CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BROKEN BAY

How do we nurture a culture of being a synodal Church?

ACCOMPANIMENT GUIDE

PARISH



"While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them."

Luke 24:15

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Parish:..... **Date:**.....

Name of person completing this Accompaniment Guide: .....

A Synodal Church

"We want to be a synodal Church, a Church that moves forward, a Church that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, that always seeks to be close above all to those who are suffering."

Pope Leo XIV,
"First Blessing 'Urbi et Orbi,'" The Holy See, 8 May 2025

Nurturing a culture of being a synodal Church

In his address to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops in 2015, Pope Francis invited the Church to rediscover its synodal character. In his words:

"Synodality is the path that God expects of the Church in the third millennium."

To walk this path together is not simply a strategy for pastoral effectiveness—it is a theological expression of who we are as the People of God.

To be a synodal Church in mission is to embrace encounter, listening, discernment, participation, and shared responsibility as essential expressions of our communion. It requires us to pause and reflect on where we are, so that we may prayerfully discern where the Spirit is calling us to go—and how we are to get there, together.

This document draws upon the Final Document from the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Synod on Synodality (2024), translating its proposed actions into a practical framework for local implementation. **(Appendix I)**

Through in-depth evaluation, prayer and conversations rooted in listening and dialogue, parish communities are invited to assess how synodal practices are being fostered across key dimensions of Church life—such as encounter, listening and discernment, shared decision-making, co-responsibility, inclusion, accountability, safeguarding, formation, and leadership.

In the words of the late Pope Francis;

"A synodal Church is a listening Church, aware that listening 'is more than hearing.' It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn." (2015)

And affirmed by Pope Leo.

"Synodality is a style, an attitude that helps us to be Church, promoting authentic experiences of participation and communion." (June 2025)

In the context of the Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis has emphasised that the goal is not simply to produce a report, but to animate ongoing conversion, planning, and growth. May this process be a meaningful step forward in nurturing a culture of being a synodal Church—one that walks together in faith, with open hearts.

Purpose

This **Accompaniment Guide** is a self-reflection tool designed to assist parish communities in deepening their synodal journey by embracing the principles of **communion, participation,** and **mission**. The insights drawn from **each reflective statement** and **reflection question** aim to support discernment, considering ways that your parish may nurture a culture of being a synodal Church.

Instructions

Step One: Welcoming all to Participate

Invite members of your parish team/s to participate in a prayerful conversation responding to the five key themes:

Theme 1: Participation and Listening

A synodal Church grows when all voices are heard, especially those often left at the margins, recognising that each person contributes to the life of the community. Listening is not simply hearing, but an active openness that allows the Spirit to speak through the diversity of experiences and perspectives.

Theme 2: Shared Leadership and Decision-Making

Synodality calls the whole People of God to embrace co-responsibility, where authority is exercised as service and leadership is shared in communion. Decisions are discerned together, balancing unity with the richness of different charisms and gifts

Theme 3: Openness to the Holy Spirit and Discernment

The synodal journey is not primarily about strategies or structures, but about discerning God's will by listening deeply to the Spirit who guides the Church. True discernment requires prayer, humility, and a willingness to be surprised by where the Spirit leads.

Theme 4: Inclusion and Welcome

A synodal Church is a home for all, where each person finds respect, dignity, and a place at the table of Christ. To be inclusive means walking with those who feel excluded, creating spaces of genuine welcome and belonging.

Theme 5: Mission and Outreach

The synodal path directs the Church outward, calling us to be witnesses of Christ's love in the world. Mission flows from communion, sending us to engage society with hope, dialogue, and acts of service that embody the Gospel.

Step Two: Listening Deeply and Discerning Together

Before beginning, invite your small group or parish team to **gather in prayer**. You may wish to use the Scripture references provided under each theme title, or prepare a prayer of your own.

Each key theme includes five reflective statements intended to support meaningful reflection and discernment. These statements invite you to consider how your parish community is nurturing a synodal culture. The accompanying code (e.g., "**FD94**") refers to the relevant paragraph in the *Final Document* from the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Synod on Synodality (2024).

For each statement, indicate the stage of development as one of the following:

- Developed and Embedded
- Developed
- Developing
- Yet to Develop

After reflecting on and recording your progress for each **Reflective Statement,** use the **Reflection Question** below each table to prompt deeper group discussion and discernment. Groups are encouraged to apply the ***Conversation in the Spirit*** methodology **(Appendix II)** when engaging with each Reflection Question.

Step Three: Discerning next steps for Mission

After your time of prayer and reflection, identify **three** priority areas that your parish will focus on as you continue the journey towards nurturing culture for a synodal Church.

