



Diocese of Richmond Facilitator's Guide



Table of Contents

- I. General Introduction
- II. Journeying Together, Listening, and Celebrating
- III. Communication and Dialogue
- IV. Called to Mission
- V. Practical Aspects of Local Consultations
 - a. Prayer
 - b. Preparation
 - c. Consultations
 - d. Submitting Feedback
 - e. Proposed Timeline

Diocese of Richmond
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission
Facilitator's Guide

General Introduction:

In the [October 18, 2021 edition of the *Catholic Virginian*](#), Bishop Knestout introduced the Synod to the people of the Diocese. He explains: “‘Synod’ is a Greek word that literally means ‘on the same path’ so the Holy Father has asked the whole Church to ‘journey together’ on the same path in communion with one another. In communion, we join with one another to listen to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and prayerfully discern God’s will for us. Our mission, as a faith community, is to act upon what we’ve heard. Contrary to the emphasis our culture places upon quantifiable outcomes in measuring success, synodality is an ongoing process expressed in our willingness to journey together. The 2023 World Synod of Bishops will not be an end, i.e., an outcome, for the process. Rather, it will mark a continuation, as we continue journeying together as a Church.”

Every Diocese has been asked to participate in this unique process with a particular focus on the local level, specifically parishes and local communities. Within the Diocese of Richmond, Bishop Knestout is asking parishes to begin a consultative process with their advisory bodies (ex. Parish Councils and Finance Councils) and the diverse people of the parish communities. In a particular way these moments of dialogue should not just be with the same people whose voices are always heard, but rather an opportunity to provide newcomers and the marginalized a chance to be heard. Bishop Knestout wrote: “Our world, and sometimes even the Church, can seem divided along cultural, political and economic lines. We experience division from one another because of our own selfishness and sinfulness. As a counter to this experience, synodality leads us to listening, speaking, accepting co-responsibility for participation in the process, discerning and deciding.” The results of the conversation are not what matter most, but rather that the faithful of the Diocese have been able to enter into these unitive moments of discussion with each other.

Before local communities and individuals enter into the synodal process it is important to identify what synodality is *not*. While it is a time for one’s voice to be heard, it is not an opportunity to push one’s personal agenda. It is not a democratic process where the majority rules or a corporate strategic process. Finally, as has been stated before, it is not a process for only those people who are already involved. It would be easy to adopt one of these mindsets or about the process and come in with an idea of how the discussion might develop. However, by setting aside our own desires, and instead focusing on the movement of the Holy Spirit synodal discussions can play a more fruitful role in the life of our Church.

The synod’s three themes of Communion, Participation, and Mission echo throughout the preparatory documents provided by the Vatican. In the third section of the *Preparatory Document*, we are presented with examples from Scripture that help support the Synodal process and in particular the work that must be done on the local level. One example given (PD 17-21) expounds upon a common image in Scripture, that of the “community scene”. In these scenes Jesus, accompanied by the Apostles, interacts with large crowds, revealing to them the Kingdom of God. The common scene shows how the Church can evangelize, inspired and led by Christ, through the guidance of the Apostles, focusing on the crowd. It explains: “Even in the diversity of the Lord’s calls, their receptive response, the common trait is that faith always emerges as a valuing of people: their plea is heard, their difficulty is helped, their availability is appreciated, their dignity is confirmed by God’s gaze and restored to the community’s recognition.” (PD, 17). This statement should guide our consultative processes; gathering together we are led by the Holy Spirit to participate in dialogue and conversation that will help the Church to truly live out her

Diocese of Richmond
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission
Facilitator's Guide

salvific mission. These conversations and listening sessions allow people to voice their experiences, interact with each other, and feel recognized by the Church and the community.

Through all of this we seek to answer the 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?” (PD, 26).

We are provided with ten guiding themes for this endeavor, with each theme providing a multitude of further questions. The Vatican encourages each Diocese to provide a structure to these conversations so that the information gathered can be easily synthesized. To better streamline this process the ten themes have been grouped together according to natural connections and questions have been distilled to address the unique reality of the Diocese of Richmond. When we enter into the discussions, centered on the provided themes, we constantly look to answering the fundamental question.

