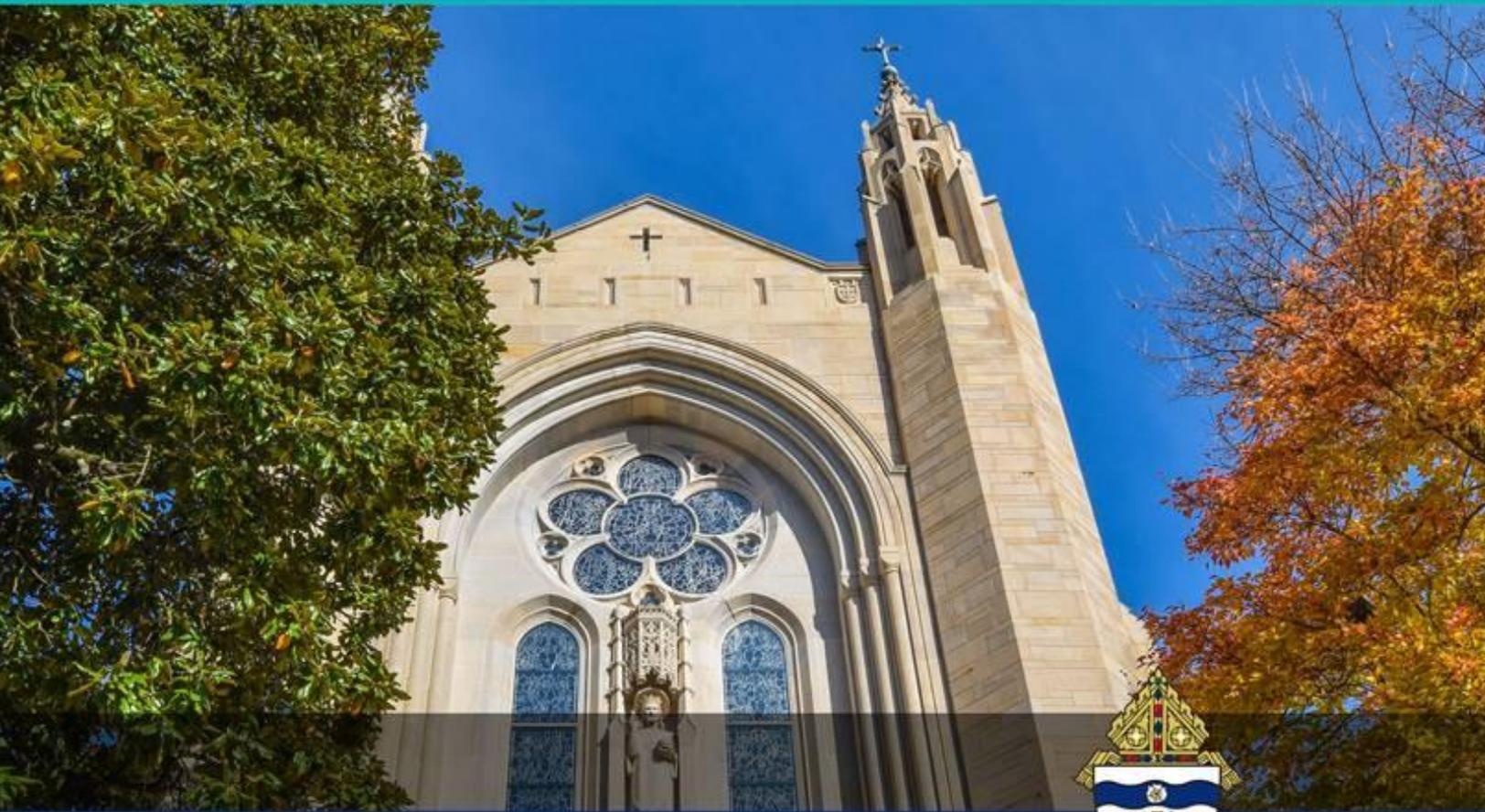




For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission



Facilitator's
Guide

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOECESIS OF
ATLANTA

Facilitator's Guide

For pastors, clergy, parish staff, and other ministry/apostolate leaders and groups especially those designated to facilitate a parish/group prayer

The Synod on Synodality

*For a Synodal Church: Communion,
Participation, and Mission*

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Mt 18:20)

... We recall that the purpose of the Synod, and therefore of this consultation, 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...”

Preparatory Document, no. 32 (quote from Pope Francis, Address at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People [October 3, 2018])

* Adapted from the Parish Synod Resources developed by the Archdiocese of Washington.

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Introduction: Journeying Together

The entire Catholic Church is called to participate in the upcoming Synod of Bishops entitled: “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.*”

Synod is a Greek word (*synodos*) meaning a meeting or assembly in customary usage. The two Greek words that make up Synod are *syn* meaning “together” and *hodos* meaning “way or journey.” At its core, synod, and the more recent term synodality, refer to being *together on the way or journeying together*.

Pope Francis has called the entire people of God to journey together. This Synod is not just another meeting with oral presentations and written reports. This Synod is a **process of journeying together**. As the Church, we will listen to each other, dialogue with each other, pray together, discern together and make decisions together for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

In his homily at the opening Mass for the Synod, the Pope encouraged us to begin the synodal process “by asking ourselves — all of us, pope, bishops, priests, religious and laity — whether we, the Christian community, embody this 'style' of God, who travels the paths of history and shares in the life of humanity.” Our Holy Father is asking us to “walk on the same road as others, living out the ‘three verbs’ that characterize a synod: to encounter, listen and discern.”

This process is founded in prayer, because the synod is “a journey of spiritual discernment that takes place in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God.” Discernment is what lights the way and guides the synod, “preventing it from becoming a church convention, a study group or a political congress, but rather a grace-filled event, a process of healing guided by the Holy Spirit. Like he asked the rich man in the Gospel reading, Jesus is asking everyone to empty ourselves, to free ourselves from all that is worldly, including our inward-looking and outworn pastoral models, and to ask ourselves what it is that God wants to say to us in this time and the direction in which he wants to lead us.” (Pope Francis, October 10, 2021).

History of Synods in the Catholic Church

The Church journeying together in a synod is an ancient practice in Christianity rooted in Scripture. In the Acts of the Apostles (chapter 15), we hear about Peter and Paul being “welcomed by the church, as well as by the apostles and the presbyters” (Acts 15:4) to listen, discuss and discern together how to reconcile Jewish and Gentile religious practices. It was after much listening, discussion and prayerful silence listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit, that the early Church discerned how to proclaim the Gospel to all people.

Several Church Fathers wrote about synodality in the early Church (c. 30 AD - c. 500 AD), including St. John Chrysostom who wrote that the “Church and Synod are synonymous” (Commentary on Psalm 149; see *Preparatory Document*, no. 11). Local churches gathered together with their bishops to discuss matters related to their local situation throughout the first millennium. This local practice grew to provincial (regional) and universal (ecumenical) councils that would gather bishops, clergy, religious and laity together.

The practice of synodality continued into the second millennium, even as decision-making was reserved more and more to bishops and the Holy See. The Second Vatican Council, an ecumenical council, emphasized the communion of the Church and reclaimed the image of the Church as the pilgrim people of God journeying together towards holiness. “...There is but one people of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly and not an earthly nature. For all the faithful scattered throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit...” (*Lumen Gentium* no. 13).

Pope St. Paul VI created the modern structure of the Synod of Bishops in 1965 after the close of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Paul wanted to ensure that the collaboration and dialogue between bishops, theologians, religious and the lay faithful continued after the Second Vatican Council. Since 1967, the Church has held a Synod of Bishops roughly every two to three years to examine an issue affecting the Church. At each of these synods since 1967, bishops have consulted with members of the clergy, religious and the laity. In fact, at these Synods, priests, deacons, religious and laity have been present and have addressed the bishops and Pope. While the “new” aspect of this current Synod, “*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*,” is asking each diocesan bishop to listen and consult with his flock on the theme of synodality, the synodal process of listening and consulting with the entire people of God is an ancient practice of the Church.

What is Synodality?

Throughout this process, we hear the terms: synod, synodality, and synodal process. What do these words mean? Do they mean the same thing?

