


Diocese: Synodality Framework and Check List


A Synodal Church	<p>Synodality is a means of more fully expressing the Baptismal theology of Vatican II, based on a pilgrim church of the People of God, on a journey through place and time. It seeks a church that is closer to the people, distinguished by flourishing interpersonal relationships flowing from a mutual love of Jesus. A synodal spirituality flows from the action of the Holy Spirit and requires listening to the Word of God, contemplation, silence and conversion of heart.</p> <p>The Report of the Synod on Synodality is effectively a user manual for a Vatican II church, updated and relevant to the challenges of today and moving to make the church “fit for purpose’ for its mission in the world of the first half of the 21st century. In a synodal church, while journeying together, we gather and participate, by right of Baptism, as equals in ecclesial assemblies, structures and processes. In this way the church gives expression to being a community and a communion joined in faith, calling forth the charisms of its members and the appreciation of local contexts, cultures and diversities.</p>
A Synodal Diocese	<p>A synodal church is built on the relationships of its members, their communities and a culture of humility, deep listening, encounter and inclusion. As the diocese is a fundamental element of the universal church and the context in which more local parish and other groupings of the People of God are associated under the leadership and pastoral care of a bishop, it is at the diocese level that a synodal church engages most intensely with the faith needs of the People of God. In this context the communion in Christ of the baptised is most fully manifested, built on open and trusting relationships.</p> <p>The bishop’s role is to work with the priests, deacons and laity of the diocese to meet the faith needs of the People of God, leading them in sacramental and other faith endeavours. This includes establishing and ensuring the proper functioning of decision making and participatory bodies such as Diocesan Synods and Assemblies, Presbyterial Councils and on-going institutional structures such as Diocesan Pastoral Councils and Diocesan Finance Councils. It is from these agencies that a properly developed Diocesan Plan will emerge from shared decision-making. Such documents will be clearly communicated and able to be understood by all.</p>

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	<p>The Synod report notes that such “participatory bodies represent the most promising areas in which to act for rapid implementation of the synodal guidelines”. (P 103) It states unequivocally that Diocesan Pastoral Councils (DPC), Parish Pastoral Councils and Finance Councils are <i>mandatory</i>. (P 104)</p> <p>The Synod report calls for bishops, priests and deacons to exercise “a more courageous discernment of what properly belongs to the ordained ministry and what can and must be delegated to others”...to “enable each ministry to be exercised in a more spiritually sound and pastorally dynamic manner”. (P74) This approach is seen as an expression of the way to collaborate with other members of the People of God and “rediscover co-responsibility in the exercise of ministry”. In these approaches a bishop is called not just to preside over the community but to be deeply imbedded and actively engaged with his people; a facilitator of the faith yearnings and expressions of all his people; and to think broadly and creatively as to how such needs can best be advanced and achieved.</p>
<p>Diocesan Culture</p>	<p>“Synodality is primarily a spiritual disposition...a spirituality that flows from the action of the Holy Spirit and requires listening to the Word of God, contemplation, silence and conversion of heart”. (P 43) At the heart of a synodal diocese is to be “a network of relationships”, open and trusted between bishop, priests, deacons and lay people, that “promotes a culture of encounter, social justice (and) inclusion”. (P 121) These networks express and are grounded in the shared birthright of baptism, motivated to advance the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and nurturing of the local faith community. A synodal diocese operates on truth, loyalty, clarity, honesty, integrity, consistency, with an absence of obscurity, hypocrisy, ambiguity and ulterior motives. (P 96) It is in such an environment that shared decision making and co-leadership can flourish.</p> <p>Transparency, accountability and evaluation build trust and credibility. (P 97) Decision making is principally a matter for joint community discernment, based on deep listening to all perspectives “in a climate of trust”. (P 80) “Trust must be mutual: Decision makers need to be able to trust and listen to the People of God. And in turn the People need to be able to trust those in authority.” (P80) “The absence of these practices is ...(a)...consequence of clericalism...(and) ...its implicit assumption that those who have</p>

