

Synod Report
Diocese of Sindhudurg

BRIEF PROFILE OF THE DIOCESE

Diocese	:Sindhudurg
Bishop	: Most Rev. Dr. Anthony Alwyn Fernandes Barreto
Total Population	: 53, 65,132
Catholic Population	: 17,881
Languages	: Konkani, Marathi& English

The Sindhudurg Diocese covers an area of 21,099 square kilometres, consisting of the entire Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts, including Kolhapur district (excluding Kolhapur city). It is located in the south-west (Konkan) region of Maharashtra state. The diocese was carved out from the Pune Diocese and inaugurated on July 5, 2005 during the tenure of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. The Diocese of Sindhudurg is known to be a missionary diocese and is home to 30 parishes and substations. Owing to steady migrations from Goa, over a period of 200 years, the cultural identity of the people of the diocese is Goan. The roots of the ethnic traditions, customs, religious customs, including the language prevalent here can be traced to Goa.

Language: Marathi, Konkani and English, are the languages used in the diocesan territory. For Catholics, the language spoken at home and in the parish community is Konkani; Marathi is spoken for administrative purposes.

Groups Consulted: The following groups were consulted during the consultation phase of the synod. Efforts were made by the parish priests and parish synod core groups to reach out to all people:

The numbers in the chart below, show those who participated in the pre-consultation training sessions (1 to 8) and in the consultation phase (9 to 18).

Sr No	Groups Consulted	Numbers participated
1	Diocesan Priests	15
2	Religious Priests	9
3	Religious Women	26
4	South Deanery	61
5	North Deanery	44
6	Our Lady of Milagris, Cathedral Parish	32
7	Kolhapur Deanery	73
8	Ratnagiri Deanery	37
9	Parish consultation	26
10	Catholic schools	13
11	NGO Directors Consultation	10
12	School going children	650
13	Diocesan Youth Consultation	45
14	Parish Priests & Coordinators	28
15	Seminarians	9
16	Synod Consultation for Religious Women	17
17	Synod Consultation for Religious Priests	14
18	Synod Consultation for Diocesan Priests	23

PHASES OF THE SYNOD

Inauguration: On 17 October, 2021, all of the faithful in the diocese joined in for the opening ceremony of the synod at Our Lady of Milagris Cathedral. The people, led by their parish priests, flocked to the Cathedral from the far-ends of the diocese, travelled for hours, to join in the inauguration program. It began with a brief talk by the Convener of the Synod. He explained in some detail, the objective of the synod, including other dynamics like the process and phases.

Following the key-note address by the convener, the inaugural Eucharist was concelebrated by Most Rev. Alwyn Barreto, the Bishop of Sindhudurg Diocese, with the entire presbyterate of the diocese. In his homily, Bishop Barreto spoke about the importance of the synod and urged everyone present to participate enthusiastically in the synod consultations, which ensued in the following months. He also encouraged the priests to ensure that every group participates actively in the consultations, so that the Church listens to their voice and understands their situation.

Pre-consultation phase: A synod committee of 24 members which comprised senate members, religious women and lay persons was formed. An executive committee, which included the curia members along with two religious women (women representatives) was also formed. In the weeks that followed, the convener set up a 'diocesan synod task force' which included two more priests, Fr Cajetan Rodrigues and Fr Amit D'Britto, OFM Cap, who planned a series of intensive training programs for the different groups leaders (diocesan priests, religious priests, sisters, lay people) from all over the diocese.

The synod prayer cards were distributed among the faithful in the three languages of the diocese. Flex banners on the theme of the Synod were designed (in English and Konkani) and displayed in the premises of the churches and the ecclesiastical institutes, to raise synod awareness.

The objective of these training sessions was to train the respective collaborators on how to carry out the consultation process in phases. The task force also visited every deanery in the diocese to educate the parish synod core group (PSCG) and parish synod committee (PSC) members on how to fruitfully execute the consultation process.