A helpful short definition of the Synod of Bishops is a gathering of bishops that

1. Fosters closer unity between the bishops and Pope
2. Provides counsel to the Pope on matters of faith and morals and discipline of the Church
3. Studies questions concerning the Church in the world (c.f. *Code of Canon Law* c. 342).

Voting in the Synod of Bishops is limited to bishops present at the synod gathering. However, clergy, men and women religious, theologians, catechists, canon lawyers and lay experts all participate in the synod gathering with bishops by providing their counsel.

Synodality and the synodal process are not a gathering or meeting of bishops, nor are they the administrative arm of the Church. Rather, synodality is the path and process of the Church as communion. It is the communion of all the baptized who are listening to each other, dialoguing with each other and praying together to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit as we all seek holiness and proclaim the Gospel. Synodality involves clergy, religious and laity listening and speaking, praying and discerning together and placing the hopes and concerns of the people of God in the hands and hearts of the bishops, who, united with the Pope, decide matters of faith and morals in order to preserve the faith and strengthen the Church throughout the world.

In a nutshell, referring to the Church as synodal recalls the basic truth that every baptized member is a subject or agent of evangelization, co-responsible for the Church's mission.

“Synodality, in this perspective, is much more than the celebration of ecclesial meetings and Bishops' assemblies, or a matter of simple internal administration within the Church; it is ‘the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* [way of living and being] of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission” (*Preparatory Document*, no. 10).

“In fact, this People, gathered together by its Pastors, adheres to the sacred deposit of the Word of God entrusted to the Church, perseveres constantly in

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the teaching of the Apostles, in fraternal communion, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer, ‘so that holding to, practicing, and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the Bishops and Faithful a single common effort’” (*Preparatory Document*, no. 13). Synodality and the synodal process are not about engaging others for the purpose of deciding matters through a parliamentary vote. Nor is the primary purpose of synodality to introduce democratic methods into the Church, where the majority determines how the Church will act. Synodality is also not about promulgating strategic plans or managing pastoral parish ministries through objectives. Synodality is about the entire people of God journeying together to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to become holy.

“The Pastors, established by God as ‘authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church,’ should not be afraid to listen to the Flock entrusted to them. The consultation of the People of God does not imply the assumption within the Church of the dynamics of democracy based on the principle of majority, because there is, at the basis of participation in every Synodal process, a shared passion for the common mission of evangelization and not the representation of conflicting interests. In other words, this is an ecclesial process that can only take place ‘at the heart of a hierarchically structured community.’ Every Synodal process, in which the Bishops are called to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church, not by themselves but by listening to the People of God, who ‘shares also in Christ’s prophetic office’ (LG, no. 12), is an evident form of that “journeying together” which makes the Church grow” (*Preparatory Document*, no. 14; see also *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12; CCC, nos. 91-93).

As we embark on this synodal process as the local Church of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, let us remember the words of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good” (1 Thes 5:19-21).

Timeline of the Synod

The global Synod, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*, is a process that Pope Francis launched in October 2021, and it will conclude with a meeting of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023 (the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops). A detailed timeline of the global Synod process is available on <https://www.synod.va/en.html>.

The timeline below highlights the Archdiocese of Atlanta's participation in the diocesan consultation phase of the Synod. Continued prayers and implementation will be ongoing.

Timeline of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta



**Prayer-Centered Listening Session
Outlines & Facilitator Scripts**
(Options 1 and 2)

Option 1: Saturday Half-Day Prayer-Centered Listening Session [3.15 hours]

General Outline

Below is a general outline for a Saturday morning half-day prayer-centered listening session. See detailed outline in the next page, including facilitator directions and a suggested script. The proposed **Questions for the Listening Sessions** can be found below in this guide.

The schedule below can be adapted according to context and circumstances. As much as possible, parishes and other groups are encouraged to preserve sufficient time for prayer and personal reflection, as well as adequate time for sharing, as indicated below.

Time Frame: 3 hours & 15 minutes

Format: Prayer and Small Group Discussion

8:30 a.m. optional hospitality & fellowship and check-in

9:00 a.m. – 9:10 a.m. Welcome, introduction and opening prayer

9:10 a.m. – 9:20 a.m. Overview of the synod process and participant ground rules

9:25 a.m. – 9:50 a.m. Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection
Participants should have the questions selected by the parish to ponder during this prayer time; they could write down any words or inspirations that they receive to share with their small groups. *Where possible, prayer and reflection before the Blessed Sacrament is encouraged.*

9:55 a.m. – 12:10 p.m. Small group sharing and dialogue
See proposed questions at the end of this kit

- Fundamental question(s) [25-30 min.]
- Supporting questions [90 min.]
- Prayer & concluding question [15-20 min.]

12:10 p.m. – 12:15 p.m. Conclusion and closing prayer

Detailed Outline & Script (Option 1 – Half Day)

Below, the facilitator will find a detailed outline for the Saturday half-day prayer-centered listening session. Regular font indicates directional information. *Italicized font* indicates a suggested script to help the facilitator conduct the meetings.

The role of the facilitator is very similar to that of a Master of Ceremonies (MC). The facilitator welcomes the participants and keeps track of the meeting, providing updates of the time devoted to each section (e.g., “*You have five more minutes for this section*”) and moving the group through the conversations in the time allotted.

Note before starting: the toolkit provides detailed set-up information for the room and layout. This script assumes the following items are at hand at minimum:

- One (1) set of small group note sheets and pen for each table with you
- Page of discussion questions for every person at each table
- If no projector/screen, you will need the Prayer for the Synod printed at each table

Before starting the session, please consult **Best Practices for Small Group Management** and the **Facilitator's Checklist** for the prayer-centered listening session found below in this guide.

8:30 a.m.

Optional hospitality, fellowship, and check-in (30 minutes) Greet people as they arrive. If possible, ask other team members' support in hospitality, greeting, offering people refreshments, using the opportunity for fellowship and placing people in their small groups.

9:00 a.m. – 9:10 a.m.

Welcome and introduction (2 minutes) Begin on time introducing the session, welcoming participants; introduce yourself to the participants and invite participants to introduce themselves to their fellow group members seated at their table. Be sure to introduce the pastor and any other parish clergy, religious or parish staff.

Opening prayer (5 minutes) Lead the opening prayer. If present, consider asking the pastor or deacon to lead or offer a blessing. If using the screen, please display the Prayer for the Synod, *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, or if available, use the prayer cards or the prayer printed in their guides.

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9:10 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.

Overview of synod process and participant ground rules (10 minutes) Say the following:

Pope Francis has called the entire People of God to journey together. We gather to listen, dialogue, and pray so that we can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. The “goal” of this journeying together is to be present with one another, to listen and learn with each other, and to grow closer to the Lord and his Church.

We have sent each person that registered a link to the participant’s guide, as an aid in facilitating our small group discussion, hoping that everyone is more familiar now with the themes related to synods in the Church, this present Synod, and the topic of synodality. If you did not have a chance to read it, please do so in the next few days so you can continue praying for this consultation.

The synod process involves active listening and prayerful discernment. Listening and discernment are at the heart of our prayer-centered listening session today.

*We will have 25 minutes for prayer and personal reflection **[give details of your place of prayer or of Adoration if available]**. The goal is for us to humble ourselves before the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to guide each of us in our reflection on the topics of consultation. May our hearts be open to the Holy Spirit’s inspirations. Remember Romans 8:26, “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”*

After our reflection time, we will gather back here to share in our small groups what we heard in our prayer time. As mentioned in the participant ground rules, remember to give your full attention to each other and to listen to the voice of God in your hearts. Listen for understanding by taking to heart what other people share. As we share, individuals will speak, one at a time, without interruption, while others listen. Everyone will have a chance to speak and, if you like, you may choose to pass. Remember, we are not correcting or critiquing each other but simply listening and sharing what’s on our hearts about the particular question at hand.

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If you have table moderators, mention:

Table moderators have been selected to help ensure that everyone has a chance to share in the small groups.

Then continue to select note takers (unless they have been pre-appointed):

Every small group will have a note taker; please take a moment to select a member of the group to serve as note taker for your group discussion.

Give the group a few minutes to name their note taker, and then invite assigned note takers to come forward to pick up the **Small Group Note Sheets** and pen.

