

# **SYNOD ON SYNODALITY**

*For a Synodal Church:  
Communion, Participation, Mission*



**CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PORT ELIZABETH**  
*Synodal Questions for use in Parish Settings*

Prepared by the Pastoral Development Office  
*Lent and Easter 2022*

## **Synod Prayer**

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.

## PREAMBLE

In a recent circular of Bishop Zungu on the Synodal Path, we were introduced to such terms as “Synod” and “Pastoral Plan”. The Synod of Bishops usually takes place in Rome, every 2 or 3 years, in order to share pastoral experience and so reflect on issues related to the mission of the church today, in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The most recent Synods, for instance, focussed on the family and young people. After each Synod, the Holy Father issues an Apostolic Exhortation, as the fruit of “Synod”. Leading up to the next Synod (October 2023), Pope Francis has asked the church, laity and clergy, to reflect on the meaning of “Synodality”, with the theme, *communion, participation and mission*. Meanwhile, the Bishops of Southern Africa have launched a Pastoral Plan to guide the ministry of the church in our region, themed, *evangelising community, serving God, humanity and all creation*.

One of the key words of this synodal process is *listening* – listening to the Holy Spirit and listening to one another. The gospel for the Second Sunday of Lent in Year C (cf. Luke 9:28-36), recalled one of the most important moments in the life of Jesus with his disciples – the *Transfiguration of the Lord* – itself a preparation for the events of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. The evangelist Luke is careful to show us that Jesus was at prayer when *his countenance was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white* while the disciples were *heavy with sleep but kept awake and saw his glory and the two men who stood with him*, that is, Moses and Elijah. At the end of this encounter, the Father’s voice is heard from the cloud that overshadowed Jesus and the disciples: *This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!* By truly *listening*, the disciples would grasp the mission of Jesus.

Thus, in our Lenten journey, through silent prayer and meditation on the Scriptures, we learn how to listen to the Lord and to one another. The privileged place to listen together to the word of God is the liturgy, especially the Sunday Eucharist. It is when we listen faithfully in this way that we are able to “journey together” as the church in the modern world, as the witnesses of Christ. Here is a “listening challenge” from the Holy Father – *let us ask ourselves frankly during this synodal process: are we good at listening? How good is the “hearing” of our heart? Do we allow people to express themselves, to walk in faith even though they have had difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without being hindered, rejected or judged?*

As we “journey together” on our Lenten pilgrimage, and thus discover anew the meaning *synodality*, Pope Francis continues to remind us about the essence of this journey, which is so pertinent to Lent: *the Synod is a process of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment, that unfolds in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God.*

The five “Listening Sessions” facilitated in parish settings with the aid of this booklet are based on the fundamental synodal question: *A Synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeys together.’ How is this ‘journeying together’ happening today in your local church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together’?* This question will form the basis of the first listening session. In the sessions to follow, parishioners will reflect together and listen to one another’s experience from the ten focus areas of the synodal process. The responses will then be gathered from all parishes. May we do all of this with humility, and become a truly listening church!

## SESSION ONE

### **OPENING PRAYER:**

**Facilitator:** Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful!

**Group:** And kindle in them the fire of your love.

**Facilitator:** Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

**Group:** And You shall renew the face of the earth.

**Facilitator:** Let us pray.

**Group:** O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

*A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (1:12 – 14)*

“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Mathew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”

*The Word of the Lord...*

## ***LECTION DIVINA:***

***Lectio:*** Reading the text until you can understand it.

***Meditatio:*** Meditation on what this text says to me, today, and in the light of synodality?

***Oratio:*** Prayer – through meditation on Scripture, we experience an intimate encounter with God, that leads us to pray.

***Contemplatio:*** Contemplation - we come to understand the parts of our lives that need to be transformed by God's grace.

***Actio:*** Action is an essential result of the encounter with God in Sacred Scripture.

## ***THE MAIN QUESTION FOR CONSULTATION:***

**The Synod poses the following fundamental question: *A Synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, 'journeys together.'***

How is this 'journeying together' happening today in your local church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our 'journeying together'?

***In response to this question, we are invited to:***

Recall your experiences of journeying together as the local church: What experiences of our local Church does this question call to mind?

***Reflect on these experiences in greater depth:***

What joys did they bring?

What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered?

What wounds did they reveal?

What insights have they elicited?

***Gather the fruits to share:***

Where in these experiences does the voice of the Holy Spirit resound?

What is the Spirit 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 local church?