In cases where groups like the school employees couldn't physically attend the training sessions at the diocesan pastoral centre, they were accommodated in the sessions via online platforms, so that they did not miss out on anything.

The team made every effort to ensure that the objective of the synod was clearly understood by everyone and they also guided them on how to carry out the consultations smoothly, paying extra attention to those who live in remote areas and have no means of transport.

For the advent season, a synod awareness campaign, comprising activities like inter-parish carol singing, inter-parish crib competition, synodal prayer recital competition for children, essay competition were organised. All of these activities added a bit of excitement to the synodal process and encouraged the people to read more about the synod, so that they could fruitfully participate in the consultation phase.

Consultation phase: The parish synod core group (PSCG), under the leadership of the parish priest, meticulously organised the consultation phase of the synod in two parts; one, to create

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+ Alwyn Barreto

awareness among the lay faithful, helping them to understand the importance of their participation in the synod and what was expected from them. The second part was the main consultation phase.

Depending on the size of the parish, the consultation was planned sector (wado) wise or based on existing SCC groups; announcements were made during the Sunday Masses asking the people to participate in large numbers. Thus, every family was involved in the entire consultation phase.

The diocesan monthly magazine based its January issue on the theme of the synod. The published content offered in-depth knowledge in vernacular languages. It explained the purpose of the synod to the faithful and a questionnaire was attached. Copies of this magazine were distributed to every family in the diocese.

Group discussions were organised, with questionnaires shared, on the five different themes of the synod. Moderators were appointed to ensure that everyone got a chance to speak during the consultations.

Depending on the size of each sector, it was decided to either host the consultation for one day or two days so that the participation was 100%. The youth and children had separate consultations to ensure that their voices would be listened to. The children wrote essays to express their opinions while the youth made creative presentations.

Consultations were planned for school employees, including people of other faiths and other Christian denominations. However, in our diocese, there is a wafer-thin population of Christians belonging to new religious movements or other churches; in most parishes it is nil, but in those parishes where their presence is marked, efforts were made to include them in the consultation, which was well received by them.

Following the parish level consultation phase, a series of consultations were organised for the diocesan priests, religious priests, religious women and seminarians. Those seminarians who were not present in the diocese, owing to their academic pursuits, were asked to write and send in their views on the synod. Besides these groups, a consultation was organised for social workers and beneficiaries; another consultation was organised on a diocesan level for the youth, where they freely expressed themselves about the situation in the Church and their expectations.

Post-consultation phase: Over a period of three days, a drafting committee of nine people (one priest, four nuns, three lay people and one seminarian) along with the convener carefully studied the reports from each parish and group and synthesised all the reports. The challenge was to make sure that all important issues and the findings reported were covered. The committee decided to formulate two reports; one synthesised for the synod and another longer version for the diocese. They will be used as a launch pad to make our diocese more participative and to ensure that everyone feels that they belong to one family, where their voice and opinion matters.

Concluding session: On 27 April, 2022, a day-long program was organised wherein once again, all the faithful gathered together, to reflect on the findings of the synod exercise. The report was presented to all those who were present and their reflections were sought and discussed, and presented at the final review of the Synodal process. The program concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist by Bishop Alwyn Barreto.

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THE OVERALL JOURNEY

The consultation took place on the following five themes of the synod:

- 1) Companions on the Journey and Sharing Responsibility for our Common Mission.
- 2) Listening and Speaking Out.
- 3) Authority & Participation, Discerning & Deciding and Forming Ourselves in Synodality.
- 4) Dialogue within the Church, with other Christian Denominations, Other Religions and Society.
- 5) Liturgical Celebration.

Theme 1: Companions on the Journey and Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission

Every individual member of the Church is unique. Each of them is blessed with talents that can be used for the common mission of the Church. Therefore, the Church needs to value every one of its members and their contribution.