For the Facilitators and Parish Leaders we provide the following information to help you with the consultative process. Each grouping provides an introduction, the original themes from Preparatory Document number 30, and the streamlined questions we encourage you to use in your parish discussions.

Journeying Together, Listening, and Celebrating (Themes 1, 2, & 4)

Introduction:

This first grouping examines the idea of Communion in a particular way. The themes draw us into discussion on what it means to journey together, listen to each other, and celebrate together. We're prompted to examine who is on the margins and who feels that they have the opportunity to speak and to be heard. The celebration of Mass is turned to as a communal experience and we are led to discuss the experience in our individual communities. The consultative discussions might go in several ways but the idea of Communion should unite the differing threads of dialogue.

Synodal Themes:

I. THE JOURNEYING COMPANIONS

In the Church and in society, we are side by side on the same road. In your local Church, who are the ones "journeying together"? When we say: "our Church," who is part of it? Who is asking us to journey together? Who are the road companions, including those outside the ecclesial perimeter? What persons or groups are left on the margins, expressly or in fact?

II. LISTENING

Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices. To whom does our particular Church "need to listen to"? How are the Laity, especially young people and women, listened to? How do we integrate the contribution of Consecrated Men and Women? What space is there for the voice of minorities, the discarded, and the excluded? Do we identify prejudices and stereotypes that hinder our listening? How do we listen to the social and cultural context in which we live?

IV. CELEBRATING

"Journeying 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 celebration inspire and direct our "journeying together"? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the Faithful in the liturgy and the exercise of the sanctifying function? What space is given to the exercise of the ministries of the reader and acolyte?

Questions:

How would you characterize your Church community-the people who are journeying together? What persons or groups are left on the margins? How is your parish inviting those on the margins into relationship?

(Consider different demographics, levels of involvement and levels of satisfaction. Also consider methods of outreach and evangelization and the effectiveness of those methods.)

Who does our Church currently listen to? Who is not being listened to? Which groups are less likely to be listened to? Who is being left out of the conversation? (Consider age, social status, race/ethnicity, gender, etc. in your discussion.)

Do our liturgies promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy and encourage them to live lives of faith? Does the homily draw from the Word of God and

Diocese of Richmond
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission
Facilitator's Guide

inspire the faithful? (Who are the people attending and actively participating in Mass? Is the music calling the faithful to deeper prayer in the Mass?)

Communication and Dialogue (Themes 3, 6, & 7)

Introduction:

For a synodal process that is focused on participatory opportunities for discussion and dialogue this grouping will look into how we accomplish these ideas on a regular basis. We are encouraged to be rooted in the Holy Spirit and guided by courage and a boldness to speak out to those we encounter, whether in the pews or distant from their faith. The Church and society find themselves facing division and conflict on a regular basis. Our ability to share about ourselves and enter into dialogue with others will help to determine how effective we are at spreading the Gospel message. Conversations about these themes could touch on many of these ideas but might also turn to the multitude of ways communication takes place and the differentiation that must occur to reach different demographics.

Synodal Themes:

III. SPEAKING OUT

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, integrating freedom, truth, and charity. How do we promote a free and authentic style of communication within the community and its organizations, without duplicity and opportunism? And in relation to the society of which we are a part? When and how do we manage to say what is important to us? How does the relationship with the media system (not only Catholic media) work? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

VI. DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Dialogue is a path of perseverance that also includes silences and sufferings, but which is capable of gathering the experience of persons and peoples. What are the places and modes of dialogue within our particular Church? How are divergences of vision, the conflicts, the difficulties addressed? How do we promote collaboration with neighboring Dioceses, with and among religious communities in the area, with and among lay associations and movements, etc.? What experiences of dialogue and shared commitment do we have with believers of other religions and with non-believers? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the world of politics, economics, culture, civil society, the poor...?

VII. WITH THE OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one Baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relations do we have with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations? What areas do they concern? What fruits have we drawn from this "journeying together"? What are the difficulties?

Questions:

Under what circumstances and in what ways are Catholics communicating in the world today? How does the prevalence of digital and social media affect communication?

