



Hosting a Synod Meeting

Synod 2021 - 2023: For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.

Guide for parishioners and lay communities in the diocese of Aberdeen

Welcome

The synodal journey involves dioceses around the world in a phase of listening.

To put this into practice in our diocese, volunteers were selected by the diocesan synodal team, with the help of Bishop Hugh Gilbert and the diocesan clergy. They were trained to host synodal consultation meetings and will travel throughout the diocese of Aberdeen from mid-January to Pentecost 2022 to facilitate spiritual conversations on the ten themes selected by the Vatican for this synod (for more information on this, go to pages 5 to 7).

These volunteers will also collect feedback from these conversations. It will contribute to the summary of views from the diocese of Aberdeen which will be submitted to the Bishops' Conference of Scotland. It will then be merged with feedback from other dioceses in Scotland to give feedback to the Vatican on these themes and the reflections they inspired in our country.

We are hoping that our volunteers will be able to host synod meetings in every parish. However, their availability, as well as geographical constraints, might make it difficult for these meetings to be held in each and every parish, at a time suitable for all who wish to attend.

Therefore, we are inviting parishioners and lay communities to consider holding synod meetings and send us the fruits of their spiritual conversations, to ensure that we hear everyone's voice. This is entirely optional, but we warmly encourage all parishioners and lay communities to host synod meetings. We created this booklet to assist you to do this and hope you find it helpful.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch should you require any further information.

The diocesan synodal team
synod@rcda.scot

The deadline for feedback from your meeting is Pentecost Sunday, 5th June 2022 (see page 8).



Using this booklet

This booklet is a simple guide about hosting a synod meeting. It includes:

- Advice on how to prepare your synod meeting
- A recommended meeting format
- The suggested themes and questions to guide your spiritual conversations
- Guidance on how to gather feedback
- Instructions explaining how to send in your feedback to the diocese

Preparing your synod meeting

Set a date

When you are ready to host a meeting, set a date. Plan your meeting so that you can submit feedback to us by 5th June 2022. This is to ensure your contribution is incorporated into the diocesan summary. If you hope to hold your meeting at your local church, you will need to ask permission from your parish priest and agree with him on suitable arrangements (date / time / location, etc).

Get help

You will need to ask others to help prepare and host the meeting. You will need someone to take notes of what is discussed by participants. You will also need helpers to keep a register (to comply with Covid-19 regulations), set up/put away seats, perhaps offer hospitality and type up your feedback afterwards.

Communicate

Tell people about your meeting. Once you have a location/date/time please ensure details are shared within your parish / community, for example through the parish newsletter (and website/social media). You could also ask your parish priest to highlight it to other parishioners at Sunday Mass.

Register

Know how many people are coming. Ask all attendees to confirm attendance and take a register on the day, as you will need to ensure that you follow Covid-19 guidelines if you meet as a group.

Location

Meetings can take place in any suitable setting. If your parish can offer this, it would be good if it takes place in parish halls (following usual Covid guidelines). If you know the turn-out will be small, a room in the parish house may be more suitable (with the permission of your parish priest).

Online

An online meeting may be preferable for you and your guests. Using Zoom, breakout rooms can be used for discussion depending on turnout. Be careful, the remote meeting should be set up using strict privacy settings (access with a password, no recordings allowed, etc.)

A warm welcome

Please ensure someone is at the entrance to the meeting to give a warm welcome to everyone who comes. Consider arranging teas/coffees at the break or after the meeting.

Print

Print the feedback form on page 9, if you plan to take handwritten notes. Alternatively, you might wish to type up notes during the meeting. In any case, make sure to document a summary of everyone's contributions. This will form the basis of your feedback to the diocese. **You might also wish to print copies of the prayer on page 3 so people can say it together before your meeting.**



Synod meeting- prayer

You should begin your synod meeting with this prayer of invocation to the Holy Spirit.

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;

Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong
path nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever. Amen.



Synod meeting - suggested format

1) Synod prayer (see page 3)

2) Scripture reading (recommendation: *Luke 17:20-21 'The Kingdom of God is among you'*)
Brief discussion of the reading / short time of silence, followed by an Our Father.

3) Welcome and introduction from meeting leader.

4) Guidance on how to have a spiritual conversation. Led by the meeting leader and/ or the priest (if one is attending).