Lay people support the church with their goodwill in different ways. In this way, they join in the process of working towards the common mission of the Church. Priests, sisters (religious women), seminarians actively join in and share the responsibilities of the common mission. People of other faiths also join in, supporting community activities in different ways. Efforts have been made to reach out to the poor and marginalized by providing them financial aid and food provisions. Often, priests and sisters have spent time listening to their difficulties and empathising with them.

Liturgical celebrations play a pivotal role in bringing the entire Christian community together. All the faithful collaborate with one another in organising and participating in church activities. At these events, one can experience how the local church walks together towards the common goal, in spite of challenges.

However, there are individuals who seek attention through aggressive behaviour, which is harmful for the welfare of the community and is a counter witness, hence they are excluded. The other group who are left out are those who truthfully voice their opinions and are forthright in their approach towards community issues, and thus are often not appreciated by those in authority.

Challenges like lack of funds, little community service, lack of human resources are some of the challenges that hinder communitarian growth. Another challenge is the lack of openness to authentic liturgical formation by both the clergy and laity. Other challenges are related to belief in culturally influenced mythological traditions, which once again prevent growth. Personality issues like misunderstanding, hatred, jealousy also stunt growth.

Evangelisation is the most neglected area in the mission of the Church of Sindhudurg. There is no outreach to those who have left the Church, to people of other faiths, to youth and children. The proclamation of the Word of God is another area of neglect. Clericalism has left drastic effects on missionary activities, and come in the way of co-responsibility of the laity.

In the political segment, there have been initiatives to make the voters aware of their right to vote, and make a conscious choice to support candidates of their liking. On the social outreach front, social workers are supported in different ways, such as felicitating them

publicly at parish and diocesan events and sometimes providing financial aid for their social initiatives.

Over the course of the pandemic, the use of social media [YouTube, Facebook, Whatsapp] grew exponentially spreading the message of the Gospel, including online Masses. However, these initiatives need to be sustained and even increased, so that the Gospel message impacts all, but especially the younger generation, motivating them to undertake community service.

Theme2: Listening and Speaking Out

The local Church has a fundamental responsibility to listen to everyone, without compromise and without giving special importance to certain people owing to their socio-economic status.

The laity, as well as sisters, seminarians and youth have a strong desire to express themselves in the Church. But, fear holds them back. The clergy have a responsibility and a duty to address this fear and instead encourage these groups to express themselves freely in the parish. Challenges like gender bias, revengeful attitudes, egocentric actions, power exercised by dominant groups, need to be addressed. The local Church needs to recognise the significant role played by these groups in the decision-making process and they need to be encouraged. The authorities need to listen in private to those who are unable to express themselves in public.

Media is a powerful weapon which can be used to build the Church in modern times. As Catholics, we have a prime duty to use the media responsibly, which includes verifying news before sharing it, especially because of the prevalent fake news culture. Over the past years, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, we have witnessed the increased use of social media in the Church.

Theme 3: Authority & Participation, Discerning & Deciding and Forming Ourselves in Synodality

Owing to the lack of laity formation, lay ministries in parishes, though existent, are not taken seriously. In the context of the Diocese of Sindhudurg, there is a paucity of lay ministries and they are not given enough responsibility. By developing lay ministries through collaborative effort, we will arrive at a unified community, with a sense of equality and shared responsibility across all age groups. Authority has sometimes been exercised by the clergy in the parish in a prudent manner, at other times based on whims and fancies. In truth, decision making bodies play an important role in fostering healthy community life. However, when personal politics become rife, it prevents the young from speaking out and becomes a strong hindrance to growth. Irresponsible behaviour on the part of the authorities, like humiliating people in public or in private, leads to division. In such instances, there is no forum for the laity to raise their voices against the injustice done to them. There is always room for fraternal correction when it is given, but it must not violate the dignity of persons, irrespective of whether they are clerics, religious women or laity. On the whole, since authority is usually reserved only for the clergy and the laity have no proper knowledge of the church's teachings and functions, they have to acquiesce in decisions made by the individual clergy, whether right or wrong.