(Consider communication at home, at work or online, the ability to have civil conversations while in disagreement, the interaction between clergy and laity, and communication between parish and parishioners.)

Diocese of Richmond
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission
Facilitator's Guide

How is the Church dialoguing, collaborating, and resolving conflicts among its own members in the Church? (Consider this question on different levels: within your parish, locally, within your deanery, between dioceses, between different ecclesial movements, or globally.)

How is the Church dialoguing, collaborating, and resolving conflicts with members of other Christian denominations, people of other non-Christian religious traditions, and people with no religious affiliation? What have been the fruits of doing so, and what have been the difficulties? (Do you see your community working together with other churches in your area? Is it a member of an ecumenical association or ministry? Are there interfaith service or charitable works being accomplished? Is your community meaningfully interacting with the those that identify as having no connection with religion?)

What areas and issues in the wider society is the Church focused on? Are there areas or issues we need to pay more attention to? (Consider politics, economics, culture, outreach, etc.)

Called to Mission (Themes 5 & 8-10)

Introduction:

The third grouping utilizes the remaining two aspects of the Synod's theme: Participation and Mission. All members of the Church are called to participate in the Church's salvific mission, but we must face the reality that many people feel unprepared and ill equipped to live a life of public witness or to serve the Church in leadership roles. The parish plays an important role in forming the faithful for lives of mission and service and to encourage people to utilize their different God given talents to answer God's unique call for them. Those who choose to lead also express an authority in their areas of responsibilities and guide their community through discernment and decision-making processes. These series of questions should facilitate conversation about how members of the community living out their baptismal call, how the parish forms them in this, and what authority looks like within the parish.

Synodal Themes:

V. CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION

Synodality is at the service of the Church's mission, in which all her members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is each Baptized person called to be a protagonist in the mission? How does the community support its members committed to service in society (social and political commitment, in scientific research and teaching, in the promotion of social justice, in the protection of human rights, and in caring for the Common home, etc.)? How do you help them to live out these commitments in a logic of mission? How is discernment about mission-related choices made, and who participates in it? How are the different traditions that constitute the patrimony of many Churches, especially the Oriental ones, integrated and adapted, with respect to the synodal style, in view of an effective Christian witness? How does collaboration work in territories where different sui iuris Churches are present?

VIII. AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How do we identify the goals to be pursued, the way to achieve them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority exercised within our particular Church? What are the practices of teamwork and co-responsibility? How are lay ministries and the assumption of responsibility by the Faithful promoted? How do synodal bodies function at the level of the particular Church? Are they a fruitful experience?

IX. DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit. By what procedures and methods do we discern together and make decisions? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchically structured communities? How do we articulate the consultative phase with the deliberative one, the process of decision-making with the moment of decision-taking? How and with what tools do we promote transparency and accountability?

X. FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

The spirituality of journeying together is called to become an educational principle for the formation of the human person and of the Christian, of the families, and of the communities. How do we form people,

Diocese of Richmond
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission
Facilitator's Guide

especially those who hold roles of responsibility within the Christian community, to make them more capable of “journeying together,” listening to one another and engaging in dialogue? What formation do we offer for discernment and the exercise of authority? What tools help us to read the dynamics of the culture in which we are immersed and their impact on our style of Church?

Questions:

How is the parish equipping and empowering people to go out and be on mission for Jesus Christ in their regular lives? What obstacles do the faithful face in living and professing their faith publicly? What opportunities is the parish providing to help the faithful face those obstacles? What is still needed?

(Do the faithful have opportunities to learn how to pray, learn how to discern, and learn how to live as a Christian witness?)

How are lay leaders given responsibility and to what extent do they have the authority to make decisions? (How are consultative groups used? Do lay leaders have the ability to make smaller decisions as well as either making or being part of the discussion for big picture, long-term decisions?)

What opportunities does your parish or community offer to raise people up into leadership positions? How are those in leadership roles formed to make them more capable of journeying together? How do you offer opportunities for those in leadership to listen and engage in dialogue with those they are journeying with?

(Consider formation and leadership opportunities as well as town halls and open forums.)