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	<p>authority in the Church are not to be held to account for their actions and decisions” (P98)</p>
<p>Diocesan Structures</p>	<p>Empowered by their baptism into the People of God, the laity share jointly in the administration of the diocese, through accessible and clearly delineated entities such as the Diocese Pastoral Council, Finance Committee and other appropriate mechanisms for shared accountability.</p> <p>The Synod calls for bishops and priests ‘to rediscover co-responsibility in the exercise of ministry’ and exercise ‘a more courageous discernment of what properly belongs to the ordained ministry and what can and must be delegated to others’...</p> <p>Lay people are therefore empowered to participate fully and legitimately in the functioning and reporting of these and other shared leadership and accountability mechanisms (P 74). To be welcoming a diocese must have a culture and praxis of accountability at all levels. (P 99) Each of the synodal steps of prayer, listening deeply and shared ecclesial discernment must be manifested in the functioning of participatory bodies. This extends to structure, membership, clarifying roles, agenda development, co-responsible decision making and the promulgation and explaining of such decisions. (P 103 – 108)</p> <p>The Synod considers Evaluation to be a critical part of synodal governance. Its virtue is not to judge but to assist in “learning from experience, adjusting plans...and remaining attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit”. (P 100) The Synod Report also emphasises the necessity “to draw on the skills of those, especially laypeople, who have greater expertise regarding accountability and evaluation.” (P 101)</p> <p>The Synod recognises the significant changes that truly synodal practices will require and impose on bishops and dioceses and on priests and parishes and lay people. It also notes that clericalism would inhibit progress and the reforms endorsed by the Synod will help to overcome clericalism. (P74). Initiatives will be required in specific areas of formation to enhance skills and capabilities in relevant roles/interactions. (P 93-4) It is critical that rapid progress is made in key areas including priestly formation and “local churches need to find ways to implement these changes”. (P 94)</p>


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**Guidance for Clergy and Lay Catholics:
Responsibilities, Expectations and Rights**


<p>Bishop</p>	<p>The local church, envisaged by the Synod, is one in which the various communities of the People of God are alive with involvement and participation by the bishop, priests and laity. It is the role of the bishop to be not just immersed in this dynamism and engagement, but to be its facilitator and to lead the People to explore horizons in the interests of taking the Gospel to others. The report speaks of the responsibility of the bishop as a leader who animates and nurtures. (P118)</p> <p>As the leader of the diocese a bishop has a critical role in ensuring the governance arrangements for the diocese accord with the Synod’s requirements for active and engaged participation by all in a synodal diocese. This applies particularly in ensuring lay people, especially women, have every opportunity and know that they are welcomed and that their views and perspectives receive genuine consideration.</p> <p>It is also essential that the bishop ensures that participatory bodies in the diocese are constituted and structured so that particular communities, regions and demographic groups are appropriately represented. The Synod also emphasises the importance that decisions made by properly constituted bodies, or by the bishop in collaboration with the community, are clearly explained and the reasons for them are transparent and openly stated.</p> <p>Synodality is not just a matter of re-branding established practices and approaches. The steps to creating a genuinely synodal diocese require significant cultural change for all: bishop, priests and lay people. All must be open to these challenges and approach them in a humble manner, receptive to the Spirit speaking through deep listening to fellow diocesan members and the prayerful discernment that leads to shared decision making and genuine co-leadership. “It also means adopting the practice of ecclesial discernment and culture of ongoing evaluation. These cannot come about unless accompanied by focussed formation processes.” (P141 - 147) Ultimately it is the bishop who is responsible for ensuring appropriate formation is available and effectively applied.</p> <p>The Synod Report refers to the need for “discernment and formation of candidates for ordained ministry be undertaken in a synodal way. (P148) Each bishop has a personal responsibility to ensure that appropriate changes are implemented in relation to his own diocese’s priests and</p>
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	<p>candidates. It is critical that priests working at the parish level feel confident that they have the full range of interpersonal and relationship skills required for full synodality. It is the role of the bishop as pastor to his priests and laypeople to address these needs in a spirit of growing together in the spirit. It is also critical that the bishop himself conscientiously discerns, in concert with his priests and lay people, the areas of his own performance where further formation or enhancement are required and takes steps to address these needs.</p> <p>A key responsibility of the bishop is “implementing the processes of decision-making correctly and resolutely and in a synodal style”. This is to occur as part of the need to achieve “rapid implementation”, without which “the vision of a synodal church will not be credible and this will alienate those members of the People of god who have drawn strength and hope from the synodal journey”. (P 94)</p> <p>It is recognised that there can be major cultural challenges in moving to such operating approaches. It is reasonable and to be expected that there will be a need for development of people/relationship skills, for both priests and lay people. Such opportunities should be embraced to ensure that all are able to function at the required levels of open, honest and committed engagement.</p>
Lay People	<p>As synodality derives from the shared right of all the baptised to participate in the functioning of the church and ways similar to those adopted for the early church, it follows that a clear message for lay people is that they are and should see themselves empowered to participate in the church at all levels, and by conscientiously doing so to share in its co-leadership and shared accountability.</p> <p>In a truly synodal diocese lay people will not have to ask repeatedly to share in the full life of the diocese, rather they will be aware of and able to respond to open and welcoming opportunities for participation. Active participation by lay people and priests will require genuine engagement by all in shared & respectful discernment and decision making. Lay Catholics should look to assist their bishop and priest with manifold tasks that will allow the clergy to focus their time and energies on sacramental and faith leadership roles.</p> <p>In a truly synodal church, clericalism will be seen as the impediment it is to the full blossoming of the spirit and the sharing of the charisms of all. Bishops and priests have particular roles stemming from their ordination, but the contributions of all of the People of God are sought and valued in a truly synodal diocese.</p>