Each of you has a copy of the topic to reflect and ponder on today; please proceed to the church/chapel [or give instructions to the place and mode of reflection] in silence. We will meet here again, in your small groups, at 9:55 am.

9:25 a.m. – 9:50 a.m.

Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection (15 minutes) Make sure you have printed out the questions to ponder. The parish/group can conduct this time of prayer and personal reflection in either the sanctuary, the chapel or the place determined for it. At the end of this period, invite participants to reconvene in their small groups:

It is time to go back to small groups. We will see you in the Hall at 9:55.

9:55 a.m. – 12:10 p.m.

Small Group sharing and dialogue – see proposed questions at the end of this kit.

Welcome back. Before we begin sharing with one another, I want to remind everyone that group members will take turns sharing their reflections, one at a time, without interruption, while other group members listen. The note taker will record reflections. Please keep your answers to 1-2 minutes per person. [If present: The table moderator will assist moving through each question.]

The Fundamental Question(s) [25-30 min.]

In your question guides, please start sharing about the areas you pondered on as outlined under the Fundamental Question

If available, display the guiding questions in the large screen, and say:

Pease feel free to share your thoughts in the small group; here are the questions on screen or use your papers for guidance. Your note taker will

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be recording an anonymous summary of your discussions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Allow 25-30 minutes for small group sharing. Please announce at the appropriate time:

You have five more minutes for this section.

Supporting Questions [90 min.]

Thanks to all. We are going to move now to sharing your thoughts on the supporting questions, outlined in your guides.

If available, display the guiding questions in the large screen, and say:

*Let's first share about **Listening & Discernment**. Please feel free to share your thoughts in the small group; here are the questions on screen or use your papers for guidance. Your note taker will be recording a summary of your discussions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.*

Allow 25-30 minutes for sharing, then change the questions if using a large screen and say:

*We are now to chat about **Co-Responsibility & Participation**. Please feel free to share your thoughts in the small group; here are the questions on screen or use your papers for guidance. Your note taker will be recording a summary of your discussions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.*

Allow 25-30 minutes for sharing, then change the questions if using a large screen and say:

*We are now to chat about **Prayer and Celebration**. Please feel free to share your thoughts in the small group; here are the questions on screen or use your papers for guidance. Your note taker will be recording a summary of your discussions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.*

- optional 5 minute break -

Prayer & Concluding Question [15-20 min.]

*Take 5-10 minutes to pray in silence with your small group, after invoking the Holy Spirit again through a "Come Holy Spirit" prayer or impromptu prayer. Then, from your small group sharing, **name one insight where you heard the voice of the Holy Spirit today, or share one insight that is on your heart after your time of prayer.***

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12:10 p.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Conclusion and closing prayer

If using the screen, please display the Prayer for the Synod, or if available, use the prayer cards or the prayer printed in their guides.

We've come to an end of our session. I would like to thank you all for sharing and listening. Let us pray together The Prayer for the Synod [or a Glory Be or an impromptu prayer of thanksgiving can also be prayed].

At the conclusion of prayer, say:

Note takers should bring their documentation to the front of the room. Again, we are very appreciative of your time and energy in participating in this prayer-centered listening session. The recorded comments from the groups will help the compilation of a parish summary report, which will contribute to the creation of the archdiocesan synthesis report. Two parish delegates will be attending [or have attended] an archdiocesan regional gathering along with clergy, religious and other lay representatives. Finally, if you have not done so already, please take time to complete the online Synod survey and encourage others to do so as well.

Show the synod webpage to remind everyone where the survey can be accessed: archatl.com/synod.

We would like to ask you please to keep the Synod process in your prayers, so that our Church may grow in living synodality, and that all of us will continue listening to the Holy Spirit as he guides us in knowing and getting closer to Our Lord. Enlightened by the Word of God and united in prayer, we will be able to discern the processes to seek God's will and pursue the pathways to which God calls us towards deeper communion, fuller participation and greater openness to fulfilling our mission in the world.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

Option 2: Three-Week Evening Prayer-Centered Listening Sessions [90 minutes per session]

General Outline

Below is a general outline for the three-week evening prayer-centered listening sessions. See the detailed outlines in the next pages, including facilitator directions and suggested scripts. The proposed **Questions for the Listening Sessions** can be found below in this Guide.

The schedules below can be adapted according to context and circumstances. As much as possible, parishes and other groups are encouraged to preserve sufficient time for prayer and personal reflection, as well as adequate time for sharing, as indicated below.

Time Frame: 90 minutes – 2 hours each session

Format: Prayer and small group discussion

Week One:

6:00 p.m. optional hospitality & fellowship and check-in

6:30 p.m. – 6:50 p.m. Welcome, introduction and opening prayer
Synod process overview and participant ground rules

6:55 p.m. – 7:20 p.m. Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection
Participants should have in hand the question selected by the parish to ponder during this prayer time, they could write down any words, or inspirations that they receive to share with their small groups. *Where possible, prayer and reflection before the Blessed Sacrament is encouraged.*

7:20 p.m. – 7:55 p.m. Small group sharing and dialogue:
Fundamental Question(s)

7:55 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Conclusion and closing prayer

Week Two:

- 6:30 p.m. – 6:40 p.m. Introduction, prayer and overview of the evening
- 6:45 p.m. – 7:10 p.m. Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection
Participants should have the question selected by the parish to ponder during this prayer time; they could write down any words or inspirations that they receive to share with their small groups. *Where possible, prayer and reflection before the Blessed Sacrament is encouraged.*
- 7:15 p.m. – 7:55 p.m. Small group sharing and dialogue:
Supporting Questions (1-2) Listening & Discernment / Co-Responsibility & Participation)
- 7:55 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Conclusion and closing prayer

Week Three:

- 6:30 p.m. – 6:40 p.m. Introduction, prayer and overview of the evening
- 6:45 p.m. – 7:10 p.m. Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection
Participants should have the question selected by the parish to ponder during this prayer time; they could write down any words or inspirations that they receive to share with their small groups. *Where possible, prayer and reflection before the Blessed Sacrament is encouraged.*
- 7:15 p.m. – 7:55 p.m. Small group sharing and dialogue: **Supporting Question (3) & Final Question (Prayer & Celebration/Listening to the Holy Spirit)**
- 7:55 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Closing prayer

Detailed Outline & Script (Option 2)

WEEK ONE

Below, the facilitator will find a detailed outline for the three-week evening option prayer-centered listening session. Regular font indicates directional information. *Italicized font* indicates a suggested script to help the facilitator conduct the meetings.

The role of the facilitator is very similar to that of a Master of Ceremonies (MC). The facilitator welcomes participants and keeps track of the meeting, providing updates of the time devoted to each section (e.g., “*You have five more minutes for this section*”) and moving the group through the conversations in the time allotted.

Note before starting: the toolkit provides detailed set-up information for the room and layout. This script assumes the following items are on hand at minimum:

- One (1) set of small group note sheets and pen for each table with you
- Page of discussion questions for every person at each table
- If no projector/screen, you will need the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* prayer printed at each table

Before starting the session, please consult the **Best Practices for Small Group Management** and the **Facilitator's Checklist** for the Prayer-Centered Listening Session, which can be found below in this Guide.

6:00 p.m.

Optional hospitality, fellowship, and check-in (30 minutes)

Greet people as they arrive. If possible, ask other team members' support in hospitality, greeting, offering people refreshments, using the opportunity for fellowship and placing people in their small groups.

6:30 p.m. – 6:50 p.m.

Welcome and introduction (4 minutes) Begin on time introducing the session, welcoming participants; introduce yourself to the participants and invite participants to introduce themselves to their fellow group members seated at their table. Be sure to introduce the pastor and any other parish clergy, religious or parish staff.

Opening Prayer (5 minutes) Lead the opening prayer. If present, consider asking the pastor or deacon to lead or offer a blessing. If using the screen,

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please display the Prayer for the Synod, *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, or if available, use the prayer cards or the prayer printed in their guides.

Overview of synod process and participant ground rules (10 minutes)

Say the following:

Pope Francis has called the entire people of God to journey together. We gather to listen, dialogue and pray so that we can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. The “goal” of this journeying together is to be present with one another, to listen and learn with each other, and to grow closer to the Lord and his Church.