***FIRST FOCUS AREA OF THE SYNODAL PROCESS:***

**1. Companions on the Journey:**

**In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road.**

- In our local Church, who are those who ‘walk together’?
- Who are those who seem further apart?
- How are we called to grow as companions?
- What groups or individual are left on the margins?

***CLOSING PRAYER (for all Sessions):***

God of our Journey,  
as we gather we lift up our voices to give praise and thanksgiving to your name, the God of encounter who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, makes us one in Christ, Our Saviour.

God of our Journey, as we journey together with Christ, your Son, who walks alongside of us day to day, may we embrace your presence within us and discover your presence in the people whom we encounter along the way.

God of our Journey, as we journey together in the power of the Holy Spirit, enlighten our minds and our hearts in our intercultural encounters, with one another and with all cultural families, so that we may become better listeners, and bearers of your faithful Word.

God of our Journey, as we journey together with all the members of the Body of Christ, instil in us the presence of your love and compassion, so that we may persevere in faith, trust in your goodness.

God of our Journey, as we together as Disciples of Christ, set our missionary hearts ablaze and transform our lives by your grace, so that we may go forth into the world to proclaim the Good News and to build up the reign of your love through our acts of justice, compassion, and mercy.

We ask this through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power of the Holy Spirit, brings forth a world of harmony and peace, One God, forever and ever. Amen.

*(From the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)*



## SESSION TWO

**OPENING PRAYER** (From the Ephphetha Prayer):

*The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak.  
May he soon touch your ears to receive his word,  
and your mouth to proclaim his faith,  
to praise and glory of the Father.  
Amen.*

**SCRIPTURE READING:**

*A reading from the gospel according to Mark (7: 31 -36)*

“At that time: Jesus returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hands upon him. And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, ‘*Ephphatha*’, that is, ‘*Be opened*’. And his ears were opened, his tongue was released and he spoke plainly. And he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.

*The Gospel of the Lord.*

**LECTIO DIVINA** (see Session One):

**Lectio:** *Reading the text until you can understand it.*

**Meditatio:** *Meditation on what does this text say to me, today?*

**Oratio:** *Prayer - we experience an intimate encounter with God...*

**Contemplatio:** *Contemplation - we come to understand the parts...*

**Actio:** *Action is an essential result of the encounter with God.*

**REFLECTION:**

“But we all know that closure of man, his isolation, does not solely depend on the sense organs. There is an inner closing, which covers the deepest core of the person, what the Bible calls the "heart." That is what Jesus came to "open," to liberate, to enable us to fully live our relationship with God and with others. That is why I said that this little word, "Ephphatha – Be opened," sums up Christ's entire mission. He became man so that man, made inwardly deaf and dumb by sin, would become able to hear the voice of God, the voice of love speaking to his heart, and learn to speak in the language of love, to communicate with God and with others.”

(Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, 9 September 2012 – Angelus)

## **THE SECOND AND THIRD FOCUS AREAS OF THE SYNODAL PROCESS:**

### **2. Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice.**

- How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore?
- How are the laity listened to, especially women and young people?
- What facilitates or inhibits our listening? How do we listen to those on the peripheries?
- How is the contribution of consecrated men and women integrated?
- What are some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than our own?
- What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalisation, or social exclusion?

### **3. Speaking out: all are invited to speak with courage and ‘parrhesia’ (*free speech*), that is, in freedom, truth and charity.**

- What enables or hinders speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local church and in society?
- When and how do we manage to say what is important to us?
- How does the relationship with the local media work (not only Catholic media)?
- Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community and how are they chosen?

**CLOSING PRAYER** (*see Session One*)

## SESSION THREE

### **OPENING PRAYER:**

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons and daughters through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ. (Ephesians 1: 3 – 8)*

### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

*A reading from the gospel according to Luke (22: 7 – 14)*

*When the day of the feast of Unleavened Bread arrived, the day for sacrificing the Passover lamb, he sent out Peter and John, instructing them, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.” They asked him, “Where do you want us to make the preparations?” And he answered them, “When you go into the city, a man will meet you carrying a jar of water. Follow him into the house that he enters and say to the master of the house, ‘The teacher says to you, “Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? He will show you a large upper room that is furnished. Make the preparations there.”’ Then they went off and found everything exactly as he had told them, and there they prepared the Passover.”*

*The Gospel of the Lord.*

## **LECTIO DIVINA** (see Session One):

**Lectio:** *Reading the text until you can understand it.*

**Meditatio:** *Meditation on what does this text say to me, today?*

**Oratio:** *Prayer - we experience an intimate encounter with God...*

**Contemplatio:** *Contemplation - we come to understand the parts...*

**Actio:** *Action is an essential result of the encounter with God.*

## **THE FOURTH AND FIFTH FOCUS AREAS OF THE SYNODAL PROCESS:**

### **4. Celebration: “Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.**

- How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community?
- How do they inspire the most important decisions?
- How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy?
- What space is given to participating in the ministries of lector and acolyte?

