

Synodality

Pope Francis convened the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on October 10, 2021 with a focus on the theme “*For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.*” In the Archdiocese of Bombay, the diocesan phase of the Synod was inaugurated at the Holy Name Cathedral by His Eminence, Oswald Cardinal Gracias, the Archbishop of Bombay, on Sunday, October 17, 2021.

From January to May 2022, there were a variety of Synod consultations across the Archdiocese of Bombay organized online, hybrid and in person, covering many groups in parishes (*you too may have had the opportunity to express yourself*) – Associations, Ecclesial groups, as well as professionals in media and business, doctors and nurses, but most importantly, the marginalized, those on the periphery, those whose voices have never been heard before like transgenders, parents of special children, those in broken marriages. Even the youth had their opportunity to express themselves, while children were heard through their art presentations. The emphasis was on listening without judgment! It was an extraordinary experience gathering, collating and evaluating the data collected, as the people of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, were given a chance to experience lived synodality. The following four themes emerged:

- ❖ An Inclusive Church
- ❖ A Collaborative Church
- ❖ A Faith-filled Church
- ❖ A Church relevant to the times

At the Diocesan Synod on 3-4 June, 2022 at St Pius X College, Goregaon, over 190 delegates from among priests, religious sisters, and the lay faithful, including a considerable number of youth, came together to reflect on the several and varied suggestions published in the Synod Report for our Archdiocese and presented many proposals.

Theme 1: An Inclusive Church

As the title suggests, it was proposed that the Church should include and reach out to the many persons who unfortunately find themselves on the periphery, either because of demeaning experiences or situations, people broken for many reasons, and those struggling to find an identity or hoping to make life meaningful.

Understanding Acts 10:34 where St Peter says: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right,” included in the exhaustive list were: Differently oriented people, Migrants & Tribals, persons who have suffered broken marriages or are members of dysfunctional families, special children, Young working adults, Senior citizens and the lonely, Breakaway groups, Language groups, Economically challenged sections and others, including people of other faiths.

Questions:

- Are there any in your cluster/community/parish from the list indicated?
- Do these need to be included in the life of the cluster/community/parish?
- Suggest practical ways of organizing these persons, reaching out to them and giving them a sense of belonging.

Theme 2: A Collaborative Church

It was proposed that the Church needs to have “all hands on deck” with numerous opportunities given to the lay faithful to take up responsibilities in sharing the burden of the priests, that priests and the lay faithful should work together for the growth of the Church and care for the Earth, with collaborative planning and decision making, that roadblocks and prejudices (especially about women and youth) are maturely dealt with, thereby building trust and maintaining cordial relationships for the growth of the Church. St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians 3:9 reminds us that “we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.” And again in Romans 12:4-5, “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

Questions:

- Rate your parish on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 as least collaborative and 10 as most collaborative.
- How do you see yourself in this process of collaboration for the growth of the parish?
- Suggest practical ways to enhance healthy collaboration in the cluster/community/parish.

Theme 3: A Faith-filled Church

It was proposed that a Church filled with faith-filled people is the best way in which the Good News of Jesus can be proclaimed. In Acts 2:41-47, a faith-filled early Christian community is described. For people to be faith-filled in today's circumstances, there is need for an effective catechism for all ages, family and personal prayer should be encouraged, the liturgies should be relevant and vibrant with well-prepared homilies and whole-hearted participation from the people, especially in the contribution of talents and time for service by everyone and not just a few, the spiritual and moral life of the people has to be enhanced through regular retreats and faith formation, people should be given a platform to inspire through their faith experiences, especially the voiceless and those on the periphery of the faith journey, and everyone should own up the responsibility of proclaiming Christ through their words and actions.

Questions:

- Explore ways of becoming a faith-filled cluster/community.
- How can you get involved in this process?
- How would you personally ensure a faith-filled life?

Theme 4: A Church relevant to the times

It was proposed that the Church can continue to be a force to reckon with by being relevant to the times, especially the language groups and the marginalized. Scripture and faith formation should challenge people to make the faith relevant and channelize efforts in reflecting this relevance. The Church must create effective channels of dialogue with other faith orientations and groups. This requires a Church to be "in the world, and yet, not of the world." What is required is a reflection of the collaboration between the clergy and laity at all levels, especially in administration and proclamation, using social media platforms and promoting networking for everyone to feel that sense of belonging, whether it is through education and careers, or even in the search for job opportunities. Pastoral professionalism should be encouraged at all levels. Education offered should be tailor-made towards seeking excellence in careers and relevance in society by involvement in political and civil spheres. Concern for the Earth and its care must be highlighted. St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians 3:10 reminds us that "According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it."

Questions:

- "If the Church has to survive, it must be relevant to the times." Discuss.
- Suggest possibilities of relevance for your cluster/community.
- Create a practical agenda for your cluster/community for relevance e.g. Possibilities of dialogue with other faiths, care for Creation, promotion of entrepreneurship and excellence in education, etc.

PRAYER FOR SYNOD ON SYNODALITY 2021-23 *(Can be recited at the end of the meeting)*

We come 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.