We have sent each person that registered a link to the participant's guide, as an aid in facilitating our small group discussion, hoping that everyone is more familiar now with the themes related to synods in the Church, this present Synod, and the topic of synodality. If you haven't had a chance to read it yet, please do so in the next few days so you can continue praying for this consultation.

The synod process involves active listening and prayerful discernment. Listening and discernment are at the heart of our prayer-centered listening session today.

*We will have 25 minutes for personal prayer and reflection [**give details of your place of prayer or of Adoration if available**]. The goal is for us to humble ourselves before the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in our reflection on the topics of consultation. May our hearts be open to the Holy Spirit's inspirations. Remember Romans 8:26, “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”*

After your reflection time, we will gather back here to share in our small groups what you heard in your prayer time. As mentioned in the Participant Ground Rules, remember to give your full attention to each other and listen to the voice of God in your hearts. Listen for understanding by taking to heart what other people share. As we share, individuals will speak, one at a time, without interruption, while others listen. Everyone will have a chance to speak and, if you like, you may choose to pass. Remember, we are not correcting or critiquing each other but simply listening and sharing what's on our hearts about the particular question at hand.

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If table moderators are being used, mention:

Table moderators have been selected to help ensure that everyone has a chance to share in the small groups.

Then continue to select note takers (unless they have been pre-appointed):

Every small group will have a note taker; take a moment to select a member of the group to serve as note taker for your group discussion.

Give the group a few minutes to name their note taker, and then invite assigned note takers to come forward to pick up the **Small Group Notes Sheet** and pen. Say:

Each of you has a copy of the topic to reflect and ponder on this evening; please proceed to the church/chapel (or give instructions to the place and mode of reflection) in silence. We will meet here again, in your small groups, at 7:20 p.m.

6:55 p.m. – 7:20 p.m.

Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection (25 minutes)

Make sure you have printed out the questions to ponder. Each parish will continue conducting this time of prayer and personal reflection in either the sanctuary, the chapel, or the place determined for it. The facilitator should give notice at 7:19 p.m., saying:

It is time to go back to small groups. We will see you in the Hall in a few minutes.

7:20 p.m. – 7:55 p.m.

Small group sharing and dialogue: Fundamental Question(s)

Welcome back. Before we begin sharing with one another, I want to remind everyone that group members will take turns sharing their reflections, one at a time, without interruption, while other group members listen. The note taker will record reflections. Please keep your answers to 1-2 minutes per person. [If present: The table moderator will assist moving through each question.]

The Fundamental Question(s) [35 min.]

Please start sharing in your small groups the questions you pondered on, outlined under the Fundamental Question.

If available, display the guiding questions in the large screen, and say:

Please feel free to share your thoughts in the small group; here are the questions on screen or use your papers for guidance. Your note taker will

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be recording an anonymous summary of your discussions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Allow 25-30 minutes for small group sharing. Please announce at the appropriate time:

You have five more minutes for this section.

7:55 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Conclusion and closing prayer. It is important to end the meeting on time.

We have come to the end of this first of three sessions. I would like to thank you all for sharing and listening. Let us pray together the Prayer for the Synod, Adsumus Sancte Spiritus, once more [or pray a Glory be... or a spontaneous prayer of thanksgiving].

At the conclusion of prayer, say:

*Note takers should bring their documentation to the front of the room. Again, we are very appreciative of your time and energy in participating in this first of three prayer-centered listening sessions. We hope to see you next week on [date] to continue our prayer and discernment together. If you are able, please review in advance, in your Participant's Guide, the next two **Supporting Questions on Listening and Discernment, and Co-Responsibility & Participation.***

Have a good night.

Detailed Outline & Script (Option 2 cont.)

WEEK TWO

Below, the facilitator will find a detailed outline for the second of the three Prayer-Centered Listening Sessions. Regular font indicates directional information. *Italicized font* indicates a suggested script to help the facilitator conduct the meetings.

The role of the facilitator is very similar to that of a Master of Ceremonies (MC). The facilitator welcomes, and keeps track of the meeting, providing updates of the time devoted to each section (e.g., “*You have five more minutes for this section*”), and moving the group through the conversations in the time allotted.

Before starting the session, please consult the **Best Practices for Small Group Management** and the **Facilitator's Checklist** for the prayer-centered listening session found below in this guide.

6:00 p.m.

Optional hospitality, fellowship, and check-in (30 minutes)

Greet people as they arrive. If possible, ask other team members' support in hospitality, greeting, offering people refreshments, using the opportunity for fellowship and placing people in their small groups.

6:30 p.m. – 6:40 p.m.

Welcome and introduction (2 minutes) Begin on time. Introduce yourself to the participants and invite participants to introduce themselves to their fellow group members seated at their table. Be sure to introduce the pastor and any other parish clergy, religious or parish staff.

Welcome back to this second of three prayer-centered listening sessions. This is a blessed opportunity to be together on this journey. We hope this experience has been fruitful thus far. We place ourselves again at the feet of our Lord, opening our hearts to the Holy Spirit. As we did last week, let's now be present again with one another, listening and learning with each other.

For those that couldn't come last time, welcome. We encourage you to read the background information about this process in your Participant's Guide if you have not yet had the opportunity to do so. Tonight, we will follow the same structure as last time, praying together and sharing on two of the supporting questions of this journey.

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Opening Prayer (2 minutes) Lead the opening prayer. If present, consider asking the pastor or deacon to lead or offer a blessing. If using the screen, please display the Prayer for the Synod, *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, or if available, use the prayer cards or the prayer printed in their guides.

Overview of synod process and participant ground rules (6 minutes)

Say the following:

Just a reminder that the synod process involves active listening and prayerful discernment. Listening and discernment are at the heart of our prayer-centered listening session this evening.

*We will have 25 minutes for personal prayer and reflection [**give details of your place of prayer or of Adoration if available**]. The goal is for us to humble ourselves before the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in our reflection on the topics of consultation. May our hearts be open to the Holy Spirit's inspirations. Remember Romans 8:26, "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."*

After your reflection time, we will gather back here to share in our small groups what we heard in our prayer time. As mentioned in the participant ground rules, remember to give your full attention to each other and to listening to the voice of God in your hearts. Listen for understanding by taking to heart what other people share. As we share, individuals will speak, one at a time, without interruption, while others listen. Everyone will have a chance to speak and, if you like, you may choose to pass. Remember, we are not correcting or critiquing each other but simply listening and sharing what's on our hearts about the particular question at hand.

If table moderators are being used, mention:

Like last time, table moderators have been selected to help ensure that everyone has a chance to share in the small groups.

Then continue to select note takers (unless they have been pre-appointed or it is decided to keep the same note takers for each session):

Every small group will have a note taker; take a moment to select a member of the group to serve as note taker for your group discussion.

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Give the group a few minutes to name their note taker, and then invite assigned note takers to come forward to pick up the **Small Group Notes Sheet** and pen. Say:

Each of you has a copy of the two questions to reflect and ponder on today; please give enough time to each one. Let's proceed to the church/chapel [or give instructions to the place and mode of reflection] in silence. We will meet here again, in your small groups, at around 7:15 p.m.

6:45 p.m. – 7:10 p.m.

Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection (25 minutes)

Make sure you have printed out the questions to ponder. Each parish will continue conducting this time of prayer and personal reflection in either the sanctuary, the chapel, or the place determined for it. The facilitator should give notice at 7:09 p.m., saying:

It is time to go back to small groups. We will see you in the hall in a few minutes.

7:15p.m. – 7:55 p.m.

Small Group sharing and dialogue: Supporting Questions (1 & 2)

Welcome back. Before we begin sharing with one another, I want to remind everyone that group members will take turns sharing their reflections, one at a time, without interruption, while other group members listen. The note taker will record reflections. Please keep your answers to 1-2 minutes per person. [If present: The table moderator will assist moving through each question.]

Supporting Questions (1): Listening & Discernment

Supporting Questions (2): Co-Responsibility & Participation

*Please start sharing in your small groups the questions you pondered on, outlined under the **Supporting Questions on Listening & Discernment.***

If available, display the guiding questions in the large screen, and say:

Pease feel free to share your thoughts in the small group; here are the questions on screen or use your papers for guidance. Your note taker will be recording an anonymous summary of your discussions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Allow 20 minutes for small group sharing. Please announce at the appropriate time:

You have five more minutes for this section.

