



General Secretariat for the Synod of the Bishops



Resource for Episcopal Conferences

1. The role of the Episcopal Conference in the diocesan phase involves:

- a) Disseminating information to dioceses/ecclesiastical provinces from the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops;
- b) Offer support, coordination, and accompaniment for the diocesan phase;
- c) Collect the diocesan syntheses, and elaborate a national synthesis on the basis of these diocesan syntheses.
- d) Organize a National Synodal Meeting as a synodal experience to discern together on the basis of what has emerged from the dioceses.

2. Objectives of the Episcopal Conference in the Synodal Process

- To designate a National Synodal Team to support the dioceses and episcopal conference in the Synodal Process.
- To promote the Synodal Process and accompany the Dioceses in getting fully engaged in the diocesan phase of the Synod.
- To provide necessary guidance, formation, training, resources and any other assistance to Dioceses in the planning and execution of the diocesan phase of the Synod.
- To plan and provide adequate formation to the Bishops on the purpose, objective, and spirit of this Synod in order to understand what God is calling the People of God to experience in the local Churches.
- To help Bishops in their role of leading the listening process in their Dioceses, to discern how the Holy Spirit is calling the local Church to walk together in the present and future, towards new Synodal paths.
- To collaborate and network with all the various pastoral organizations, institutions, and movements within the country throughout the Synodal Process.
- To plan initiatives, programmes, and events both in person and online, taking into account the local situation and the resources available.
- To draw up a National strategy and plan based on the *Preparatory Document* and *Vademecum*, to promote the widest participation possible and a fruitful synodal experience in dioceses, utilising all means possible, including technology, social media, etc. for an effective synodal journey in the country.
- To highlight the fruits of synodal paths in various dioceses as well as in other countries as a model for others, sharing best practises and recommendations among dioceses and countries.
- To gather and summarize all the diocesan syntheses in order to prepare an overall synthesis to be sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. It is

recommended that the National Synodal Team gather the diocesan syntheses and formulate a draft national synthesis on the basis of what has been experienced in the dioceses, which will then be used as the working document for the National Synodal Meeting of the entire episcopal conference.

- To organize a National Synodal Meeting for the episcopal conference to gather to discern together on the basis of draft national synthesis and the experience of the dioceses in order to produce the final synthesis for the entire episcopal conference. As with the Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meetings, this meeting should take place in a spirit of prayer, communion, and mutual listening to the Holy Spirit. It should also be a time to celebrate what has occurred in the local Churches and entrust the synodal journey to God.

3. The Synodal Meeting of the Episcopal Conference (National Synodal Meeting)

a. Participants of the Synodal Meeting of the Episcopal Conference

- Bishops
- The National Synodal Team
- Lay representatives (men, women, and young people) from various Dioceses
- Leaders of various national commissions and ministries
- Representatives of different ethnic and religious groups
- Experts from fields of theology, philosophy, synodality, sociology and outreach ministries, as is helpful
- Clergy (diocesan priests, religious priests, and deacons)
- Religious sisters and brothers
- Members of associations of the faithful, movements, and religious communities

b. Agenda for the Synodal Meeting of the Episcopal Conference

- To gather together in prayer, grounded in listening to the Word of God and celebrating the Eucharist. To celebrate what has happened across the dioceses and entrust the process to God.
- To reflect on the draft synthesis prepared by the National Synodal Team, on the basis of the diocesan syntheses. This overall synthesis serves as the working document for the National Synodal Meeting.
- To elaborate a final version of the synthesis of the Synod that would represent Synodality in the particular country, best practises, and future goals of the episcopal conference for journeying together with its people and the universal Church on the path of synodality towards deeper communion and wider participation for a more fruitful mission.
- To share the final document with the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops as well as drafting a simplified version that can be communicated to Dioceses and the People of God throughout the territory covered by the episcopal conference.

c. Methodology for the Synodal Meeting of the Episcopal Conference

i. Planning and Preparation

- The National Synodal Team is to accompany, support, and promote entire synodal consultation processes across the territory of the episcopal conference

- The National Synodal Team spearheads the organisation of the National Synodal Meeting to mark the end of the diocesan phase across the episcopal conference
- The National Synodal Team synthesizes all of the diocesan responses into a draft national synthesis of the Synodal Process across the dioceses. This will then be reflected upon at the National Synodal Meeting, where the final version of the synthesis will be elaborated, to be sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. The national syntheses will be assembled by the General Secretariat as the foundation for the first *Instrumentum Laboris*, to be used during the continental phase of the Synod.
- Episcopal conferences are invited to plan their own methodology for the National Synodal Meeting aligning with the *Preparatory Document* and *Vademecum*, adapted to the local context.
- Care must be taken to ensure that the entire Synodal Process is accessible, involving a variety of means, including formal consultation sessions, informal forums, online platforms, digital tools, etc.
- The various departments, commissions, ministries, and institutions that belong to the episcopal conference could be assigned specific roles, for more focused and targeted processes that would also ensure greater participation of people.
- For larger Bishops conferences there could be additional extension meetings at the ecclesiastical province levels that would directly contribute to the National phase of the synodal process.

