



Together in Mission: The Synod and Our Parish Life

(An Invitation to Encounter and Renewal)

The XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops initiated by Pope Francis in 2021, reminds us that “every new step in the life of the Church is a return to the source”¹—a renewed encounter with the Risen Christ, who calls us to unity, renewal, and mission. The Synod has been a profound journey of listening, dialogue, and discernment. Grounded in the rich tradition of the Church and inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Synod has brought together voices from across the world to reflect on how we, as the People of God, can walk together in faith, deepen our communal bonds, and respond to the needs of our time.

St. Margaret Mary was part of this Synodal process in 2022 and in 2023 hosted a series of parish listening sessions, where members of our community gathered to share experiences, hopes, and challenges. The recently released Synod Final Document is a testament to this shared journey. It highlights the joys and challenges facing the Church today—acknowledging the wounds of our world while calling us to greater communion, participation, and mission. The document offers guidance on key areas and reminds us that our baptism calls each of us to be active participants in the life of the Church, to listen with open hearts, and to embrace a spirit of co-responsibility in building a faith-filled, welcoming community.²

Importantly, the document shares “the synodal process does not conclude with the end of the current Assembly of the Synod of Bishops but also includes the implementation phase.” The work of Synod continues beyond the global gathering, calling local churches to integrate a “synodal methodology of consultation and discernment.” Parishes are encouraged to “identify concrete ways and formation pathways to bring about a tangible synodal conversion.”³ This means that our engagement with the Synod is not merely reflective, but must also be transformative, responding to the authoritative teaching of the Church, shaping the way we live and minister together.

As a parish, Pope Francis invites us to engage with the fruits of this Synodal process and explore how they connect to our ministries, relationships, and mission⁴. To help support this reflection, this guide has been created from the Synod Final Document to help connect its insights to the work of our parish and ministries.

The complete *Final Document* can be found at:

https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf

¹ *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission Final Document* Pope Francis & XVI Ordinary General Assembly Of The Synod Of Bishops (October 2024). #1

² Ibid #4

³ Ibid #9

⁴ Ibid, Accompanying note by the Holy Father Francis, p. 5-6.

Key *Final Document* Paragraphs

The following three pages include paragraphs from the *Final Document* that affect parish life in a broad sense across all ministries. Additional pages with content focused on specific areas of ministry are also provided for individual parish staff.

The Synod stressed the importance of the unique contributions of a diverse range of ministries that give life to the Church as we journey together.

42. “The synodal Church can be described using the image of the orchestra: the variety of instruments is necessary to give life to the beauty and harmony of music, within which the voice of each one retains its own distinctive features at the service of the common mission. Thus, is manifested the harmony that the Spirit brings about in the Church, the One who is harmony in person (cf. St. Basil, On Psalm 29:1; On the Holy Spirit, XVI: 38).”

1. Every new step in the life of the Church is **a return to the source**. It is a renewed experience of the disciples’ encounter with the Risen One in the Upper Room on Easter evening. Like them, during this synodal Assembly, we, too, felt enfolded in His mercy and drawn to His beauty. We felt His presence in our midst as we lived conversation in the Spirit and listened to one another: the presence of He, who, in bestowing the Holy Spirit, continues to build among His people a unity that establishes harmony amidst differences.

28. ... Synodality is the walking together of Christians with Christ and towards God’s Kingdom, in union with all humanity. Orientated towards mission, synodality involves gathering at all levels of the Church for **mutual listening, dialogue, and community discernment**. It also involves reaching consensus as an expression of Christ rendering Himself present, He who is alive in the Spirit. Furthermore, it consists in reaching decisions according to differentiated co-responsibilities. ...

32. **Synodality is not an end in itself**. Rather, it serves the mission that Christ entrusted to the Church in the Spirit. To evangelise is “the essential mission of the Church. It is [...] the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity” (EN 14). By **being close to all without distinction of persons**, preaching and teaching, baptising, and celebrating the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, all the local Churches and the whole Church respond concretely to the Lord’s command to proclaim the Gospel to all nations (cf. Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-16). ...