Theme 4: Dialogue within the Church, with other Christian denominations, Other Religions & Society

We need to focus on the importance of dialogue within the Church first and then expand it beyond the walls of our Church. There is a gap at the diocesan level, where there is no dialogue among the clergy, religious men and women and the lay people.

In the Diocese of Sindhudurg, the geographical dynamics pose a challenge. The lay faithful from the northern area of the diocese (Ratnagiri and Kolhapur deaneries) are excluded from major diocesan events, owing to the distance they have to travel and the unsatisfactory state of public transportation. Although efforts are made to see that they do participate in the diocesan events, dialogue between these particular deaneries and the diocese needs to be strengthened.

The new religious movements exist in a few parishes, having made strides in the recent past. Many have left the Catholic Church for various reasons; lack of financial help, anger towards the priests, a sense of abandonment, inter-faith marriages and ignorance of the teachings of the Church and its traditions.

In such a scenario, our schools are an excellent avenue for our children to learn to co-exist, irrespective of religious background. Children joyfully participate in major festivities of all faiths, without any bias. They can become the messengers of dialogue and peace. Social outreach has always been an important ministry because the Church has served humanity irrespective of caste or creed, especially during the recent pandemic. It offers us another forum where we can dialogue with other faiths.

Theme 5: Liturgical Celebration

The celebration of the liturgy is the source and summit of everything we do as a community. The liturgy nourishes our souls, strengthens us and brings us healing. Liturgical celebrations bring people closer to one another and help them to grow in the knowledge of Christ and spur them on to mission.

However, it was felt that proper liturgical formation is required for the laity, to help them understand the various aspects of the liturgy, including the outward signs used and the need for a good interior disposition. Activities such as prayer services, bible study, retreats, catechism classes are seen as unifying activities that enable better participation in the liturgy.

Lay participation in the liturgy is promoted through the various liturgical ministries. However, in some areas, language can become a barrier since the Mass readings are read in different languages. Liturgical music is another area which needs proper attention, proper use of musical instruments and proper formation for choir members etc., with regular practices, so that they understand that they are singing with a parish community and not performing for an audience.

Liturgical celebrations also offer us lessons enabling us to lead a good life filled with love, unity, peace, collaboration with others. These celebrations can give us a better understanding of God's will in our personal lives and help us to answer his call to either marriage or religious or priestly life. These celebrations are also an opportunity to unite families when challenged by climate changes. The priests should make efforts to listen to confessions

+ *Awyn Baret*

periodically and help the people to prepare themselves spiritually, especially during the important liturgical seasons (advent and lent).

The Word of God augments our Christian way of life and makes us aware that we are all God's children, while giving us a sense of belonging to one Christian family. It also sustains our missionary way of life, including our lay ministries. In our diocese, efforts have been made to celebrate the Eucharist in remote mission areas where people crave for the sacraments.

Veneration of the Word of God is promoted through advance planning for the Eucharist, getting people more involved and training lectors and cantors. Well prepared homilies, the use of audio-visuals even during the homilies, can enhance the effectiveness of the liturgy. The use of regional languages during the liturgy is important so that the people can fully understand what is going on.

Special attention must be given to homilies, which should be short and within the ten-minute frame. A homily needs to be used as a means to transform the lives of the people; to break the Word of God with practical life tips and not used as a weapon against people to blackmail the lay people emotionally into donating money to the Church, to denigrate the laity because of their lack of participation in parish life or to threaten them in the name of God by forcing them to obey the clergy. Sometimes, knowledge gained in the confessional is used indiscreetly in the sermon. It gives a wrong impression.