In order for everyone to have a fair opportunity to participate and for all to be able to listen to and learn from others, it is essential that everyone knows what the rules of the conversation are.

How should someone signal they wish to speak? By raising their hand? How long should they ideally speak for, so that everyone else gets enough time to contribute to the conversation? Who gives to everyone their turn to speak? Who is taking notes? etc.

The synod, our journey of listening to one another, should be an authentic experience of discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit. Authentic discernment is made possible where there is time for deep reflection and a spirit of mutual trust, common faith, and a shared purpose.

Humility in listening must correspond to courage in speaking: everyone has the right to be heard, just as everyone has the right to speak. Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate to convince others. Rather, it is welcoming what others say as a way by which the Holy Spirit can speak for the good of all (1 Corinthians 12:7).

5) The spiritual conversation takes place. The leader of the meeting reads out and select with participants the themes they wish to consider (see pages 5, 6 and 7). Participants then discuss these themes, one theme at a time.

You don't have to discuss all of the ten themes, you should only cover what is relevant to you and what is manageable within the time you have.

In addition, please note:

- It could be helpful to allow for one or two minutes of quiet time for personal reflection at regular intervals throughout your synod meeting, for example just before gathering the final thoughts of participants on a theme.
- A break could also be highly beneficial. For example, it might help participants who are less comfortable to speak up in larger groups to collect their thoughts and informally share some of their ideas, perhaps over a cup of tea/coffee.

6) Closing prayer of your choice

Suggested length of meeting: Two hours maximum, with a break, or 90 minutes without break.



Questions for discussion

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together”: how is this “journeying together” happening today in our Church? What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?

To contribute to our diocesan synod, you are invited to:

- **Ask yourselves** what experiences in your particular church do these questions call to mind?
- **Re-read the experiences in greater depth.** What joys did they provoke? What difficulties and obstacles were there? What wounds have they brought to light? What insights have they elicited?
- **Gather the fruits to share.** Where in these experiences, does the voice of the Holy 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?

Below are the ten themes chosen by the Vatican for this Synod. These themes and their accompanying questions are suggested to aid spiritual conversations at synod meetings.

You can find more extensive information about the themes and possible questions on these topics on the Vatican's website dedicated to the synod at <https://www.synod.va/en.html>

Please remember, **the aim is not to answer all of the questions, but to choose those that are most relevant in your local context.** You can also ask other questions, and we encourage you to do so.

Theme 1: COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

The Acts of the Apostles tells us how the first disciples worked together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to build the early Church. In the Church and in society today, we are side by side on the same road.

- In our local church, who are the ones already “journeying together”? How can we do this better?
- Who is getting left behind and why? How can we, as a parish, reach out to those who don't feel welcome or are no longer interested in Jesus Christ?

Theme 2: LISTENING

Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices. When we can listen like this, we may hear God's voice speaking to us through other people.

- What is limiting our ability to listen in our local church, especially to those who have different views than our own? What could help us to listen to others better?
- How are the Laity, especially young people and women, listened to? What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or exclusion?



Theme 3: SPEAKING OUT

As Catholics, we are all invited to speak with courage, and ensure that our words convey freedom, truth, and charity.

- In our local church, when and how do we manage to say what is important to us? Are we comfortable talking about Jesus to others? If not, why, and what would make us be more confident and able to do so?
- What enables or hinders us to speak up courageously and responsibly as Catholics in wider society? How can our parish be a light for our community, to share with others the love of Jesus and his saving truth?
- Beyond our parish, who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen? How does the relationship with local media work (not only Catholic media)?

Theme 4: CELEBRATION

"Journeying together" is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist (Mass).

- How do prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and guide our community?
- How well do we enable every faithful to participate in liturgical celebrations? How are we encouraging and helping the members of our community who wish to take part in the ministries of the reader and acolyte? How could we do it better?

Theme 5: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Synodality is at the service of the Church's mission. Every baptised person is called to use their gifts and talents to participate in the life and missionary service of the Church.

- Within our parish, how is every baptised person called to participate in the mission of the Church? How can we encourage participation and a true gift of each person to the Lord Jesus?
- What prevents us from giving our gifts and talents to the Church? Are there areas of mission we are neglecting? (For example: helping the poor, supporting the pro-life efforts of the Church, evangelising, caring for the environment, etc)
- How does our community support its members who serve society (through social and political involvement, scientific research, education, etc.)?

Theme 6: DIALOGUE

Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding.