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Allow 5 minutes to finish this section and say:

*Please start sharing in your small groups the questions you pondered on, outlined under the **Supporting Questions on Co-Responsibility & Participation***

If available, display the guiding questions in the large screen, and say:

Please feel free to share your thoughts in the small group; here are the questions on screen or use your papers for guidance. Your note taker will be recording a summary of your discussions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Allow 20 minutes for small group sharing. Please announce at the appropriate time:

You have five more minutes for this section.

Allow 5 minutes to finish this section and move to the conclusion and closing prayer.

7:55 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Conclusion and closing prayer. (It is important to end the meeting on time)

We have come to an end of this second of three sessions. I would like to thank you all for sharing and listening. Let us pray together the Prayer for the Synod, Adsumus Sancte Spiritus [or conclude with a Glory Be or a spontaneous short prayer of thanksgiving].

At the conclusion of prayer, say:

*Note takers should bring their documentation to the front of the room. Again, we are very appreciative of your time and energy in participating in this second of three prayer-centered listening sessions. We hope to see you next week on [date] to continue our prayer and discernment together. If you are able, please review in advance, in your Participant's Handbook, the last **Supporting Questions on Prayer & Celebration and the Conclusion question on the Holy Spirit.***

Have a good night!

Detailed Outline & Script (Option 2 cont.)

WEEK THREE

Below, the facilitator will find a detailed outline for the last of the three-week prayer-centered listening sessions. Regular font indicates directional information. *Italicized font* indicates a suggested script to help the facilitator conduct the meetings.

The role of the facilitator is very similar to that of a Master of Ceremonies (MC). The facilitator welcomes, and keeps track of the meeting, providing updates of the time devoted to each section (e.g., “*You have five more minutes for this section*”), and moving the group through the conversations in the time allotted.

Before starting the session, please consult the **Best Practices for Small Group Management** and the **Facilitator's Checklist** for the prayer-centered listening session found below in this guide.

6:00 p.m.

Optional hospitality, fellowship, and check-in (30 minutes)

Greet people as they arrive. If possible, ask other team members' support in hospitality, greeting, offering people refreshments, using the opportunity for fellowship and placing people in their small groups.

6:30 p.m. – 6:40 p.m.

Welcome and introduction of the evening (2 minutes) Begin on time introducing the session. Introduce yourself to the participants and invite participants to introduce themselves to their fellow group members seated at their table. Be sure to introduce the pastor and any other parish clergy, religious or parish staff.

Welcome back. This is the last of our three prayer-centered listening sessions. Again, we hope this experience has been fruitful and that it will continue to bear fruit as we place ourselves again at the feet of our Lord, opening our hearts to the Holy Spirit and being present with one another.

For those that couldn't come last time, welcome. We encourage you to read the background information about this process in your Participant's Guide if you have not yet had the opportunity to do so. We will have the same structure tonight as our last two sessions, praying together and sharing on the third supporting question and the concluding question of this consultation.

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Opening prayer (2 minutes) Lead the opening prayer. If present, consider asking the pastor or deacon to lead or offer a blessing. If using the screen, please display the Prayer for the Synod, *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, or, if available, use the prayer cards or the prayer printed in the guides.

Overview of the synod process and participant ground rules (6 minutes)

Say the following:

Just a reminder that the synod process involves active listening and prayerful discernment. Listening and discernment are at the heart of our prayer-centered listening session this evening.

*We will have 25 minutes for personal prayer and reflection [**give details of your place of prayer or of Adoration if available**]. The goal is for us to humble ourselves before the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in our reflection on the topics of consultation. May our hearts be open to the Holy Spirit's inspirations. Remember Romans 8:26, "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."*

After your reflection time, we will gather back here to share in our small groups what we heard in our prayer time. As mentioned in the participant ground rules, remember to give your full attention to each other and to listening to the voice of God in your hearts. Listen for understanding by taking to heart what other people share. As we share, individuals will speak, one at a time, without interruption, while others listen. Everyone will have a chance to speak and if you like, you may choose to pass. Remember, we are not correcting or critiquing each other but simply listening and sharing what's on our hearts about the particular question at hand.

If table moderators are being used, mention:

Like the previous sessions, table moderators have been selected to help ensure that everyone has a chance to share in the small groups.

Then continue to select note takers (unless they have been pre-appointed or it is decided to keep the same note takers for each session):

Every small group will have a note taker; take a moment to select a member of the group to serve as note taker for your group discussion.

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Give the group a few minutes to name their note taker, and then invite assigned note takers to come forward to pick up the **Small Group Notes Sheet** and pen. Say:

Each of you has a copy of the two questions to reflect and ponder on today, please give enough time to each one. Let's proceed to the church/chapel (or give instructions to the place and mode of reflection) in silence. We will meet here again, in your small groups, at around 7:15 p.m.

6:45 p.m. – 7:10 p.m.

Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection (25 minutes)

Make sure you have printed out the questions to ponder. Each parish will continue conducting this time of prayer and personal reflection in either the sanctuary, the chapel or the place determined for it. The facilitator should give notice at 7:09 p.m., saying:

It is time to go back to small groups. We will see you in the Hall in a few minutes.

7:15p.m. – 7:55 p.m.

Small Group sharing and dialogue: Supporting Questions (3)

Welcome back. Before we begin sharing with one another, I want to remind everyone that group members will take turns sharing their reflections, one at a time, without interruption, while other group members listen. The note taker will record reflections. Please keep your answers to 1-2 minutes per person. [If present: The table moderator will assist moving through each question.]

Supporting Questions (3): Prayer & Celebration

*Please start sharing in your small groups the questions you pondered on, outlined under the **Supporting Questions on Prayer & Celebration.***

If available, display the guiding questions in the large screen, and say:

Please feel free to share your thoughts in the small group; here are the questions on screen or use your papers for guidance. Your note taker will be recording an anonymous summary of your discussions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Allow 20 minutes for small group sharing. Please announce at the appropriate time:

You have five more minutes for this section.

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Allow 5 minutes to finish this section and say:

*We will change a little bit from our regular structure now, since we are going to take 5-10 minutes to pray in silence with your small group, after invoking the Holy Spirit again through a "Come Holy Spirit" prayer or impromptu prayer. Then, from your small group sharing, **name one insight where you heard the voice of the Holy Spirit during these sessions or share one insight that is on your heart after your time of prayer.***

Allow 5-10 minutes for prayer, say:

Please begin to briefly share an insight from the experience of these listening sessions or from your prayer time.

Allow 5-10 minutes for small group sharing. Please announce at the appropriate time:

You have five more minutes for this section. When you are finished, Note takers, please bring your notes to the front of the room.

7:55 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Conclusion and closing prayer.

We have come to an end of the [parish/group name] consultation for this Synod. I would like to thank you all for sharing and listening. The recorded comments from the small groups will help form the parish/community report to be incorporated into the diocesan report, together with the reports of other parishes/communities throughout the archdiocese as well as the reports that come from the regional gatherings. Finally, if you have not done so already, please take time to complete the online synod survey and encourage others to do so as well.

Show the synod webpage to remind everyone where the survey can be accessed: archatl.com/synod.

Please keep this process continuously in your prayers, since it is so important that we learn to live synodality daily, where we journey together, listen to each other, and most importantly, listen to the Holy Spirit everyday.

Thank you and God bless.

Let us pray together the Prayer for the Synod, Adsumus Sancte Spiritus. We ask you to pray this prayer daily, at the beginning of your morning, entrusting to the Lord the future works of the Synod. [Pray...]

Good night!

Additional Resources for Listening Sessions

Facilitator's Checklist

(for the prayer-centered listening sessions)

Volunteers Checklist:

- ___ Hospitality team
- ___ Intercessors/guardians to remain praying while the listening and sharing sessions are undergoing
- ___ Report Drafter: Pastor/leader with selected individual/team to consolidate small group notes into parish report and upload to <https://archatl.com/synod/>.