Priests need to introspect on their inner attitude towards the liturgy. The questions that can be asked are, "How does my spirit respond to the Liturgy?", "Is my attitude right towards the liturgy?", "Am I open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit?", "Am I doing it for the greater glory of God or myself?" The liturgy should not be used as a pedestal to promote oneself, because the focus of the liturgy is God alone and all our actions, rituals are directed towards God. Therefore, besides the external preparation, intense internal preparations need to be done like spending time in prayer, understanding and internalising the text of the readings

The laity will participate in the liturgy when they are empowered with responsibilities and motivated by encouragement. Special catechesis on the Eucharist should be introduced, wherein the laity are made aware of the meaning and value of the Eucharist, teachings of the church and its life-changing power. The celebration of the sacraments, novenas and other devotions, are initiatives which draw the parish family together as one people of God.

FINDINGS DISCOVERED DURING THE CONSULTATION

Theme 1: Companions on the Journey and Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission

Concerted efforts must be made to overcome challenges like clericalism, gender bias, jealousy and groupism, because these challenges divide the community and suffocate its growth.

Love and unity provide oxygen for a healthy parish community; therefore, our sense of unity, harmony, togetherness need to expand beyond the realm of self, families and parishes. We all have a duty to connect with one another and maintain harmonious relations. Therefore, harmonious relations need to be fostered between clergy and laity; initiatives like visiting families, sharing a meal, for instance, could become a means to sort out differences, clear

+ *Alwyn Barwell*

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misunderstandings, bring reconciliation and foster peace. There is a need to reach out to those who have left the Church and dialogue with them.

Sports and cultural activities help in the all-round formation of youth and children, owing to the lessons they learn from them. Other activities like career guidance and employment fairs for youth need to be organised to help them in the choice of a good career, including awareness about civil and defence services.

In our country where Christians are a minority and need proper representation in the government, Christians must be consciously informed, encouraged, and supported to play an active part in the political arena, especially in the electoral process.

The goal of sharing responsibility will be realized only when the laity are empowered by the clergy to join and share the responsibility of working towards the common mission of the Church. A healthy de-centralisation of parish functions is key to the task of sharing responsibility. The role of sisters is often limited to only decorating altars, acting in the place of sacristans, teaching in schools, taking catechism classes, social work and some representation in the parish council. Rarely do we find a deeper involvement of sisters in critical decision-making bodies of the parish and diocese or in opportunities to share the Word of God. Therefore, sisters need to be empowered to fruitfully reach out to the laity and offer spiritual formation. At the diocesan level, liturgical and sacramental formation programs need to be conducted for priests and sisters.

We need to focus on transforming our local church into a missionary model, rather than an administrative one, which means that we need more involvement of all Christ's faithful at all levels of the parish.

Theme2: Listening and Speaking Out

Considering that our Small Christian Communities (wados) are an integral part of the parish, their voices need to be listened to. The area leaders need to foster a good relationship between the parish and its members. They also need to be empowered in decision making for the welfare of the community.

The role of the secular media is crucial, especially during these times of uncertainty, where the right message needs to be given. Therefore, a collaborative effort must be made by the laity and clergy to address issues concerning the local church and secular media; dioceses need to appoint a competent spokesperson(s) as a single point of contact for the media.

Theme 3: Authority & Participation, Discerning & Deciding and Forming Ourselves in Synodality

Under this theme, discernment is the key word. It empowers the communities to exercise authority and participate fully. In relation to lay ministries in the diocese of Sindhudurg, a uniform policy needs to be mandated, which must be the fruit of a joint effort by both the laity and the clergy. The clergy should also abide by this uniform policy without keeping the people in the dark. A failure to exercise the rules and regulations on the part of clergy should be dealt with by taking proper action.

+ *Apwyr Baneh*
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Co-responsibility will become a reality when the prevailing mentality of the community and clergy changes and becomes open to change. This includes, accurate planning, transparent financial systems and taking the laity into confidence in all parish functions.

A healthy decentralisation process is required to share authority and responsibility, which will foster teamwork in the exercise of authority and help the parish to take community centric decisions. The crab mentality needs to be rooted out. More importance should be given to spiritual growth of the people. The other responsibilities such as finance, different cells in the parishes, property related matters, infrastructure and repairs etc. could be shared with the laity so that the clergy can focus on the spiritual growth of the community.