36. ...A desire emerged to **expand possibilities for participation and for the exercise of differentiated co-responsibility** by all the Baptised, men and women. In this regard, however, the lack of participation by so many members of the People of God in this journey of ecclesial renewal was a source of sadness. There was also a sense of sadness expressed at the widespread difficulty within the Church in living flourishing relationships fully between men and women, between different generations and between individuals and groups with diverse cultural identities and social conditions. Of particular concern in this regard must be those people made poor and those who are excluded.

44. The renewal of the Christian community is possible only by recognising the **primacy of grace**. If spiritual depth at both personal and communal levels is lacking, synodality is reduced to organisational expediency.

51. We should, therefore, look to the Gospels to outline for us the journey of conversion we are required to undertake, learning little by little **to make Jesus' practices our own**. The Gospels present to us a Lord who is often “in the act of listening to the people who come to Him along the roads of the Holy Land” (DCS 11). Jesus never sent anyone away without stopping to listen and to speak to them, whether men or women, Jews or pagans, doctors of the law or publicans, righteous men and women or sinners, beggars, the blind, lepers or the sick. By meeting people wherever their history and personal freedom had led them, He revealed to them the face of the Father. By listening to the needs and to the faith of those He met, and by responding through words and gestures, He renewed their lives, opening the path to healed relationships. Jesus is the Messiah who “even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak” (Mk 7:37). He asks us, His disciples, to do the same and, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, gives us the capacity to do it conforming our hearts to His: only “the heart makes all authentic bonding possible, since a relationship not shaped by the heart is incapable of overcoming the fragmentation caused by individualism” (DN 17). **When we listen to our sisters and brothers, we are participants in the way that God in Jesus Christ comes to meet each of us.**

60. By virtue of Baptism, women and men have equal dignity as members of the People of God. However, **women continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, vocation and place** in all the various areas of the Church's life. This is to the detriment of serving the Church's shared mission. ...There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped. Additionally, the question of women's access to diaconal ministry remains open. This discernment needs to continue. The Assembly also asks that more attention be given to the language and images used in preaching, teaching, catechesis, and the drafting of official Church documents, giving more space to the contributions of female saints, theologians and mystics.

66. Mission involves all the Baptised. The first task of lay women and men is **to permeate and transform earthly realities** with the spirit of the Gospel...

80. Decision-making processes need ecclesial discernment, which requires listening in a climate of trust that is supported by **transparency and accountability**. Trust must be mutual: decision-makers need to be able to trust and listen to the People of God. The latter, in turn, needs to be able to trust those in authority. This integral vision highlights that each of these practices depends on and supports the others, thus serving the Church's ability to fulfil its mission.

110. Thus, synodal conversion calls each person to **enlarge the space of their heart**, the heart being the first place where all our relationships resonate, grounded in each believer's personal relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church. This is the starting point and the condition of any synodal reform of the bonds of our communion and the spaces where we are Church. Pastoral action cannot be limited to tending to relationships between people who already feel attuned to one another but rather encourage the encounter between all men and women.

117. **The parish is one of the main organising units in the local Church** present throughout our history. The parish community that gathers in the celebration of the Eucharist is a privileged place of relationships, welcome, discernment and mission. Changes in how we experience and live our relationship with locality require us to reconsider how parishes are configured. What characterises the parish is that it is a community that is not self-selecting. People gather there from different generations, professions, geographical origins and social classes and status. Responding to the new needs of mission requires opening up to new forms of pastoral action that take into account the mobility of people and the space in which their life unfolds. By placing a special emphasis on Christian initiation and offering accompaniment and formation, the parish community will be able to support people in the different stages of life in fulfilling their mission in the world. In this way, it will become more evident that the parish is not centred on itself but oriented towards mission. The parish is then called to sustain the commitment of so many people who in so many ways live and bear witness to their faith through their profession, in social, cultural and political activities. ...

147. Shared synodal formation for all the Baptised... **often requires a demanding change of mentality and a renewed approach** to both formation contexts and processes. Above all, it implies an inner readiness to be enriched by the encounter with brothers and sisters in the faith, overcoming prejudices and partisan views. The ecumenical dimension of formation cannot but facilitate this change in mentality.