**5. Sharing responsibility for our common mission: Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate.**

- Since we are all missionary disciples, how is every baptised person called to participate in the mission of the Church?’
- What hinders the baptised to be from being active in mission?
- What areas of mission are we neglecting?
- How does the community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment)?
- How does the church help these members to live out their service to society in a missionary way?
- How is the discernment about missionary choices made and by whom?

**CLOSING PRAYER** (*see Session One*)

## SESSION FOUR

### **OPENING PRAYER** (*St Francis Prayer for Peace*):

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where  
there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.  
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be con-  
soled as to console, to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

*A reading from the gospel according to John (14: 23-27)*

Jesus answered and said to him, 'Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me. I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me tell you, 'I am going away and I will come back to you.'

*The Gospel of the Lord.*

**LECTIO DIVINA** (see Session One):

**Lectio:** *Reading the text until you can understand it.*

**Meditatio:** *Meditation on what does this text say to me, today?*

**Oratio:** *Prayer - we experience an intimate encounter with God...*

**Contemplatio:** *Contemplation - we come to understand the parts...*

**Actio:** *Action is an essential result of the encounter with God.*

**THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH FOCUS AREAS OF THE SYNODAL PROCESS:**

**6. Dialogue in Church and Society: Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding.**

- To what extent do diverse peoples in our community come together for dialogue?
- What are the places and means of dialogue within our local church?
- How do we promote collaboration with neighbouring dioceses, religious communities in the area, lay associations and movements, etc?
- How are divergences of vision, or conflicts and difficulties addressed?
- What particular issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to?
- What experiences of dialogue and collaboration do we have with believers of other religions and with those who have no religious affiliation?
- How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors: the spheres of politics, economics, culture, civil society, and people who live in poverty?



**7. Ecumenism: The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the Synodal journey.**

- What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations?
- What do we share and how do we journey together?
- What fruits have we drawn from walking together?
- What are the difficulties?
- How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?

**CLOSING PRAYER** (*see Session One*)

## SESSION FIVE

### **OPENING PRAYER** (A Prayer by Saint Ignatius of Loyola):

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
my memory, my understanding and my entire will,  
All I have and call my own. You have given all to me.  
To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours;  
do with it what you will.  
Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me.  
Amen.

### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

*A reading from the gospel according to John (17: 11 – 21)*

“Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are... I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely. I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth.

I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.”

*The Gospel of the Lord.*

**LECTIO DIVINA** (see Session One):

**Lectio:** *Reading the text until you can understand it.*

**Meditatio:** *Meditation on what does this text say to me, today?*

**Oratio:** *Prayer - we experience an intimate encounter with God...*

**Contemplatio:** *Contemplation - we come to understand the parts...*

**Actio:** *Action is an essential result of the encounter with God.*

**THE EIGHTH, NINTH AND TENTH FOCUS AREAS OF THE SYNODAL PROCESS:**

**8. Authority and Participation: A Synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church.**

- How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued, the way to reach them, and the steps to be taken?
- How is authority or governance exercised within our local Church?
- How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice?
- How are evaluations conducted and by whom?
- How are lay ministries and the responsibility of lay people promoted?
- Have we had fruitful experiences of synodality on a local level?
- How do Synodal bodies function at the level of the local Church (Pastoral and Deanery Councils in parishes)?

**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 can we foster a more Synodal approach in our participation and leadership?
- What method and processes do we use in decision making?
- How can they be improved?
- How can we promote participation in decision-making within the hierarchical structures?
- Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God?
- What is the relationship between consultation and decision-making, and how do we put these into practice?
- What tools and procedures do we use to promote transparency and accountability?
- How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment?

**10. Forming ourselves in Synodality: Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and ongoing learning.**

- How does our church community form people to be more capable of ‘walking together’, listening to one another, participation in mission, and engaging in dialogue?
- What formation is offered to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a Synodal way?

**CLOSING PRAYER** (*see Session One*)