

Synod of Bishops: The Continental Stage

Preparation for the Synod of Bishops began with a world wide effort to create local responses and a subsequent Diocesan response. The first (diocesan) phase of the synodal process concluded with the creation of a national response ([available on the web site](#)) and the next stage of the process, known as the Continental Stage, has begun. Australia is part of the Oceania Response.



The Continental Stage

At a meeting towards the end of September 2022 the Synod General Secretariat prepared a *Document for the Continental Stage*. This *Document* was shared with the Bishops' Conferences and dioceses around the world, who coordinated further reflection on its contents. We were assured this is not a matter of beginning consultation all over again, but of continuing the dialogue that has already begun. National syntheses had been prepared around the world. The Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops used these documents to prepare an *instrumentum laboris*, or working document, for the Synod. Continental gatherings of bishops conferences will also be used to prepare for the Synod of Bishops.



Australia's contribution to reflection on the *Document*

In Australia, Trudy Dantis from the National Centre for Pastoral Research was appointed to serve as the ACBC representative on the Synod Oceania Taskforce chaired by Susan Pascoe AM.

The national Synod working group created processes and resources for the Continental stage to assist groups to reflect on the *Document* and provide feedback. The NCPR established an online portal to collect this feedback nationally by December 9.

The Diocese of Ballarat participated in this phase and a group met recently to reflect on the [working document](#). The group included Sr Veronica Lawson rsm, Pat McOwan, Fr Barry Ryan, Susan Crowe, Bernadette Lynch, Fr Kevin Maloney, Bishop Paul Bird and Jane Collins. A reflection guide was used to discern the document with questions to focus the discussion.

The following are the questions and the group's response submitted to the NCPR.

What resonates with the experience of the Church in Australia?

Meetings to discuss synod questions provided a positive experience of “walking together” prayerfully, seeking to discern the voice of the Spirit. This was similar to the experience of meetings for our Australian Plenary Council.

Recognition of the common dignity of all the People of God

Need for formation of all members at every level of the Church.

Liturgy makes communion tangible and nourishes mission. Need for intelligibility in language of liturgy (par 95).

Desire for leadership that is collaborative service.

Women to participate fully in the life of the Church (e.g. preaching, diaconate)

Fuller engagement of lay men in the life of the Church.

Awareness of what Pope Francis calls the “existential peripheries”, the deep suffering of those who feel excluded for many reasons.

Recognition and inclusion of cultural diversity

Which experiences are new, or illuminating to you?

Image of the Church as a tent of meeting.

Examples of synodality among people in war-torn countries.

In many ways, we do not have to deal with wars and persecutions on the same scale as many other countries

A desire for deeper ecumenical encounter, and the need for formation to support this.

What tensions or differences emerge in your continent's perspective?

Challenge to have voices of some groups included: youth, elderly, people with disabilities, indigenous groups, migrants, LGBTQ+ people, those in irregular marriages.

Changing context of evangelisation in view of rapid decline in religious affiliation in Australia.

Reading the signs of the times, understanding the world we live in. We often make judgements rather than using dialogue and emotional intelligence

Clericalism

Seminary formation is a limited experience, too many leaders only look at the world with a ecclesial outlook

Secularism

What issues should be addressed in the next steps of the process?

Rewording of the final sentence of point 8: "to proclaim Christ who LIVED, died and was raised for the salvation of the world".

Continuing effort to include voices from those less represented so far.

Present hierarchical structure

Clericalism

Awareness of the dangers of secularism, individualism, affluence, sexism, racism

Leadership and Governance

What are the priorities, recurring themes and calls to action?

Recognition of the common dignity of the People of God

Need for formation of all members at every level of the Church.

Liturgy makes communion tangible and nourishes mission. Need for intelligibility in language of liturgy.

Forms of leadership involving collaboration between laity and clergy.

Participation of women and lay men in the life of the Church.

Evangelisation, in view of decline in religious affiliation in many countries.

More emphasis on Laudato Si'

What should be discussed during the First Session of the Synod in October 2023?

Recognition of the common dignity of the People of God

Need for formation of all members at every level of the Church.

Liturgy makes communion tangible and nourishes mission. Need for intelligibility in language of liturgy.

Forms of leadership involving collaboration between laity and clergy.

Governance - call for a cultural change in the Church with a view to greater transparency, accountability and co-responsibility.

Participation of women and lay men in the life of the Church.

Evangelisation, in view of decline in religious affiliation in many countries.

More emphasis on Laudato Si'

Inclusion of voices of groups including: youth, elderly, people with disabilities, indigenous groups, migrants, LGBTQ+ people, those in irregular marriages, sick and mentally ill

Synod Resource

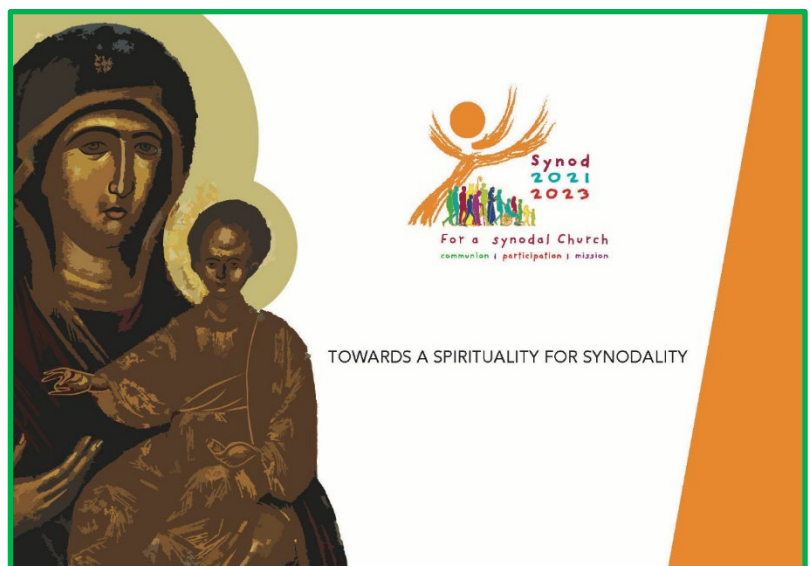
Attached [here](#) is a document *Towards a Spirituality of Synodality* which has been released by the Synod General Secretariat. This resource offers an overview of the main features of a synodal spirituality that can inform and assist the synodal process. This can also be accessed at:

<https://www.synod.va/en/highlights/towards-a-spirituality-for-synodality.html>

More information on the Continental Stage

Several resources have been made available to help further our understanding of this stage:

<https://www.synod.va/en/highlights/the-continental-stage-resources.html>



Two other interesting resources include: The Frequently Asked Questions guide in English:

https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/FAQ_Continental-Stage_EN.pdf

The second is the address from Susan Pascoe, who is on the Oceania Task Force for the Continental Stage and is a member of the Methodological Commission:

https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/EN_Pascoe.pdf