Materials Checklist:

- ___ Facilitator's Guide
- ___ Name tags
- ___ Sign-in sheet
- ___ Copies of the discernment questions: one per person and one for each table
- ___ Food/hospitality
- ___ [Holy Hour prayer resource](#)
- ___ Copies of Notes Sheets
- ___ Space set-up for small groups

Before the Prayer-Centered Listening Session:

- ___ Set-up plans, according to the facility, and assign duties for the team and the volunteers.
- ___ Invite the community by publicizing the Synod using email or any other method of parish/group communication, at Masses, in your bulletin, as well as by asking all parishioners to let their voices be heard and to listen to the voice of their brothers and sisters by attending the parish session or by completing the online survey. Be sure to invite those who do not regularly attend Mass. This Synod is for everyone and is an opportunity for encounter and evangelization.
- ___ Encourage attendees to visit <https://archatl.com/synod> and to download the Participant's Handbook.
- ___ Identify someone to serve as report drafter to type up small group notes into one parish report.

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- Invite intercessors/guardians to allow Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel while the sharing and dialogue parts are underway in the parish hall.

At the Prayer-Centered listening Session:

- Parishes are invited to consider offering an opportunity for prayer and personal reflection before the Blessed Sacrament. Participants are encouraged to ponder the themes and questions under consideration in the light of the Holy Spirit. The [Holy Hour prayer resource](#), developed for the archdiocesan Eucharistic Renewal could be made available. The Gospel from the Mass of the day or another suitable passage from Sacred Scripture could be considered to encourage prayer and meditation on God's word.
- *Intercessors/guardians* – parishes can consider inviting intercessors/guardians to allow Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel while the listening session is ongoing in the parish hall.
- Parishes/groups could choose instead to offer personal time for reflection, encouraging participants to discern under the light of the Holy Spirit.
- Provide hospitality such as greeters and food and refreshments to create a welcoming environment for all who come.
- Bring nametags to encourage conversation, especially for those who are new.
- Ask participants to sign-in collecting participant name, email and if they are interested in learning more about the parish/community.
- Gather participants in small groups of five to six people so that everyone has an opportunity to share and to listen. If you have multiple small groups, ensure that there is a note-taker for each group. You may also encourage the small groups to share with the whole group after they discuss.

After the Listening Session:

- Follow up with the participants. Another fruit of the prayer-centered listening session is to consider how the faithful can continue to invite the participants into deeper participation and leadership in the life of the parish. Parishes are encouraged to follow up with participants even on a one-on-one basis to encourage their involvement in-the parish/community.

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- Submit your parish/group feedback online by March 31, 2022. It is the responsibility of the parish/group to identify who will aggregate the feedback and submit the online form for your parish/group. Parishes that have multiple listening sessions with various audiences are asked to consolidate all the feedback into one report (see instructions contained later in this guide).

Best Practices for Small Group Management

Hospitality

The synodal process is offering an opportunity to display intentional hospitality to all participants. Many parishes or other communities might be welcoming people back from the pandemic into a large event for the first time. Consider the “first 10 minutes,” where the team can anticipate the experience visitors and returning parishioners might have, including clear signage and greeters equipped with name tags and big smiles.

Hospitality doesn't necessarily mean to provide food and beverage, or to do it in any costly way. Parishes and other communities, depending on their context, can choose to offer a meal or snacks to accommodate their guests; nevertheless, it is not strictly necessary. Almost 1,500 years ago, St. Benedict wrote in his rule for monastic life: "Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ, for he is going to say, 'I came as a guest, and you received me'" (Mt 25:35).

Table Moderators

It is recommended to invite table moderators to manage the conversation and sharing at the appropriate times, especially if the parish/community is planning to offer a large prayer-centered listening session. The moderators should have a copy of the Facilitator's Guide as well as of the Participant's Guide, ensuring they understand and are enthusiastic supporters of the consultation process. A training meeting (virtual or in person) is recommended so they are familiar with the methodology and the order of the day. Encourage them to pray for whoever the fellow guests will be at their table, for their hearts to listen, both to the Holy Spirit and to others. Moderators should display particular interest and respect for guests, trying to maintain a flow in the discussion, and making sure that participants observe the one to two (1-2) minute participation rule. Moderators can always say something like: “[*name of the person*] thank you so much for sharing, let's give others the opportunity to also share; if we still have time, we can come back to you.” The intention is not to abruptly interrupt a guest, but to kindly manage the time and opportunity for all.

Prayerful Communication Guidelines / Participant Ground Rules*

(Consider providing copies of the below for every participant/ small group.)

P – PRAY and PONDER before and after you speak. Ask our Lord to be in your heart and mind and on your lips as you begin to speak. Also, ponder what has been shared and what the Lord is putting on your heart.

R – Take RESPONSIBILITY for your own thoughts and feelings, avoiding the temptation to lay blame on others. Likewise, keep in mind that you are not responsible for the thoughts and feelings of others in your group. In a context of listening and sharing, it is okay for varying thoughts and feelings to be shared.

A – ALLOW others to speak and to share without correction or criticism. If you are more outgoing and assertive in conversation, it may be helpful to listen more and to allow those who typically do not speak to be heard first. We hope to hear from everyone during this synodal process, especially those on the margins.

Y – YOU – Be attentive to your own thoughts, feelings, opinions or even prejudices. Ask yourself, “Why do I feel or think this way?”

E – Use EMPATHETIC listening, and be attentive not just to words but also to feelings being expressed. Try placing yourself in the speaker’s situation to help yourself truly feel what he or she is feeling.

R – RESPECT every person as Jesus taught us: *love one another*. Avoid minimizing or dismissing other people’s thoughts or experiences. Always seek to control your emotions while speaking and listening, showing kindness and generosity towards others.

Note Taker Roles

Guests will be informed that there will be a note taker/secretary at each table taking notes (this can be a volunteer from the guests, or a parish/group might choose to designate note takers in advance). The notes will be anonymous. The notes from all of the small groups at your prayer-centered listening session will help in the creation of a parish/group summary report (one report per parish/group, summarizing the prayer and listening experiences and sharing highlights). This parish/group summary report will be sent to the archdiocesan Synod Team who will create an archdiocesan report based on the parish/group reports, regional gatherings, and feedback from the online survey and other meetings.

* For more extensive Communication Guidelines consult, *Intercultural Communication: The Mutual Invitation Process* found in: USCCB, *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers: Bilingual edition*. Washington, D.C., 2014 accessible at: <https://www.usccb.org/committees/cultural-diversity-church/bicm-appendices>

Questions for Listening Sessions

The following questions are offered as the leading questions to guide the parish/community prayer-centered listening sessions in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. They can be adapted or modified by parishes or other groups according to time, circumstances, and needs. If adaptations occur, communities are encouraged to follow the suggested themes and questions in the Synod Preparatory Document and Vademecum as a guide (see also optional questions suggested below). An online survey will complement the feedback gained from the parish/community prayer-centered listening sessions and regional gatherings.

The Fundamental Question

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in our parish/community? How is the Holy Spirit inviting our parish/community to grow in “journeying together?”

- What does “journeying together” mean to you? What experiences come to mind?
- What joys have you experienced in our parish/community? What difficulties and obstacles to journeying together, or to active and vibrant participation in the life of the parish/community, have you encountered?
- Where in these experiences do you hear the Holy Spirit inviting growth?

Key Themes and Supporting Questions

Listening & Discernment

Listening is a first step that requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice. Discernment in a synodal style, which requires attentiveness to the Holy Spirit through the prayer and sharing of the whole community, depends first on listening.

- How do you listen to God’s voice every day?
- How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst, including those on the peripheries (the poor, marginalized, socially excluded, disaffiliated, etc.)? How do we hear the voices from the peripheries without prejudice?

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- What space(s) does our parish/community provide for listening and sharing (speaking freely) among all the members as well as those not regularly connected to our community?
- How do we together discern God's will in our parish/community, and what role does consultation play?

Co-Responsibility & Participation

Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate. All the baptized are co-responsible for the mission of the Church—to proclaim the Gospel and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

- What enables or hinders you from witnessing and speaking up courageously and responsibly in our parish/community and in society?
- How are all the members of our parish/community called and empowered to participate in the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel?
- What obstacles to active discipleship and participation do you see?
- How are teamwork and co-responsibility for mission put into practice in our parish/community?