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Tracking Synodality:

How to measure implementation and effectiveness

Answers to the questions below will provide a good picture as to how serious/successfully the implementation of synodality is being approached in your diocese. The answers will provide a template for evaluation processes that are to accompany the implementation of synodality and provide an indication as to where remedial interventions are best focussed.


Topic/Area/Issue		Y/N/Comments
1.	Are appropriate diocese governance entities established with clear statements of roles and functions?	
2.	Are all Catholics in the diocese aware of these governance entities, encouraged to participate and informed of their decisions?	
3.	Does the Bishop clearly state his positive approach to implementing synodal practices and encourage lay participation, particularly by women?	
4.	Is each meeting of participatory bodies conducted with a clear and specific agenda, with all relevant facts shared openly with all, and do members of relevant entities feel they can raise issues for consideration and have them properly addressed?	
5.	Are meetings conducted in the spirit of true discernment with deep respectful listening by all participants, leading to proper reflection and considered decision making?	
6.	Does the Diocesan Pastoral Council, in conjunction with the bishop, have overall responsibility for the direction and operation of the diocese and its related entities?	
7.	Are decisions when taken, and the reasons for them, clearly understood by all in the meeting and then fully explained to the wider diocesan community?	
8.	Are diocesan activities and operations characterised by an environment of truth, loyalty, clarity, honesty, integrity and consistency, with an absence of obscurity, hypocrisy, ambiguity and ulterior motives?	
9.	Are diocesan communications clear, effective and readily accessible for all, including those from differing cultural/language backgrounds?	
10.	Are opportunities for the involvement and participation of women in the diocese maximised in all aspects of diocesan life, including liturgies?	

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Topic/Area/Issue		Y/N/Comments
11.	Are diocesan meetings held at times that maximise the opportunities for participation and engagement?	
12.	Does participation in the liturgy and other activities across the diocese reflect the wider multicultural and minority groups composition of the faith community?	
13.	Is there a general sense within the diocesan community of satisfaction and confidence in the open and shared co-leadership/ co-responsibility and accountability for the functioning of the diocese at all levels?	
14.	Has the diocese put in place appropriate procedures and mechanisms to evaluate strategies, approaches and the performance of specific initiatives or activities?	
15.	Is the approach of the bishop seen as facilitative of a synodal functioning diocese or an impediment to that? In what ways and how might such matters be best addressed by cultural or other skills development?	
16.	Has there been an increased sense of engagement and co-responsibility among lay people in the diocese, resulting from their involvement in a diocese functioning in a synodal manner?	
17.	Does the diocese support adult formation experiences for its members, such as courses?	
18.	Does the diocese have in place an on-going program to enhance the relationship and people management skills of all clergy (Bishop and priests) and diocesan leadership staff?	
19.	Do Eucharist liturgies, celebrated by the bishop across parishes and venues in the diocese, inspire the lay community, and to what extent do the homilies on these occasions nourish and inflame the faith of the people?	
20.	Has the diocese's experience of synodality been based on evidence of 'a more courageous discernment of what properly belongs to the ordained ministry and what can and must be delegated to others'?	

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Topic/Area/Issue		Y/N/Comments
21.	Does the diocese have a culture and praxis of accountability at all levels? Is that manifested by most priests and lay people in the diocese?	
22.	Do there continue to be in the diocese examples and behaviours that manifest clericalism or its attitudes and behaviours? How are such instances responded to and is there evidence of a shared commitment to eradicating clericalism in all cases?	
23.	Are there clear examples where “rapid implementation” of synodal practices has occurred and been bedded down in the diocese? Examples?	
24.	Is there acceptance by the bishop, priests and laity of evaluation as a valuable tool to ensure that diocesan plans and approaches are effective? Is a program of evaluations in place?	
25.	What evaluation mechanisms would lay members of the diocese suggest are appropriate/required to advance diocese synodality?	
26.	Is there an on-going program of formation to assist the bishop, priests and laity to embed a synodal culture into the diocese?	
27.	Has the diocese’s experience of synodality been based on evidence of the rediscovery of “co-responsibility in the exercise of ministry”?	
28.	Are effective initiatives in place to address the formation needs of candidates for ordination to ensure they have the skills necessary to work effectively in a truly synodal diocese?	

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