How are decisions made for the parish or community? (Is there a time of discernment and collaboration and who has authority to make the decisions? Who is engaged in the process? How are those not in leadership positions able to participate?)

Practical Aspects of Local Level Consultations

The ways in which parishes approach local level consultations can be as varied as there are numbers of parishes. The processes that will guide the parish in this undertaking are up to the discretion of the pastor and the leaders that he appoints. In this section, basic recommendations are made as to how to utilize the discussion questions. If the parish is looking for an in-depth outline for the Consultation process, please refer to Leadership Roundtable's resource, found [here](#), for one example.

Prayer:

The *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality* states that the entire process that we are partaking in needs to be centered on prayer. When possible, consultations should include opportunities to attend Mass, and meetings should include time for prayer individually and as a group. The parish or community is encouraged to pray through the various steps including invitations, Consultations, and when reporting feedback. Consider using the Synodal Prayer when working on the different steps of the Synod. It can be found [here](#) in several languages.

Participants in the Consultation sessions should be guided in how to pray before, during and after their sessions.

Preparation:

The parish will need to prepare for Consultations in two ways: 1) as an institution, and 2) preparing individual participants.

When preparing as a parish for the Consultation process, it is important to take appropriate steps to make sure that this process is as successful as possible. Areas to consider are:

- a. *Establishing a Point Person:*
An initial step in the local process is the identification of a point person or leadership team to help plan and coordinate the process on a parish level. This could be a staff member, but it might be advantageous to have a volunteer, the leader of the parish evangelization team, or a hired consultant guide the process. By doing so, an additional burden would not be placed on the parish staff, and it might allow for greater openness among participants.
- b. *Advertising:*
The parish should utilize all of its typical forms of advertising (parish website, social media, bulletins, email newsletters, etc.) to inform the parish of the many steps and details of the synodal process and to invite those who are interested in joining. These types of communications can tell people how to participate, when the Consultations are happening, and as a reminder to pray. The synod's logo is easily available [here](#). The idea of the synod could also be introduced through Sunday homilies so that many of the faithful can hear from the pastor about the process.
- c. *Scheduling Consultations:*
Each parish will need to conduct several types of Consultations and will need to take into consideration the different demographics that they are working with when it comes time to schedule those meetings. While consultations for the Parish Council, Finance Council and any for staff members will be easier to schedule, a particular focus needs to be paid to scheduling consultations for parishioners at a conducive time for them. Thought should be put into what

Diocese of Richmond
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission
Facilitator's Guide

day and time work for people, if refreshments or meals will be offered, and if childcare will be provided.

d. *Identifying Facilitators and Note Takers:*

During parish Consultations, you will need small group facilitators to lead groups. Additionally, you will need to identify people to take notes. In order to prepare your facilitators for this important role, you will want to brief them on the goal of the synod, the need to encourage prayer, silence, and dialogue, and how to handle hard questions or difficult participants.

e. *Personal Invitations:*

In order to reach as many people as possible and to have a diverse group of participants, it will be necessary to personally reach out to people who are less involved. The best way to do this is with a personal invitation so that they feel their presence is valued and needed. Pope Francis challenges us to reach out to the margins, and to do so we need to go out of our comfort zone to invite people in.

When preparing participants for the Consultations, they need to be given materials beforehand and prepared for what to expect. Remind them of what the mission of the Church is and what the goal of these conversations are. Parishioners, as well as staff members and facilitators, should be reminded that many of the influential movements in the Church have been unlooked for but come out of intentional prayer and discernment. The Consultations are not about a particular personal agenda or about presenting perfect feedback to the Diocese. It is a time to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, who continues to move and work in the lives of the faithful and in the work of the Church. Participants will be examining how the Church is living out its call to spread the Good News to the world. By providing Scripture passages to participants it will help them to reflect on the mission of the Church. Some passages for reflection could include: the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20), Communal Life in the Church (Acts 2:42-47), the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10), the Blessing of the Children (Matthew 19:13-15), or the Story of the Rich Young Man (Matthew 19:16-30).