Prayer and Celebration

Central to “walking together” is the communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.

- How do prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially Sunday Mass, inspire and guide our parish/community in our shared life and mission?
- How does listening to the Word of God together (e.g., Holy Mass, Scripture study groups, Holy Hours, etc.) inspire our parish/community's most important decisions?
- What does the Eucharist mean to you? How does the Eucharist inspire your life and actions?
- How do we encourage the active participation of all the faithful in prayer, the liturgy and the sacraments?

Concluding Question – Listening to the Holy Spirit

Take 5-10 minutes to pray in silence with your small group, after invoking the Holy Spirit again through a “Come Holy Spirit” prayer or impromptu prayer. Then, from your small group sharing, **name one insight where you heard the voice of the Holy Spirit today, or share one insight that is on your heart after your time of prayer.**

Optional Additional Questions – These could be integrated into the framework above or adapted for groups outside of parish life or ministry settings:

On God and the Catholic Church

- What thoughts and experiences come to mind when you hear mention of “God?”
- What does a relationship with God mean to you?
- What thoughts and experiences come to mind when you hear mention of “Jesus Christ?”
- What does a relationship with Jesus mean to you?
- What thoughts and experiences come to mind when you hear mention of the “Catholic Church” or “being Catholic?”

Dialogue and Relationship with Others

- Are you aware of the ways the Catholic Church promotes dialogue and is in dialogue with others? How can this be strengthened?
- Are you aware of the ways the Catholic Church walks together with other Christians? How can this be strengthened?

Other Topics Related to Synodality

- What does authority mean to you?
- What does listening mean to you?
- What does discernment mean to you?
- How can we better communicate how decisions and actions are taken in the Catholic Church?
- Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation and ongoing learning. How do you live synodality in your daily life?

Please note: As a reminder, the Synod [Preparatory Document](#) and [Vademecum](#) provide further possible questions that can be adapted by groups.

Optional Additional Questions –

On God and the Catholic Church

Dialogue and Relationship with Others

Other Topics Related to Synodality

Prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*

Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus *We stand before You, Holy Spirit*

Prayer of invocation to the Holy Spirit for an ecclesial assembly
of governance or discernment (thus synodal)

We stand 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.



SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, the first word of the original Latin, meaning, “We stand before You, Holy Spirit,” which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years, and is attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 4 April 636)The original version of the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* can be found on the Synod website.

Glossary of Terms

This glossary was created by the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops and is accessible at <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/document/common/resources/Glossary.pdf>.

Authority

The New Testament uses a specific term to express the power Jesus received from the Father to grant salvation, which He exercises over all creatures in the power ($\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$) of the Holy Spirit: $\epsilon\acute{\xi}\theta\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$ (authority). It consists in imparting the grace that makes us “children of God” (cf. John 1,12). The Apostles receive this $\epsilon\acute{\xi}\theta\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$ from the risen Lord, who sends them to teach the nations by baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe all He has commanded (cf. Matthew 28,19-20). By virtue of baptism, every member of the People of God is given a share in this authority, having received the “anointing of the Holy Spirit” (cf. 1 John 2,20.27), having been taught by God (cf. John 6,45) and having been guided “to the complete truth” (cf. John 16,13). (ITC, Syn., no. 17)

There is to be no distance or separation between the community and its Pastors - who are called to act in the name of the only Pastor - but a distinction between tasks in the reciprocity of communion. A synod, an assembly, a council cannot take decisions without its legitimate Pastors. The synodal process must take place at the heart of a hierarchically structured community. In a diocese, for example, it is necessary to distinguish between the process of decision-making through a joint exercise of discernment, consultation and cooperation, and decision-taking, which is within the competence of the Bishop, the guarantor of apostolicity and Catholicity. Working things out is a synodal task; decision is a ministerial responsibility. A correct exercise of synodality must contribute to a better articulation of the ministry of the personal and collegial exercise of apostolic authority with the synodal exercise of discernment on the part of the community. (ITC, Syn.,no. 69)

Baptism and Confirmation

Baptism is the sacrament by which we enter into the People of God, freed from original sin and adopted as sons and daughters of God in Christ. Baptism is the fundamental identity of all the faithful, including priests, religious, and lay

people. Pope Francis describes the mission of every baptized person as that of being a missionary disciple in the midst of the People of God, to bring the light of the Gospel to every corner of the world.

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”. If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!” (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him “because of the woman's testimony” (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, “immediately proclaimed Jesus” (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for? (Evangellii Gaudium, no. 120) Confirmation is the sacrament by which the faithful receive the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In Confirmation, we become fully equipped for the mission entrusted to us at our baptism. The Spirit poured out upon us enables us to live ever more deeply our primordial vocation as sons and daughters of God who cry out “Abba, Father!” (Romans 8:15) We are not only called to live out our call as sons and daughters of God, but also to invite others into this filial relationship with the Father in

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Christ, of which the Holy Spirit makes us partakers.

Charisms

The Lord's ἐξουσία (authority) is expressed in the Church through the variety of spiritual gifts (τα πνευματικά) or charisms (τα χαρίσματα) the Spirit shares out among the People of God for the upbuilding of the one Body of Christ. In exercising them we need to respect an objective τάξις, so that they can develop in harmony and bear the fruit they are meant to bear for the good of all (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,28-30; Ephesians 4,11-13). The Apostles have the first place among them - with a special and pre-eminent role being attributed by Jesus to Simon Peter (cf. Matthew 16,18f., John 21,15ff.): they, in fact, are entrusted with the ministry of guiding the Church in fidelity to the depositum fidei (1 Timothy 6,20; 2 Timothy 1,12.14). But the term χάρισμα also evokes the gratuitous and varying character of the free initiative of the Spirit, who grants each one his or her own gift with a view to the general good (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,4- 11; 29-30; Ephesians 4,7), always in terms of mutual submission and service (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,25): since the highest gift, the one that regulates them all, is love (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,31). (ITC, Syn., no. 18)

Church

Taking up the ecclesiological perspective of Vatican II, Pope Francis sketches the image of a synodal Church as "an inverted pyramid" which comprises the People of God and the College of Bishops, one of whose members, the Successor of Peter, has a specific ministry of unity. Here the summit is below the base. "Synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretative framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself.... Jesus founded the Church by setting at her head the College of Apostles, in which the Apostle Peter is the 'rock' (cf. Matthew 16,18), the one who must "confirm" his brethren in the faith (cf. Luke 22,32). But in this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located below the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called 'ministers', because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all"[68]. (ITC, Syn., no. 57)

Consensus

Consensus in the context of the Synodal Process does not mean uniformity or a democratic majority. This would ignore the fact that the Holy Spirit can speak through the words of one

single member of the People of God or a small group. Rather, consensus in synodal key refers to the process of listening to one another in order to discern the common path that God is calling us to in a spirit of communion, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Consultation

In previous Synods, consultation was sought by means of questionnaires that were circulated among the faithful prior to a gathering of the Synod of Bishops in Rome on a particular topic. This current Synod seeks to broaden the experience of "consultation" in order to move towards a more synodal Church that more fully listens to and engages the entire People of God. In this way, "consultation" is now taking the form of a wider "participation." The Synod of Bishops in Rome is no longer the sum total of the experience of Synodality in the Church, but rather the culmination of a long process by which the voice of the Spirit resounds throughout the whole Church, at the diocesan, national, continental, and universal levels.

Communion

Synodality is a living expression of the Catholicity of the Church as communion. In the Church, Christ is present as the Head united to His Body (Ephesians 1,22-23) in such a way that she receives from Him the fullness of the means of salvation. The Church is Catholic also because she is sent to all, in order to gather the entire human family in the richness of the plurality of cultural forms, under the Lordship of Christ and in the unity of His Spirit. The synodal path expresses and promotes her Catholicity in two ways: it shows the dynamic way in which the fullness of faith is shared by all members of the People of God and it assists in handing it on to all people and all peoples. (ITC, Syn., no. 58)

Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting

Each local Church culminates the diocesan phase with a Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting. This gathering provides the opportunity for diverse members of the diocese to come together for a liturgical celebration, to pray together, to reflect on their experience of the Synodal Process in the diocese, to listen the feedback that has been raised, to dialogue about the current reality of the local Church and the signs of the times, and to discern the Spirit's call for the diocese in relation to its growth in synodal conversion. While much of the consultation process during the Diocesan Phase might have occurred within specific communities of the local Church, such

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as parishes, ministries, youth and other groups, the objective of the Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting is to bring together a representative crosssection of the whole diocese, including minority groups and those on the peripheries, and enable participants to listen, reflect, and discern together. Thereafter the outcome of the meeting should be part of the diocesan synthesis, as described in Part 4 of the Vademecum.

