can clergy be better involved in our synodal discussions and planning?</li> <li>• How can we involve people from other generations in our listening, especially the young?</li> </ul>

<i>Theme</i>	<b>Deepening Accompaniment and the practice of Conversation in the Spirit</b>
<i>Synthesis Report Section</i>	<b>2. Gathered and Sent by the Trinity</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has the synod journey so far helped people hear each other's joys and concerns?</li> <li>• What has been fruitful about the spiritual conversations you've been a part of?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What other contexts in your community could the conversation in the Spirit method be utilised?</li> <li>• How could we harness the riches of lectio divina in our parish meetings and gatherings?</li> </ul>

<i>Theme</i>	<b>Christian Initiation</b>
<i>Synthesis Report Section</i>	<b>3. Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways does your community celebrate and prepare for the sacraments of initiation that embody elements of synodality and walking together?</li> <li>• In what ways has your parish been enriched by those who have been received into the Church? Could this be more effective?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the celebration of the Eucharist form a 'fundamental school of discipleship' in our community? What might be one next step in achieving this?</li> <li>• In what ways can we widen community prayer beyond the celebration of Mass?</li> </ul>

<i>Theme</i>	<b>The option for the Poor</b>
<i>Synthesis Report Section</i>	<b>4. People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Church's Journey</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you had an experience of walking together with the spiritually or materially poor?</li> <li>• Who do you know who is involved in building the common good, or who is inspired by the Church's social teaching?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we better share and embody the social doctrine of the Church?</li> <li>• How can we bring the voices of the marginalised to the heart of our parish planning processes?</li> <li>• In what ways can our parish better respond to the climate emergency?</li> </ul>

<i>Theme</i>	<b>Those on the margins of our community</b>
<i>Synthesis Report Section</i>	<b>5. A Church "out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation"</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have you felt welcomed by the Church?</li> <li>• When have you not felt welcomed by the Church?</li> <li>• How have different cultures enriched your local parish community?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are our neighbours? What are the joys and sorrows of our local community? What do we as a Catholic community have to offer?</li> <li>• If your local parish is affected by polarisation in relation to theology or politics, how can reconciliation begin?</li> <li>• How can our parish be more attentive to the call for racial justice in our Church and wider society?</li> </ul>

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Ecumenism</b>
<b>Synthesis Report Section</b>	<b>7. On the Road Towards Christian Unity</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where in your life have you talked about your faith or taken action with Christians from other traditions?</li> <li>• Do you have friends, colleagues or family members from other Christian traditions? What do you value about their different traditions?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How could our parish community build stronger relationships with our Christian neighbours on the anniversary of the Council of Nicea in 2025?</li> <li>• In what ways could we hear the reflections of our Christian neighbours on our synodal journey?</li> </ul>

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Evangelisation</b>
<b>Synthesis Report Section</b>	<b>8. Church in Mission</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you've ever been involved in sacramental initiation programmes, what blessings and joys have you experienced through this ministry?</li> <li>• What have been your joys of Christian family life?</li> <li>• Have there been any sorrows or challenges in your own family's vocation?</li> <li>• When have you experienced the church as 'mission', or the church as embodying a joyful missionary spirit?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What practical steps could you take to make your sacramental programmes more focussed on mission?</li> <li>• How do we accompany all the people in our community through the joys and sorrows of life?</li> <li>• How could we better draw on the creativity of the young, the apostolic capacities of those with disabilities and other gifts of the people of God in our evangelistic efforts?</li> <li>• How do the voices of the marginalised get heard in our decision-making structures? Whose voices are never heard?</li> </ul>

<i>Theme</i>	<b>Women</b>
<i>Synthesis Report Section</i>	<b>9. Women in the Life and Mission of the Church</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What ways do women contribute to the life of your community?</li> <li>• Have you experienced clericalism or 'a chauvinist' mentality in the Church?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can our parish extend this work of listening and accompaniment to women who are marginalised in our community?</li> <li>• Are women sufficiently involved in decision making processes in your parish? If not, how could this be improved?</li> </ul>

<i>Theme</i>	<b>Formation</b>
<i>Synthesis Report Section</i>	<b>14. A synodal approach to formation</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who has been an important model in your life for your own Christian formation?</li> <li>• What experiences have helped me deepen my encounter with Jesus Christ?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can our parish formation efforts be more synodal?</li> <li>• What aspects of formation need more attention in our community, and what can we do to respond?</li> </ul>