Once these priority areas are identified, develop SMART goals—goals that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound. These goals should outline how your parish will actively work towards fostering a culture of synodality. **(Appendix III)**

Theme 1: Participation and Listening

Where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.
Matthew 18:20

Nurturing a synodal culture
Where are we on the journey?

Reflective Statements	Developed and embedded	Developed	Developing	Yet to be Developed
Our parish creates spaces for genuine listening, inviting all parishioners to share their experiences, hopes, and concerns as we journey together in faith. **FD28**				
All voices—including those on the margins—are welcomed and valued. **FD19**				
There are clear and open channels for parishioners to communicate with leadership. **FD94**				
The parish values diverse perspectives, fosters open dialogue, and embraces relational conversion. **FD50**				
Our parish embraces and honours the richness of our differences—recognising them as gifts from God and vital sources of life and unity within our community. **FD52**				

Reflection Question:

How might we improve opportunities for all voices to be heard and stories shared in our community?

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Theme 2: Shared Leadership & Decision Making

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another
as good stewards of God's varied grace.

1 Peter 4:10

Nurturing a synodal culture
Where are we on the journey?

Reflective Statements	Developed and embedded	Developed	Developing	Yet to be Developed
Leadership in our parish is collaborative, involving both clergy and lay leaders. **FD74**				
The Parish Pastoral Council and other leadership bodies actively engage parishioners in decision-making. **FD102**				
Lay leaders feel empowered to take on meaningful roles within our parish. **FD66**				
There is transparency in decision-making, and major parish initiatives are communicated effectively. **FD101**				
Our parish leadership seeks and values feedback and undertakes ongoing evaluation. **FD141**				

Reflection Question:

How can we better foster co-responsibility in leadership?

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Theme 3: Openness to the Holy Spirit & Discernment

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

Nurturing a synodal culture
Where are we on the journey?

Reflective Statements	Developed and embedded	Developed	Developing	Yet to be Developed
Our parish engages in prayerful discernment, listening to the word of God in order to discern God's will. **FD84**				
Spiritual reflection and prayer guide our parish's mission and activities. **FD43**				
Our parish encourages ongoing formation in discernment and listening to the Holy Spirit. **FD43**				
There is space for silence, reflection, and spiritual conversations in our parish. **FD31**				
Our parish prayerfully discerns the charisms bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon the faithful, and seeks to nurture, encourage, and accompany them as they respond to the call to ministry and mission. **FD57**				

Reflection Question:

How might we become more attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

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Theme 4: Inclusion and Welcome

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Romans 15:7

Nurturing a synodal culture

Where are we on the journey?

Reflective Statements	Developed and embedded	Developed	Developing	Yet to be Developed
Our parish fosters a strong sense of belonging and welcome for all; inclusive of the accompaniment of young people. **FD62**				
Our parish actively reaches out to those who feel excluded or disconnected from the Church. **FD20**				
Our ministries consider, reflect and celebrate the diversity of our community. **FD63**				
Our parish makes an effort to listen to and accompany people in difficult life situations. **FD50**				
There is a conscious effort to be inclusive of different perspectives within our parish. **FD34**				

Reflection Question:

How can we better reflect Christ's radical hospitality and inclusion?

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Theme 5: Mission and Outreach

Go and make disciples of all nations.

Matthew 28:19

Nurturing a synodal culture

Where are we on the journey?

Reflective Statements	Developed and embedded	Developed	Developing	Yet to be Developed
Our parish is actively engaged in outreach to the wider community. **FD48**				
We encourage parishioners to take part in social justice initiatives and charitable work. **FD20**				
Evangelisation is a priority, and we provide opportunities for people to deepen their faith. **FD32**				
There are strong connections between our parish and local faith groups and organisations that serve those in need. **FD145**				
Our parishioners feel equipped and encouraged to live out their faith. **FD59**				

Reflection Question:

How can our parish be more mission-oriented?

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Step Three: Discerning next steps for Mission

"Synodality is a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform that enables the Church to be more participatory and missionary so that it can walk with every man and woman, radiating the light of Christ." (FD28)

Where to now?

Setting priorities and developing SMART Goals

After your time of prayerful reflection and dialogue, your parish is invited to take the next step in fostering a culture of synodality by identifying **three** priority areas for action. These priorities should emerge from the key themes explored in your conversations and reflect where your parish is being called to grow. As you discern these areas, consider which actions will have the greatest impact in building a more participatory, inclusive, and mission-oriented Church.

For each priority area, develop one or more **S M A R T** goals—goals that are:

Specific — Clearly define what you aim to accomplish.

