

**For a Synodal Church:  
Communion, Participation and Mission  
XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops**

DIOCESE OF MOTHERWELL



Leaders' Notes for the Diocesan Phase  
October 2021-April 2022

The purpose of this Leader's booklet is to highlight

- What Synodality is
- The fundamental question the Holy See puts before the People of God
- A suggested methodology and content (*Lectio Divina and Spiritual Conversation*) in which to respond to the question
- Core dimensions of the process

These contents reflect the material given in the *Preparatory Document for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* and the *Vademecum* ([synod.va/content/synod/en.html](https://synod.va/content/synod/en.html)) both of which are necessary reading for group leaders. See also, the Synod Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/synod.va/>

Training, facilitation, and accompaniment will be offered throughout the entire process. Two parish co-ordinators should be appointed and their names sent to [frmagill@rcdom.org.uk](mailto:frmagill@rcdom.org.uk)

Four meetings are suggested. Time is needed to allow the group to gel and build up trust.

Each meeting has two parts. In the first, there is a *Lectio Divina* of a biblical text. The second part is a *Spiritual Conversation* during which each individual is encouraged to share his/her reflections with the group. Discernment then comes through listening, silence and prayer.



## WHAT IS SYNODALITY?

This is the word used by Pope Francis to describe his vision of the church in the 21st century. Primarily, it is not about new structures, plans, or working procedures, but about the Church as a way of living and working (*modus vivendi et operandi*) as Communion. It is about the style and form of the Church

The source, form and scope of synodality is rooted in the communal life of the Trinity. “There is a *singularis conspiratio* between the faithful and their Pastors, which is an icon of the eternal *conspiratio* that is lived within the Trinity.” *International Theological Commission*, 64

Synodality as the style and form of the Church thus refers to the experience of communion, participation and mission by all the faithful in the life and evangelising task of the Church and flows from the Godhead itself. All members of the Church sharing in the one Priesthood of Christ by virtue of their baptism are members of the priestly, prophetic, and royal People of God.

"In all the baptised, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelisation. The People of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo*. This means that it does not err in faith, even when it cannot find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of His mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an *instinct of faith - sensus fidei* - which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively."

*Evangelii Gaudium* 119

For a more lengthy discussion, please see the separate booklet “What is Synodality” which will be sent to you.

## THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION

Throughout the process, the fundamental question should be kept in mind by all:

*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”?*

In response:

a) ask yourselves what experiences in your particular Church the fundamental question calls to mind;

b) reread these experiences in greater depth: What joys did they provoke? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered? What wounds have they brought to light? What insights have they elicited?

c) gather the fruits to share: Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound? What is he asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are opening up for our particular Church?

*Preparatory Document, 26*

These questions form the backdrop of the Lectio Divina and the Spiritual Conversation.



## LECTIO DIVINA



**Introduction:** some themes from the *Vademecum* will be suggested for each session (eg. Companions on the Journey, Listening, Speaking out). Ask the participants to have these in mind as they begin the Lectio.

### Step 1: Lectio

**Read the passage** — The passage is read twice by different people. The first time, just get a feel for the passage. When you read the passage a second time, note the word or phrase to which your attention is being drawn. It is God drawing your attention to this word or phrase. The divine has a special message just for you in this moment.

### Step 2: Meditatio

**Meditate on the word** or phrase that stood out to you. How is God speaking to you through this word or phrase? Is there an invitation? Is there a call? Does a memory surface? What image comes to mind? What feelings are evoked? Take your time and allow God to speak to you in the depths of your soul. Notice that God is speaking to you personally about your life right now.

### Step 3: Oratio

**Respond to God** who has been speaking to you. What is your response? What is your prayer? Allow your own words to come from a place deep within where the Spirit dwells. This is a very important in the process because here the participants will have the opportunity to speak for the first time. See the section, Prayer, page 7.

### Step 4: Contemplatio

**Still yourself** and rest in the loving embrace of your Maker. Words are never sufficient to express all that stirs within. Simply be present to the Sacred One. Savour the silence. Connect with the Presence deep in your soul. When distractions occur, return to your chosen word or phrase and repeat it to re-centre.

After the Lectio, lasting about 30 minutes, there is an opportunity for a break before beginning the second part, the Spiritual Conversation.

## SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

The *Vademecum* for the Synod (*Appendix B, 7-11*) published by the Holy See gives a detailed description of this process. It should flow from the period of *Lectio Divina*, the period of prayer during which certain topics will have emerged.