- What are the places and means of dialogue within our local church?
- How do we promote communication and collaboration with neighbouring dioceses, religious communities in the area, lay associations, etc.? How do we resolve potential conflicts? How could we do it better?
- How well do we dialogue with and learn from diverse groups, like people who live in poverty, believers of other religions and those who have no religious affiliation? How can we improve?



Theme 7: ECUMENISM

The dialogue with other Christian communities, united with us 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 do we share and how do we journey together? What are the benefits and the difficulties? How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?

Theme 8: AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

A synodal Church is a Church where everyone participates and shares responsibility.

- How well do we identify our goals and how to reach them? How is authority exercised within our local church? What good examples do we have of teamwork and shared responsibility?
- How do we promote lay ministries and the responsibility of lay faithful? What can our parish do to prepare us to be committed disciples of Jesus?
- How does synodality work at the level of our particular church (Pastoral Councils, lay ministries, etc.)? Are they a fruitful experience? How can we foster more leadership of the lay people?

Theme 9: DISCERNING AND DECIDING

In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community.

- How well do we promote participation in decision making and how well do we make decisions together?
- How can we improve our methods so that everyone's voice can be included?
- How do we promote transparency and accountability?
- How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment?

Theme 10: FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

Synodality, that is journeying together, involves ongoing learning and being open to change.

- What do we need to help us to be more capable of 'walking together', listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue?
- What formation do we offer so that decision-making and the exercise of authority takes place in a synodal way, that is to say, making sure that every member of the community is welcomed, respected and listened to?



Synod meeting summary

It is essential that the main ideas that came out of your discussions are summarised then recorded in writing, so that you can contribute to the diocesan synodal summary.

To give feedback from your synod meeting, notes must be taken, then typed up in a word document. This summary cannot exceed 500 words.

IMPORTANT GUIDELINES

The goal of notetaking is **not** to write down everything that was said.

Instead, it should be an **act of discernment** in choosing and writing what will contribute to the next stage of the synodal process, by being sent to the diocese.

In this sense, your notes should contain **not only what was agreed, but also points that strike a chord, inspire an original point of view, or open a new horizon.**

After discussing each of the themes you selected, when you summarise your discussions and prepare to write down some notes to give feedback to the diocese, ask yourselves:

- What themes emerged strongly?
- What do you think the Holy Spirit is saying?
- What was there agreement on?
- What was there split opinion on?

Your feedback should not only underline positive experiences but also bring to light challenging and negative experiences in order to reflect the reality of what has been listened to. Your notes should also pay special attention to the voices of those who are not often heard.

Your feedback should reflect both the joys and challenges of engaging together in discernment.

To achieve this, you might find it helpful to read out your notes at the conclusion of the meeting, so that all those present can agree that they are faithful to the ideas they shared, or help to make them more accurate.

The following page provides a template you could print for help to take notes. You don't have to use it, it is just provided to assist you to write down well-organised notes. We hope this will make it easier for you to type up your feedback at a later date.

A template for you to type up your feedback is also available from the Synod page of our diocesan website at <https://www.rcda.scot/synod/>

Make sure that you send in your feedback. Your summary must be emailed to the diocesan synodal team at synod@rcda.scot by Pentecost, on Sunday 5th June 2022.



Synod meeting - summary



Date/location of meeting: _____

Meeting leader and number of attendees _____

Name of the parish(es) of the attendees: _____

Please summarise the main ideas that came out of your synod meeting.

Make sure to write down:

- 1) the themes and questions you discussed,**
- 2) a summary of the fruits of your spiritual conversations on each of these themes.**

Organise your notes by themes for greater clarity. Thank you.



This is a form you might wish to use to make notes in order to summarise the views shared at your synod meeting. To type up your summary, please use the editable Word version available to download on the synod page of our diocesan website at <https://www.rcda.scot/synod/> . Once complete, email it to synod@rcda.scot



Feedback to the diocese

The written feedback from your synod meeting must be typed up in a word document and cannot exceed 500 words. This summary must then be sent to the diocesan synodal team at this email address: synod@rcda.scot

The deadline for feedback from your meeting is Pentecost Sunday, 5th June 2022.

Contacts and Support

Diocesan synodal team

synod@rcda.scot

Synod page of our diocesan website

<https://www.rcda.scot/synod/>

Synod website

<https://www.synod.va/en.html>