Measurable — Determine how you will assess progress and success.

Achievable — Ensure the goal is realistic given your available resources.

Relevant — Align the goal with your parish's mission and current needs.

Time-bound — Set a clear deadline or timeframe for completion.

For each SMART goal indicate:

Who will be responsible for implementing it (e.g., an individual, ministry, or small team).

When the goal is expected to be achieved (a specific date or timeframe).

As you formulate each goal, take time not only to define what you hope to achieve but also prayerfully consider any potential obstacles that may arise. Anticipating challenges—such as limited time, resources, or differing expectations—can lead to more thoughtful and realistic planning. As a community, reflect together on these possible barriers and explore practical ways to address or overcome them. This shared awareness deepens commitment and nurtures a spirit of collaboration as you continue the journey forward.

Fostering shared ownership and responsibility throughout the goal-setting and implementation process is key. These intentional steps will support your parish in walking the synodal path with greater unity, purpose, and hope.

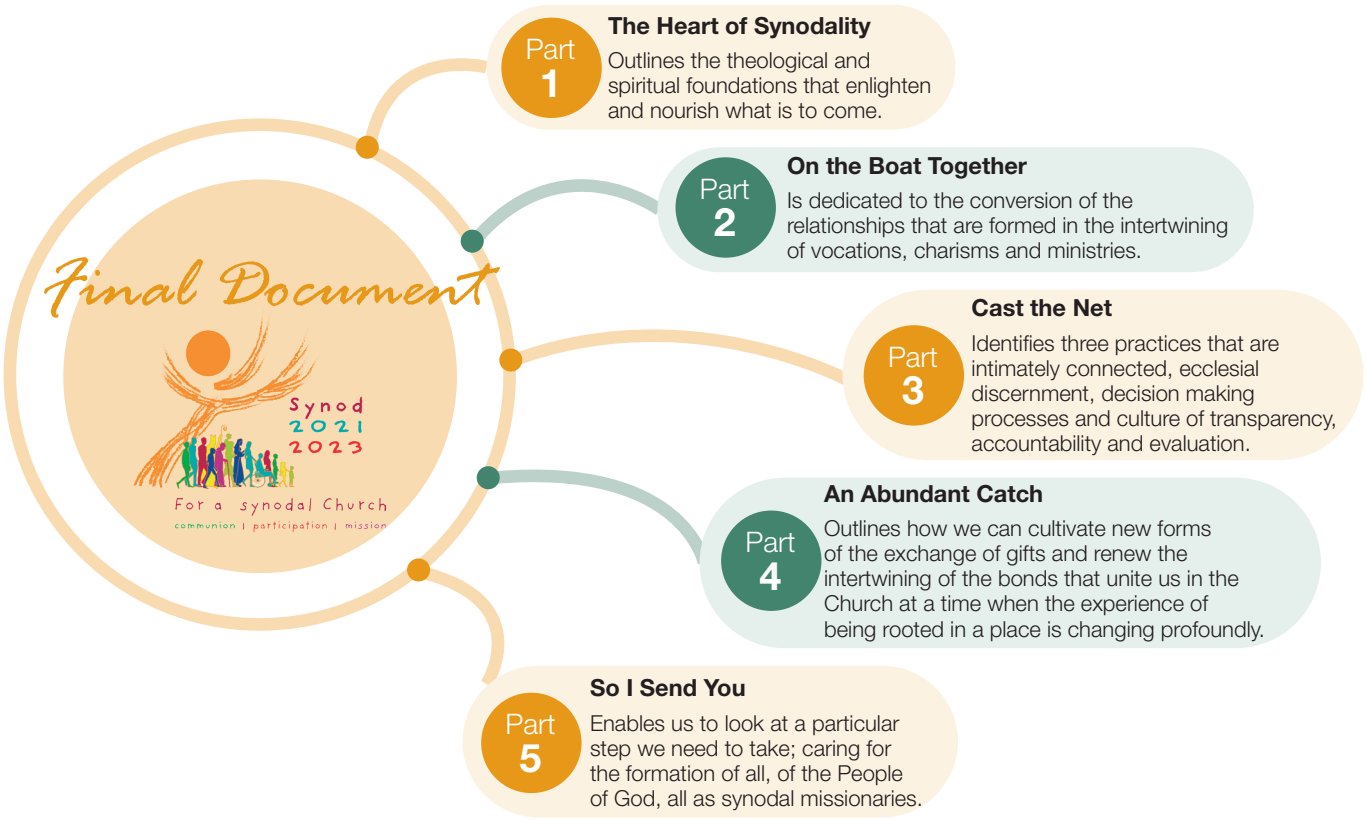
A synodal Church *"is not to produce documents, but to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands."*

Pope Francis — 11 December, 2023

Appendix I: The Final Document

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission

Final Document



In 2021, Pope Francis issued a historic invitation to the entire People of God to embark on a synodal journey—a global process of listening, dialogue, and discernment. His vision was for a Church that walks together, rooted in communion, participation, and mission. This synodal path involved local and continental consultations, culminating in two major gatherings in Rome: the first in October 2023 and the second in October 2024. These assemblies brought together bishops, laypeople, religious, and clergy in a spirit of prayerful reflection to discern how the Church can more fully embody synodality at every level.