The Spiritual Conversation method promotes active participation, attentive listening, reflective speaking, and spiritual discernment. Participants form small groups of about 6-7 persons from diverse backgrounds. This method takes about an hour and comprises three rounds.

In the first round, everyone takes equal turns to share the fruit of his or her prayer. There is no discussion in this round and all participants simply listen deeply to each person and attend to how the Holy Spirit is moving within oneself, within the person speaking, and in the group as a whole. This is followed by a time of silence to note one's interior movements.



In the second round, participants share what struck them most in the first round and what moved them during the time of silence. Some dialogue can also occur, and the same spiritual attentiveness is maintained. Once again this is followed by a time of silence.

Finally in the third round participants reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation and what moved them most deeply. New insights and even unresolved questions are also noted. Spontaneous prayers of gratitude can conclude the conversation. **Each small group will have a facilitator and note-taker.**

Once the group dialogue has taken place, participants should review and share about their experience of the process within their small group. How was their experience? What were the ups and downs? What new and refreshing insights might they have discovered? What have they learned about the synodal way of proceeding? How was God present and at work during their time together?

Participants should then decide on the feedback they wish to communicate to the organizing/facilitation team. The guiding questions for the diocesan synthesis as outlined in Part 4 of the *Vademecum* can be used as a basis for this feedback on the local level (see also Appendix D).

All participants can then come together to conclude the gathering. One representative from each small group can briefly share about the experience of the group. The participants should be informed about the next stage of the Synodal Process, so that they know how their input will contribute to the whole Church. It is recommended that the gathering conclude with a prayer or song of thanksgiving.



## THE HOLY SPIRIT

The experience and practice of synodality is first and foremost the experience of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the *primary agent* in this way of being Church. Each meeting/gathering/discussion will be an *epiphany of the Spirit*. An expectation of this experience should be the reason for gathering and acting in a synodal manner. The presence of the Spirit will be confirmed in various ways such as:

- The environment of **Prayer**
- **Communion** — individuals should have a profound sense of belonging to the Body of Christ in which their voices are heard and valued as being led by the Spirit. This is at the same time *Communio* with the Most Holy Trinity
- **Participation** — encouragement should be given to everyone to know that what they have to say is both important and valued
- **Listening** — this is to have an open mind and an open heart with prejudices left to one side. It is openness to the other.
- **Parrhesia/frankness** — everyone is given room and time to express themselves. This opens up the possibility of being surprised by the “unpredictability of grace.” The Spirit awakens creativity in continually new contexts
- **Metanoia/conversion** — a change of mind leading to a change of heart and a change of patterns of behaviour will emerge. The community will step by step have the same mind as was in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2.5) and assume co-responsibility in mission
- **Healing** — the grasp of hurt and pain will become loosened and relationships will begin to be restored and a desire to celebrate together will emerge
- **Harmony** — different voices will register in different keys but this will lead to a common mind and a common purpose (I Cor 1.10) and a recognition that all are companions and participants on the journey
- **Mission** — an eagerness to go out to build up God’s kingdom in the world will emerge
- **The Fruits of the Spirit** — love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control will be evident throughout



## PRAYER

Synodality should be understood as a spirituality rooted in personal, community, and liturgical prayer. Material for four meetings will be given in the participants' booklets where the four steps of *Lectio* are also explained. In this way, our discussions will be embedded within prayer and the outcome will be the result of prayer. This prayerful environment opens up everyone to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Once people get accustomed to this they will expect any parish meeting or discussion to open with an extended period of prayer.

The *Oratio* is the third step in *Lectio Divina*. This is a crucial point in the process where individuals discover their own voice. The basis of the *Oratio* is the first two steps where the group has *listened to* and *invited* the Word of God into its heart. Everyone should be encouraged

- To leave behind fear and embarrassment — their voice is important and valued
- To adapt their prayer to the message they have received from the text
- To use their own words and expressions — commonplace and rote prayers should be avoided
- To speak humbly as a creature, enthusiastically as a disciple
- To express to the Lord and to the group in prayer how the Spirit has moved them, whether in joy, thanksgiving, hurt, confusion, intercession, consolation, desolation etc.
- To understand the bond God is forming with them through the Sacred Word and their response to it.