Theme 4: Dialogue within the Church, with other Christian denominations, Other Religions & Society

Before an outreach outside the Church, authentic and healthy dialogue is key to closing gaps and fostering healthy relationships between the clergy and lay faithful; between the bishop and presbyterate, including sisters and laity.

As Catholics, we have a moral duty to reach out to our protestant sisters and brothers, to understand why they have left the Church and adopt practices which will foster healing. Common prayer services, agape meals could be some ways to foster this unity. Cultivating a sense of respect is the need of the hour. Once again, authentic dialogue plays a crucial role in this area.

Living in a multi-religious society, we also have a fundamental duty to reach out to people of other faiths, especially during festive celebrations; we also need to cultivate a sense of respect when we communicate with them. Therefore, the laity needs to be catechised on the importance of interreligious dialogue. Given the history of our country, we need to avoid divisive forces which divide communities on the basis of religion. Considering that Catholics are seen as peace-loving citizens, we need to assume the role of ambassadors for peace, and create communal harmony in society. To achieve this, diocesan level forums need to be constituted to resolve issues and sort out differences.

Theme 5: Liturgical Celebration

Efforts need to be made to make sure that everyone participates in the Mass and we need to make room for the Holy Spirit to guide our liturgical life. The catechetical, hermeneutical or anthropological and apologetical systems should be made use of to explain the Word of God to the faithful.

Other dynamics include the use of audio visuals or short skits to explain Bible stories or Gospel messages to children. Considering that parents are the first catechists, adult faith formation will play a key role in this area. Special importance must be given to study of the Bible.

A diocesan liturgical commission comprising the clergy and the laity should be introduced. All liturgical guidelines need to be updated by this commission, which would have the responsibility to form the laity liturgically. Importance must be given to the proper method of celebrating the liturgy without diluting its spirit. Considering the long distances between those who stay in remote areas and the main churches, special emphasis needs to be given to the celebration of the Eucharist in SCCs (wadós).

+ *Alwyn Barrett*
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Awareness needs to be raised about the role of recurring sacraments (Reconciliation & Eucharist) in the Catholic way of life. The importance of other sacraments also needs to be taught to the laity.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SYNODAL PROCESS

The diocesan synod team task force employed a comprehensive strategic approach in organizing the entire synodal process; right from planning the inaugural mass and program to organising training sessions across the diocese; every aspect was well charted.

The team made sure that the parish group leaders were trained to help create an inclusive and free atmosphere, so that everyone could participate in the synod, without fear or reservation. Preparations were meticulously made in advance, to ensure that the peripheries of the diocese were reached out to. The training program was common for all, with the main goal being, putting across to the faithful, the reason and purpose of the synod. The awareness programs for the group leaders of the parishes facilitated this process in the consultation phase.

Priests, religious, seminarians and the laity were enthusiastic about the synod, once they understood the entire purpose and process. The laity welcomed the opportunity to freely express themselves without any reservation. A period of two months was allotted for the main consultation phase and the parish synod groups ensured that the deadlines were met, including that of submitting the reports.

REVIEW OF THE JOURNEY

Except one parish, all parishes joined in the synod; intensive efforts were made to include all parishes, however, only one parish could not participate fully. The church leaders and *fabrikars* (community leaders) played a strong role in inviting every parishioner to the consultation, so the participation was 100%.

For the laity, the entire Synodal process was a breath of fresh air, since they could express themselves freely and be listened to. People of other faiths and protestant denominations were invited to participate and were impressed by the purpose of the synod and the freedom they had to express themselves. It came as a surprise to these brothers and sisters of ours that the clergy reached out to them and listened to their concerns and suggestions. The rapportage of their opinions gave them a sense of confidence that the Church was serious about listening to their voice and valued their opinion.

There is a strong desire for change in the Church, especially because some of the faithful, especially the younger generation are drifting away. Today it is a great challenge to us to dialogue with the many Catholics who have already left the Church, for one reason or another.

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