

# ARCHDIOCESAN SYNOD

## PRIMER

By

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### A. NATURE

An (arch) diocesan SYNOD is basically an assembly of the representative People of God, convoked, presided and ultimately confirmed by the competent Local (Arch) Bishop to deliberate and pronounce on particular pastoral needs and dated concerns of the Clergy and the Laity of the (Arch)Diocese.

#### Notanda:

Save for the differences particularly in the question of the competent convoking Church Authority, membership, agenda items and the time prescribed for their convocation, as an (ARCH)DIOCESAN SYNOD is to an Archdiocese or Diocese, so is a PROVINCIAL COUNCIL to an Ecclesiastical Province, a PLENARY COUNCIL to several Ecclesiastical Provinces, an EPISCOPAL SYNOD to the Catholic Episcopate, and an ECUMENICAL COUNCIL to the Universal Church.

### B. FINALITY:

An (arch)diocesan SYNOD is substantially motivated by the intent to promote the good of GOD'S PEOPLE in the (Arch)Diocese, concretely in terms of the pastoral welfare of both the Clergy and the Laity therein as seen in the circumstances of time and place.

#### Notanda:

Unless there be reasons to the contrary, an (arch)diocesan SYNOD should be held at least every ten years precisely because the pastoral welfare of the Clergy and the Laity is affected by the changing circumstances of time and place. Irrespective of whether the SYNOD is given a prevalently reconciliative, educative or normative finality, its ultimate objective must be the good of the People of God, the Clergy and the Laity alike, of the (Arch)Diocese. All

synodal deliberations and pronouncements, being local and particular in nature, cannot but be within the framework of Common Law.

### C. MEMBERSHIP:

An (arch)diocesan SYNOD, unequivocally headed by the Local (Arch)Bishop, is composed of membership under two categories: members according to law and members according to the discretion of the Head.

#### 1. Members According to Law:

- a. Auxiliary Bishops and Vicars General.
- b. Cathedral Canons or Diocesan Consultors.
- c. Rector of the Major Diocesan Seminary.
- d. Episcopal Vicars and Vicars Forane.
- e. Duly elected Deputy from every Collegial Church.
- f. Parish Priests of the Synod City site.
- g. Duly elected Parish Priest from every rural Vicariate.
- h. Governing Abbots.
- i. Superior of every clerical religious Institute in the Diocese, designated by the Provincial, unless the Provincial House proper is situated within the Diocese and the Provincial himself prefer to personally attend the Synod.

#### 2. Members According to Discretion

Primarily depending on the nature of the concrete Synodal agenda items and the prudential judgement of the Local (Arch)Bishop, other members may be invited to the Synod such as the following expressly mentioned by law by way of examples: all Canons, Parish Priests, Religious Superiors and members of the Diocesan Clergy.

On the principle that an (arch)diocesan SYNOD is an assembly of the representative People of God, subject to the discretion of the same Local (Arch)Bishop, the following may also be invited to attend a SYNOD: lay religious Superiors in the Diocese, Rectors or Presidents of Catholic Universities and Colleges, Rector of the Diocesan Minor Seminary and Rectors of non-diocesan Major Seminaries in the Diocese, Diocesan Major Seminarians, Papal Awardees and the like, Presidents of Mandated Catholic Organizations, Parish Council Presidents of their equivalent, Civil Government Officials, Leaders of Basic Christian Communities and others.

**Notanda:**

Unless otherwise provided for in the instrument of invitation to the SYNOD, membership herein according to discretion carries the right to a consultative vote equal to that in favor of synodal members according to law. It is however a well established principle that there is but one synodal legislator, viz., the Local (Arch) Bishop.

**D. SUBJECT MATTER:**

An (arch)diocesan SYNOD should be clear and specific as to the concrete agenda items it aims to deliberate and pronounce upon as warranted by the circumstances of time and place, suggested by duly recognized sources, approved and/or determined by the Local (Arch)Bishop — but within the framework of Common Law always.

Synodal subject matters of deliberations and pronouncements may be conveniently titled under such generic headings:

1. Worship. Formation. Services.
2. General Policies. Persons. Sacraments. Temporalities. Procedures. Discipline.
3. (Arch)diocesan Organization. Diocesan Clergy. Clerical and Lay Religious. Diocesan Seminarians. Laity. Worship. Education. Missions. Communications Media. Ecumenical Affairs. Community Affairs. Temporal Affairs. Church and State Relation.

**Notanda:**

The nature and number of Synodal Commissions will depend on the nature and number of the duly determined synodal agenda items either under general headings as above said or under more limited or more specific titles if so desired, v.g., Catechetics, Pastoral Program, Parish Organization, Clerical Discipline, Youth Program, Family Life, Lay Apostolate, Ministries, and the like.

The significance and impact in time of a SYNOD largely depend on the determination or choice of its subject matter and the deliberative process made thereupon. To ask the right questions on the right issues is a salutary synodal guiding principle.

**E. PROCEDURES:**

An (arch)diocesan SYNOD usually follows four basic procedural steps, through decretal measures: Decree of Convocation. Decree of Formal Opening. Decree of Promulgation. Decree of Conclusion.

**1. Decree of Convocation:**

This instrument carries the general objective or goal of the projected SYNOD, specifies the place (the Cathedral as a rule) and time of the SYNOD celebration, and mentions in general lines the title for synodal membership.