Consultations:

The actual structure for Consultations will differ from location to location and will depend on the people that are participating in the process. As previously mentioned, [Leadership Roundtable](#) has a very thorough structure that could be adapted for each parish.

The information found below are some basic recommendations about how to run a Consultation. They can and should be adapted to fit the needs of each local community.

- a. The pastor should begin with a prayer and introduction.
- b. The Lead Facilitator should provide an overview of the process and the goals.
- c. Participants should break into small groups.
 - i. Small groups should be assigned ahead of time
 - ii. They should have plenty of physical space for their group
 - iii. It might be wise to assign a set of questions/themes to each small group, rather than trying to tackle all the topics. (ex. Group 1 is focusing on the first group of questions focusing on Communion)
 - iv. Participants need to introduce themselves to each other within the small group.
- d. Participants should have received a list of questions prior to the Consultation. Ideally, they would have prayed with those questions and discerned how the Holy Spirit is moving in the

Diocese of Richmond
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission
Facilitator's Guide

parish. Now that they have specific questions that they have been assigned, a short amount of time (5 minutes) should be given to prayerfully reflect on what they are being called to discuss as a small group.

- e. Small Group Facilitators should lead their groups in individual sharing.
 - i. Consultations are not a spectator activity, and everyone needs to speak up.
 - ii. Each individual should share, openly about what has stood out to them the most regarding the particular questions the small group is addressing.
 - iii. This is not the time for discussion, but rather a chance for everyone to speak and participate.
- f. Participants should enter into silent reflection on what has been said and discernment into what the Holy Spirit is prompting them to discuss as a group.
- g. Small Group Facilitators should guide their small groups into discussion and dialogue over what has been shared and how the Holy Spirit is working in the life of the parish.
 - i. There might be disagreement and that is fine, the facilitator's job is to navigate that disagreement so that people are able to hear each other and enter into dialogue.
 - ii. The facilitator should not let one person or issue dominate the discussion, pulling it always back to the Fundamental Question and their area of discussion.
- h. The Lead Facilitator will call small groups back together for a time of large group sharing.
 - i. This would be a quick opportunity to hear from each group.
 - ii. Similar to the first period of sharing, this is not a time of discussion.
- i. The Pastor or Lead Facilitator will conclude the Consultation with a prayer, give directions if there are follow up questions, and then offer a few words of approval and dismissal.

The total time needed for this process is roughly two hours, although that could fluctuate depending on the circumstances. Two hours might seem like a daunting amount of time for one of these sessions, however each participant would ideally only be participating in one session. If you plan on having multiple sessions then it would be considerate to shorten them.

Submitting Feedback to the Diocese:

At the conclusion of each Consultation, the feedback from that session should be submitted to the point person or the coordinating team. Under the direction of the pastor, the team will synthesize the feedback so that it best reflects what has been shared in the process.

The Diocese is asking that each parish submit their feedback through an online survey. You can find that survey [here](#).

Each parish will only be able to submit information once, so it will be necessary to compile feedback from all Consultations. Additionally, it is not possible to save responses so please have all answers ready prior to starting the report. The questions you will be asked to answer are as follows:

- How many Synod Consultations did your parish or community hold?
- What was the total number of unique participants?
- What feedback do you have to report from the conversations centered on the theme of Communion? (Synodal Themes 1,2, &4) *Word limit 500*
- What feedback do you have to report from the conversations centered on the themes of Discussion and Dialogue? (Synodal Themes 3,6, &7) *Word limit 500*

Diocese of Richmond
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission
Facilitator's Guide

- What feedback do you have to report from the conversations centered on the themes of Participation and Mission? (Synodal Themes 5,8-10) *Word limit 500*
- What were the central idea(s) surrounding your parish/community's discussion of the 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?") *Word limit 500*
- Do you have any final thoughts or feedback that your parish/community would like to share with the Diocese? *Word limit 500*

Proposed Timeline:

While each parish can undertake this process at the pace that best suits their schedule and needs, a proposed timeline could work for many parishes.

- December – January: Parish Planning
- January – March: Consultations
- March 28: Submittal of Feedback and Parish Action Points
- Follow Up: At Deanery Meetings and Priest Council Meeting in Fall