<i>Theme</i>	<b>Discerning and controversial topics</b>
<i>Synthesis Report Section</i>	<b>15. Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways has the conversation in the spirit process helped you better understand other's perspectives on controversial topics?</li> <li>• When have you felt listened to in the Church, when the uniqueness of your personal story and situation has been appreciated?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can our parish enable shared discernment about controversial doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues?</li> <li>• In what ways can our parish pastoral practice better embody love and truth?</li> </ul>

<i>Theme</i>	<b>A Listening Church</b>
<i>Synthesis Report Section</i>	<b>16. Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has the spiritual conversation method helped you to adopt the same attitude Jesus has towards the people he encounters in the Gospels?</li> <li>• Are there times when you have felt hurt by, marginalised or excluded from the Church?</li> <li>• What experiences of visiting the sick, elderly or isolated have you had experience of?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can our Church be a home where all are listened to?</li> <li>• How can our parish connect with those who accompany the poorest, refugees and migrants in a more integral way?</li> <li>• What would a 'ministry of listening and accompaniment' look like in our parish?</li> </ul>

<i>Theme</i>	<b>Digital Mission</b>
<i>Synthesis Report Section</i>	<b>17. Mission in the Digital Environment</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you had an experience of mission in the digital environment?</li> <li>• Do you see the digital environment as a dangerous threat or an exciting possibility for the Church?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can our parish better engage in the digital environment?</li> <li>• What is our parish's 'digital footprint', that is, how it presents itself in the digital environment?</li> </ul>

<i>Theme</i>	<b>Church Structures</b>
<i>Synthesis Report Section</i>	<b>18. Structures for participation</b>
<i>Possible questions: reflecting on personal experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have parish structures you have been a part of been oriented towards mission?</li> <li>• When have I felt that I cannot participate in the councils or other structures in my parish?</li> </ul>
<i>Possible questions: next steps and recommendations questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does co-responsibility underly the structures of our parish and deanery?</li> <li>• How can we ensure prayer and sharing the Word is at the heart of all of our parish meetings?</li> </ul>

# Resource Context

Following the local and continental phases of the Synod on Synodality the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops took place in Rome in October 2023 and produced a 42 page document which synthesised the month long discussions called the Synthesis Report.

This Synthesis Report was produced over the last week of the October Assembly for a voting process to take place before the close of the Assembly. We know from the votes of the participants (all of which overwhelmingly passed) that the Synthesis Report is an accurate representation of the content of discussions and themes covered. Unlike other documents such as the working document for the continental stage, less thought was able to go into how this document would be read and used by the whole Church as part of the larger process.

In December 2023 guidance was published in the document 'Towards October 2024' for how the process will progress in the lead-up to the second Synodal Assembly in October 2024. This international document speaks to multiple audiences across many different contexts and cultures and as such doesn't set out a clear process for how parishes can engage.

In light of this, and based on this guidance, this resource has been put together to create a simple resource to help communities engage with the Synthesis Report without the need for all participants to read the whole report and guidance about how to use it.

As has been the case before, there is a short time frame to send in feedback from discussions that happen at a local level. At the time of writing, we're not aware of any English or Welsh diocesan submission deadlines, but the Bishops Conference are expecting Diocesan submissions by the 17th of March. We believe the value of this phase has two distinct parts, the first being any formal contribution to the process. The second, which we think is just as important (if not more), is for the discussions to help your own communities understanding of Synodality and what it will look like to implement in locally.

If it's not possible to arrange meetings in time to feedback formally into the process, we'd still encourage you to meet, reflect and collect your reflections while keeping your local Synod leads up to date with your activities.

## Key Documents

**Synthesis Report:** [synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/bookdocuments/The-synodal-journey-Documents-EN.pdf](https://synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/bookdocuments/The-synodal-journey-Documents-EN.pdf)

**Letter to the People of God:** [synod.va/en/news/letter-of-the-xvi-ordinary-general-assembly-of-the-synod-of-bishops-to-the-people-of-god.html](https://synod.va/en/news/letter-of-the-xvi-ordinary-general-assembly-of-the-synod-of-bishops-to-the-people-of-god.html)

**Towards October 2024:** [synod.va/en/news/how-to-be-a-synodal-church-in-mission.html](https://synod.va/en/news/how-to-be-a-synodal-church-in-mission.html)

**Worksheet:** [synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2023-12-12\\_towards-2024/ENG-Worksheet.pdf](https://synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2023-12-12_towards-2024/ENG-Worksheet.pdf)