ii. Liturgical Opening of the Meeting

- Invoking the Holy Spirit to guide the National meeting and its fruits
- Spending time listening to the Word of God
- Giving thanks through Eucharistic celebration
- Two biblical images are proposed by the *Preparatory Document*: Jesus, the crowd, and the apostles; and the encounter of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10)
- Moments of fraternal prayer, adoration, meditation and other spiritual exercises

iii. Meeting Proceedings and Deliberations

- The working document for the National Synodal Meeting is the draft national synthesis prepared by the National Synodal Team on the basis of the diocesan syntheses. However, it can be very helpful to have presentations, witnesses, and testimonials during the National Synodal Meeting from Bishops, clergy, religious, and laity who share their first-hand experience of the diocesan phase.
- The meeting could take place over a single day or multiple days.
- The meeting could be divided into plenary sessions and presentations as well as smaller group discussions, using the draft national synthesis and the synodal experience across dioceses as the foundation. Depending on the length of the meeting, the background of participants, and common national concerns, specific themes could be dedicated for the group discussions.
- Times of silence to be observed at regular intervals or during interventions to allow participants to process the discussions and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

- The aim is listening to one another and to the experience of the dioceses in order to hear what God is saying to all.
- On the basis of what has been experienced together across the dioceses and at the National Synodal Meeting, the final version of the national synthesis is elaborated, to be sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

iv. Liturgical Closing

- In a Eucharistic spirit of thanksgiving and communion entrusting to God the path of synodality of the People of God across the territory of the episcopal conference.

4. Preparing the National Synthesis

The national synthesis conveys the main fruits of the discernment of the whole People of God across all the dioceses covered by the episcopal conference. It is recommended that this be captured in a written document of up to 10 pages. Other materials such as images, videos, stories, artistic expressions, and personal testimonies can be submitted as attachments, insofar as they help to bring out the experience and input of participants.

Like the diocesan syntheses, the national synthesis should reflect the diversity of views and opinions expressed, and pay particular attention to the lived experiences of participants, both positive and negative. The synthesis should be faithful to the people's voices and to whatever emerged from their discernment and dialogue, rather than a series of generalized or doctrinally correct statements. Points of view that are contrary to one another need not be omitted but can be acknowledged and stated as such. Views should not be excluded simply because they were expressed by a small minority of participants. Indeed, sometimes the perspective of what we could call the "minority report" can be a prophetic witness to what God wants to say to the Church.

The content of the synthesis may be organized according to the following questions, which are offered as suggestions. The aim is to aptly convey the diverse fruits, insights, joys, and challenges of the synodal experience and discernment among the people of the diocese:

- In terms of the **process** of the consultation, what were the main steps taken in the dioceses? What were the main questions posed? What was done to engage as many participants as possible and to reach out to the peripheries? Approximately what proportion of people in the dioceses participated in one way or other? Were there any groups of people whose participation was especially noteworthy? Where there specific groups of people who did not participate for any reason?
- What was most significant about the whole **experience** of the consultation? What were the high points and low points, or the consolations and desolations? What dispositions, attitudes, or feelings were notable? What tensions or disagreements emerged from the listening process? What topics or issues gave rise to diverse points of view? Overall, what were the fruits that the Holy Spirit has brought about through this experience?
- Among the **feedback** from the dioceses, what was particularly significant, surprising or unexpected? What new perspectives or new horizons opened up? Which particular

stories or real-life experiences were especially moving and why? Which points of view seem to have strong resonance? Which points of view were mentioned less but are interesting and noteworthy?

- Overall, what has the Holy Spirit inspired the community to see regarding the **current reality** of synodality in the dioceses, including the present lights and shadows? What did participants have to say about areas where the Church is in need of healing and conversion, in its spiritual life, culture, attitudes, structures, pastoral practices, relationships, and missionary outreach?
- In what ways is the Holy Spirit inviting the local Churches to **grow** in synodality? What dreams, desires, and aspirations for the Church were expressed by participants? Based on their feedback, what steps does the diocese feel called to take in becoming more synodal? What are the next steps forward for our diocese on the path of synodality, in communion with the whole Church?
- What cultural image(s) articulate(s) our experience of synodality across our territory?

It is recommended that the synthesis be prepared by a small team of persons rather than a large assembly. They should read all the diocesan syntheses in a spirit of prayer. The synthesis team meetings themselves should be synodal and spiritually discerning, listening to the living voice of the People of God across the territory of the episcopal conference under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As a model of transparency, the members of the synthesis team as well as the process of synthesizing the feedback can be made known to all. It is strongly recommended that the synthesis be made public once it has been drafted, as a touchstone for the journey of the dioceses along the path of synodality.

5. If we cannot gather in person, how to do an e-synodal meeting at the national level?

- Episcopal conferences may also consider the possibility of an organized e-synodal meeting. This meeting could be entirely online or a hybrid of online and in person participation simultaneously.
- It is important that special efforts be made to ensure that this meeting take place in a spirit of prayer, communion, reflecting together on the Word of God, and listening to one another in order to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to all.
- There could be a centralized meeting for the whole episcopal conference (keeping in mind the diversity of cultures, languages, time zones, etc.).
- Alternatively, there could be multiple meetings either coordinated directly by the National Synodal Team or delegated to other ecclesiastical organizations.
- Each of these meetings could be planned as a longer meeting on a single day or shorter durations spread across a few days.
- The National Synodal Team must plan the agenda and dynamics of the e-synodal meeting.

- Participants could be invited to share their thoughts and reflections either during the virtual gathering or prior to the meeting using digital modes of communication such as email, social media, etc.
- Virtual group discussions or thematic sessions could be planned for smaller groups.
- Digital tools and social media could also play a significant role in such a case, where a system of monitored interaction and responses could be facilitated that would engage a vast majority of people. However, we must also bear in mind the limitations of such interactions, as they do not provide the shared experience of such a process. Therefore, we encourage having offline meetings as much as possible.