The **Final Document** presents key insights and proposals shaped by the voices of the faithful worldwide. It emphasises shared leadership, inclusion, discernment, and renewal in mission. Pope Francis has urged the Church not to let this work remain theoretical, stating at the closing address at the First Session of the Synod on Synodality, October 28, 2023;

> ***"We must not be afraid to implement the fruits of the synodal process. The Holy Spirit is the protagonist, and we are called to listen, discern, and act with courage."***

The Synod calls all communities to engage deeply with these proposals and to live synodality as a way of being Church—together.

Appendix II: Conversation in the Spirit Methodology

Conversation in the Spirit is a prayerful discernment methodology that invites participants to listen deeply to the Holy Spirit and to one another, fostering a respectful and reflective space for sharing. Rooted in synodal practice, it emphasises silence, attentive listening, and communal reflection to seek God's guidance — together.

Round 1:

- Everyone takes equal turns to share,
- Each person is invited to speak for one or two minutes,
- Each person begins with ***"In my prayer",***
- There is no discussion and no response during this round,
- Each person is invited to share what God is speaking to them about through prayer.

One minute of silent, prayerful reflection on what you have heard.

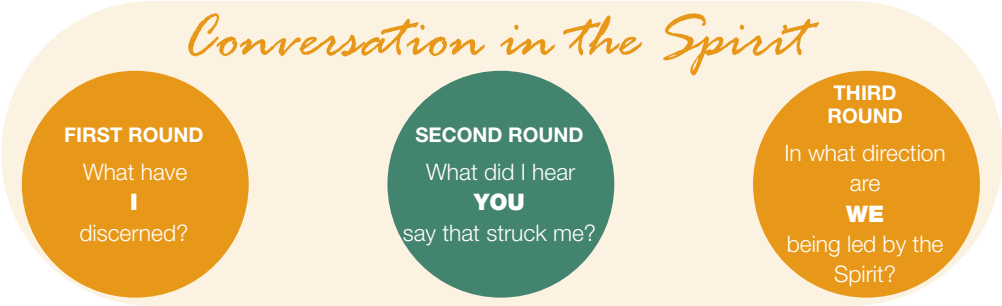
Round 2:

- Participants share what struck them most, what resonated during the time of silence,
- Everyone takes equal turns to share,
- Each person will have one or two minutes to share,
- Respond with questions such as;
  - ◊ *How was I affected by what I heard?*
  - ◊ *Is there a comment or thread that is shared?*
  - ◊ *Have I received any particular insight?*
  - ◊ *Where did I experience a sense of harmony in what I was hearing from others?*
  - ◊ *What am I feeling now?*

One minute of silent, prayerful reflection on what you have heard.

Round 3:

- Participants are invited to share what seems to be resonating in the conversation,
- Participants are not obliged to speak and can speak spontaneously,
- Respond with questions such as;
  - ◊ *What shared discernment has emerged?*
  - ◊ *Where is the Holy Spirit calling us to go?*
  - ◊ *What seems to be resonating in the conversation from the group?*



Appendix III: Discerning the next steps — Goal Setting

Goal 1 Start Date | Due Date

S M A R T Goal

Goal Progress 0% 100%

ACTION STEPS	Possible obstacles
	How to overcome obstacles

In review…

Goal 2

Start Date

Due Date

S M A R T Goal

Goal Progress 0% 100%

ACTION STEPS

Possible obstacles

How to overcome obstacles

In review…

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This **Accompaniment Guide** was developed by Patti Beattie,
Head of Pastoral Discernment and Accompaniment for the Diocese of Broken Bay.

It draws on the **Final Document** from the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Synod on Synodality (2024), translating its proposed actions into a practical framework for local application. The guide is designed for use in parishes, ministry groups, and other community settings to support shared reflection, dialogue, and planning, as we continue to nurture a culture of being a synodal Church.

This guide is a formation resource and does not constitute doctrinal, canonical, or professional advice.
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