Other Decrees immediately follow: Decree on the Constitution of Synodal Commissions. Decree on the Constitution of Synodal Procedures. Decree on the Constitution of Synodal Officials.

- a. **Synodal Commissions:** The instrument lists down the particular Commissions, usually preceded by a General Commission-Secretariat, with the Chairman, Members and Secretaries thereof specified.
- b. **Synodal Procedures:** The instrument determines the method or mechanics to be adopted on how the synodal inquiries, deliberations and votations shall be conducted particularly by the Commissions and the Synodal Members.
- c. **Synodal Officials:** The instrument names the persons duly charged with specific functions during General and Solemn Synodal Sessions, viz., the Synodal Promoter, the Scrutator(s), Notary (Notaries), Ceremonial Master (arrangements and liturgy).

**2. Decree of Formal Opening:**

This instrument carries the declaration that, everything thus being duly prepared, the SYNOD is formally opened with a Solemn Session — which may be followed by other Solemn Sessions prior to the closing one — on the date, time and place designated.

During the Solemn Sessions(s), aside from the confirmation or formal approval of the Synodal produce/recommendations by the Local (Arch) Bishop, this same Synodal Authority may solicit also the approval of his proposed or opted Consultors, Synodal Examiners and Synodal Judges by the Synod Members as provided by law — not unless other measures are already provided for locally, particularly with reference to the Consultative Board of the local (Arch)Bishop.

**3. Decree of Promulgation:**

This instrument carries two main content items, viz., the mandate to release to the public the documental produce of the

Synod as approved by the Local (Arch)Bishop, and the specification of the date when it would actually become effective.

#### 4. Decree of Conclusion:

This instrument simply carries the statement declaring the Synod formally closed, together with suitable lines of gratitude to God and His People for their prayers/participation, and other appropriate exhortations relative to the synodal pronouncements.

#### Notanda:

The determination of Synodal Procedures, method or mechanics to be observed by the synodal members during their particular and general sessions constitutes a very important feature in the orderliness of the deliberations and in ascertaining the true mind of the majority when votes are cast.

#### F. WORKING SCHEMA:

An (arch)diocesan SYNOD may adopt the following simple but also effective Working Schema wherein the Synodal Commissions play the key role once the synodal subject matter or agenda items for deliberations and pronouncements have already been duly established:

##### 1. Commission to Members:

All Synodal Commissions send questionnaire on their respective assigned subject matter directly to the individual Synodal Members. The responses are accordingly evaluated and the Commissions in accord thereto prepare their respective drafts.

#### Notanda:

The Commissions may send further clarifying questionnaires to the individual Synodal Members if so desired and deemed convenient for the better preparation of the draft.

##### 2. Commissions to Session:

All Synodal Commissions one after another present their respective drafts to the Synodal Members gathered in particular or general (plenary) sessions as the case may be, for their votes of approval, rejection or amendment, until a majority affirmative vote (preferably two thirds at least) is obtained.

**Notanda:**

The Commissions would do well to qualify or specify their drafts with "First", "Second", "Third", etc., etc, in the event that successive drafts are prepared pursuant to the mind or vote of the Synodal Members in session.

**3. Commissions to Local (Arch)Bishop:**

All Synodal Commissions submit the drafts duly passed by the Synodal Members gathered in session, to the Local (Arch)-Bishop for his consideration and confirmation as the case may be.

**Notanda:**

The Commissions should regularly consult with the Local (Arch)Bishop in the preparation of the draft(s) to also know his mind on the agenda item concerned. The formal confirmation of the drafts or synodal documental produce by the Local (Arch)-Bishop may be done during the Solemn Session(s) of the Synod.

**G. SYNODAL PRODUCE:**

An (arch)diocesan SYNOD is usually expected to have and issue documental produce in line with the leadership-direction given it by the Local (Arch)Bishop possibly with the advice of his Council or Consultative Board.

Such documental produce can be mainly either educative in nature or normative in content — or a happy combination of both, in which case, the documents would first contain general (doctrinal) declaration of principles followed by particular norms of action, and ended at times with recommendations for future reference or feasibility study.

It is also quite possible that the SYNOD would see the necessity or convenience of creating or establishing new offices or functions, committees or departments in one or more (arch)diocesan pastoral endeavors. The pertinent synodal documental produce could carry such items by way of ordinances.

After the II Vatican Council, there is a distinct trend noticed in (Arch)Diocesan SYNODS to produce eminently pastoral documents with both ecclesiological and eschatological features that provide the premises of their normative contents which are reduced to essentials.

**H. SYNODAL TIME TABLE:**

An (arch)diocesan SYNOD would do well to follow as closely as possible a predetermined time table or schedule from its formal opening to the solemn closing: sufficient time allotments are given and observed in various basic steps of the opted working schema.

The synodal schedule should allow time as well for conferences by experts in subject matter for deliberation, sufficient dissemination of printed materials, and even spiritual renewal days for the Synodal Members if this be desired particularly prior to discussion and deliberation on difficult synodal agenda items that may acutely divide the said members during particular or general sessions.

Each step in the Synodal Time Table according to schedule is definitely a contributing factor to the ultimate goal and objective of the SYNOD in accord with the keynote address of the Local (Arch)Bishop during its formal opening and as generically expressed in the Decree of Convocation.