## DISCERNMENT

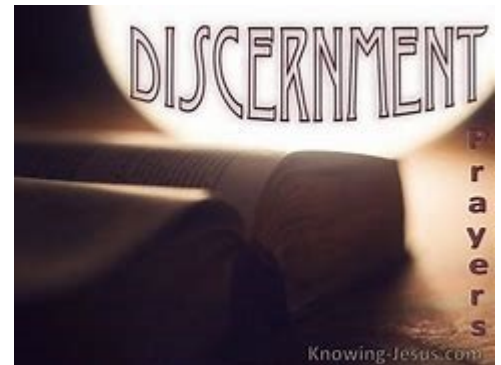
For Pope Francis, discernment is a dying followed by a rising: it is letting go of one's own plans, certainties and agendas, and allowing oneself to be guided into new life by the unpredictable leadings of the Holy Spirit.

Nicholas Austin SJ, reflecting on Pope Francis' teaching, suggests three steps in the discernment process (<https://www.pathwaystogod.org/resources/thinking-faith/francis-discerning-pope>)

### Discernment as a new perspective

I invite you to cultivate an attitude of listening, growing in the freedom of relinquishing one's own point of view (when it is shown to be partial and insufficient), to assume that of God.

We leave behind our own limited point of view, our prejudices even, and look at the situation from God's perspective. We look with the gaze of Christ.



### Discernment as a spiritual sense

As part of his mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith – *sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression.

This is discernment as wisdom, instinct, intuition. As baptised people we experience a consonance or dissonance with the life of the Spirit within us through our attention to our intellect, senses and emotions. It is a different kind of 'knowing'. And this spiritual sense and sensitivity can be cultivated through practice and prayer.

### Discernment as gift

There is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills.

This requires openness, patience and gradualness. It should be characterised by 'merciful love, which is ever ready to understand, forgive, accompany, hope, and above all integrate.' The patience needed here is not an empty waiting for something to turn up but rather a radical reliance on God's action. This deep act of trust is what carries us through times of uncertainty and lack of clarity.

This process of discernment should characterise the entire meeting but should be most evident in the second part, the Spiritual Conversation.

## CONVERSION

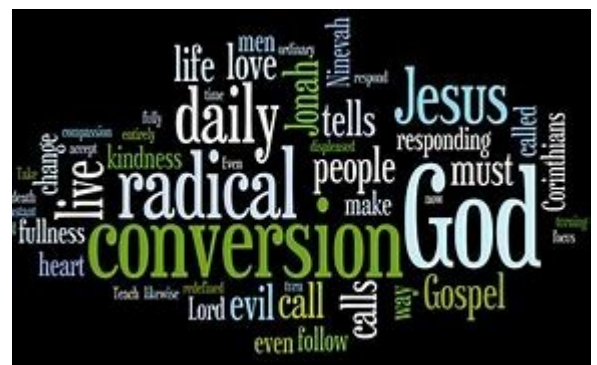
St Mark introduces the concept of conversion at the very beginning of his gospel in 1.15. He links *metanoia* with the Kairos, Kingdom, faith/trust and the Gospel. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; convert, and believe in the good news.”

### ***METANOIITE***

- The primary import of the word is not ethical, focussing on the individual’s guilt/shame/sin.
- The command is in the plural, pointing to a community rather than individual dimension.
- At its core is the requirement of a change of mind. Paul puts it more positively when he urges Christians to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2.5).
- The Hebrew/OT word most closely associated with it is *shub* – to turn/turn round/return. This implies that our starting point is in God and that the life of faith is a continual returning to God.

### ***METANOIA*** and

- ***Kairos***. Kairos is the “now” the Holy Spirit gives us. If that is all we have, it is also God’s gift. The command *metanoiite* is in the continuous present – “keep on converting/returning/changing. Disruption and change are part and parcel of the Christian life. There never has been an unchanging Church, *semper idem*.
- **The Kingdom**: Many of the Lord’s parables, especially in Matthew, are descriptions of the Kingdom and portray growth, change, hiddenness, gratuitousness, surprise, newness, openness. The story of the Prodigal Son in Luke is about a literal return journey.
- **Faith/Trust/Belief**: This is the assurance that the work of *metanoia* is first and foremost the work of the Holy Spirit. It does not in the final analysis depend on human endeavour. Ecclesial *metanoia*, then, is not primarily about new structures and programmes but is rooted in a change of heart. (see Ezekiel 36.26)
- **The Gospel**: The Gospel is not primarily a written record but “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.” (Romans 1.16) Again, the experience of *metanoia* comes as a free gift of grace from God. This divine power is guaranteed to the community of the Church.



Conversion has, of course, a personal dimension, repentance of one’s sins. In these discussions, however, we are focussing on *communal* conversion — how we as Church must turn to a new style and way of being Church through communion, participation and mission.