Diocesan Synodal Team

The role of the Synodal team is to implement, coordinate, and oversee the diocesan phase of the Synodal Process under the leadership of the local Bishop, collaborating with the Diocesan Contact Person(s). The synodal team must plan the listening sessions to be carried out on the local level to ensure the widest participation possible including those on the margins. Special efforts must be made to engage those who are seldom listened to in the Church. The Synodal team organises any gatherings, events, and meetings that coincide with the Synodal Process. The goal is to create an authentic experience of synodality at the local level. Upon the completion of the listening sessions, the Synodal team is responsible for elaborating the diocesan synthesis on the basis of the experiences and feedback received from all those who participated.

Discernment

The Synodal Process entails a discernment process oriented towards consensus. We listen to each other in order to discern what God is saying to all of us. This kind of discernment is not only a one-time event, but ultimately a way of life, grounded in Christ, following the lead of the Holy Spirit, living for the greater glory of God. Communal discernment helps to build flourishing and resilient communities for the mission of the Church today. Discernment is a grace from God, but it requires our human involvement in simple ways: praying, reflection, paying attention to one's inner disposition, listening and talking to one another in an authentic, meaningful, and welcoming way. Discernment in this spiritual key plants seeds that can bear the fruits of fraternity, healing, communion, mission, and more. God comes to lead and inspire us as we seek to discern His will.

Ecclesial

Synodality is the path of journeying together that corresponds to the deep nature of the Church. In this sense, any Synodal Process is deeply ecclesial since it is rooted in the nature of the Church and necessarily involves the common journey of the People of God. Walking together in a synodal way calls us to deeper communion with one another, moving towards an ever fuller participation in the mission we share. For this journey together, a vital principle is "sentire cum Ecclesia: to feel, sense and perceive in harmony with the Church. This is required not just of theologians, but of all the faithful; it unites all the members of the People of God as they make their pilgrim journey. It is the key to their 'walking together.'" (ITC, Syn., no. 56) We do not walk the synodal path alone, as isolated individuals, parishes, or dioceses. Rather, synodality is the journey of the entire Church all together, which is experienced and lived out across the whole of God's people.

Episcopal

The greek term episkopos is used in the New Testament to refer to one who has "oversight" of the flock of God. The leaders in the early Christian communities were the successors of the apostles, and this apostolic succession continues to this day in the bishops who are appointed in the Catholic Church. "Bishops exercise their specific apostolic authority in teaching, sanctifying and governing the particular Church entrusted to their pastoral care at the service of the mission of the People of God." (ITC, Syn., no. 56) "Episcopal" thus refers to the mission of the bishop, who guides the flock of Christ entrusted to his care amid the communion of the entire Church. The bishop is not meant to be the summit of a pyramid, but rather the servant of the faithful entrusted to his care. Episcopal conferences are the collegial body of bishops at a national or international level to promote fraternity among bishops and unity across local Churches.

Instrumentum Laboris

The Instrumentum Laboris is the "Working Document" that is used as the basis for the discussions, interventions, and exchanges that take at the Synod of Bishops. It is a document published by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. Unlike previous Synods, the current Synodal process will involve two versions of the Instrumentum Laboris. One version will be published

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after the listening phase at the diocesan level has been synthesized at the national level. This first draft will then serve as the “Working Document” for the meetings that will take place at the continental level. Based on the work of the continental phase, a second draft of the *Instrumentum Laboris* will then be published, which will serve as the basis for the meeting of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023.

Local Church

In the context of the Synodal Process, “local Church” refers to each diocese, eparchy, ordinariate, and equivalent ecclesial body. The local Church is the first level on which synodality is exercised, encompassing parishes, ministries, movements, and other communities. Here “the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation of all God’s holy People in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which the Bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers”[90]. (ICT, Syn., no. 77)

The historical, linguistic and cultural links that mould interpersonal communication in the local Church and describe its particular features facilitate the adoption of a synodal style in its daily life and are the basis for effective missionary conversion. In the local Church Christian witness is embodied in specific human and social situations, which allows for an incisive initiation of synodal structures which serve mission. As Pope Francis has emphasized, “only to the extent that these organizations keep connected to the ‘base’ and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape”[91]. (ITC, Syn., no. 77)

Listening

Pope Francis has affirmed that: “A synodal Church is a Church which listens. [...] The faithful People, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other; and all listening to the Holy Spirit.” The International Theological Commission explained this central role of listening as follows (ICT, Syn., no. 111): Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate where one speaker tries to get the better of the others or counters their positions with brusque arguments, but about expressing whatever seems to have been suggested by the Holy Spirit as useful for

communal discernment, at the same time being open to accepting whatever has been suggested by the same Spirit in other people’s positions, “for the general good” (1 Corinthians 12,7).

Mission

The dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* sets out a vision of the nature and mission of the Church as communion, with the theological presuppositions of a suitable re-launch of synodality: the mystical and sacramental conception of the Church; her nature as People of God on pilgrimage through history towards the heavenly homeland, in which all her members are by virtue of baptism honoured with the same dignity as children of God and appointed to the same mission; the doctrine of sacramentality of the episcopate and collegiality in hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome. (ITC, Syn., no. 40)

Parrhesia

Parrhesia refers to the boldness that the coming of the Holy Spirit brought about in the hearts of the apostles at Pentecost. It is the inner courage that sent them out to proclaim the Good News that Jesus is Lord without fear in the days of the Early Church. The Spirit offers us this same boldness to carry out the mission of the Church today. Parrhesia is required in the Synodal Process so that we can speak boldly and listen humbly, inspired by the Holy Spirit as we journey forward towards this “new phase of evangelization” to which God calls us (cf. ITC, Syn., no. 121)

The parrhesia of the Spirit required the People of God on its synodal journey is the trust, frankness and courage to “enter into the expanse of God’s horizon” in order to “ensure that a sacrament of unity exists in the world and that man is therefore not destined for dispersion and confusion”[169]. The lived and enduring experience of synodality is, for the People of God, a source of the joy promised by Jesus, a catalyst of new life, the springboard for a new phase of missionary commitment. (ITC, Syn., no. 121)

Participation

A synodal Church is a Church of participation and co-responsibility. In exercising synodality she is called to give expression to the participation of all, according to each one’s calling, with the authority conferred by Christ on the College of Bishops headed by the Pope. Participation is based on

the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit. The authority of Pastors is a specific gift of the Spirit of Christ the Head for the building up of the entire Body, not a delegated and representative function of the people. (ITC, Syn., no. 67) The distinction between deliberative and consultative votes must not allow us to underrate the opinions expressed and votes made in various synodal assemblies and councils. The expression *votum tantum consultivum*, which indicates the weight of evaluations and proposals in such august assemblies, is inadequate if it is understood according to the mens of civil law in its various expressions [81].

The consultation that takes place in synodal assemblies is actually different, because the members of the People of God who take part in them are responding to the summons of the Lord, listening as a community to what the Spirit is saying to the Church through the Word of God which resonates in their situation, and interpreting the signs of the times with the eyes of faith. In the synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will. So, in coming to formulate their own decisions, Pastors must listen carefully to the views and experiences of the faithful. Canon law stipulates that, in certain cases, they must act only after having sought and obtained the various opinions according to juridically established procedures [82]. (ICT, Syn., no. 68) At the same time, the path of synodality requires much wider participation than only that which is required by the law.

People of God

The Second Vatican Council focused on the Church as the "People of God." This makes clear that the Church is not only a hierarchical structure, but a people on pilgrimage together, guided by God on its journey. God brings us into unity with one another as He draws us into union with Himself: "God does not make men and women holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness." (Lumen Gentium, 9) This people was first made manifest

in Israel, whom God chose as His own and with whom he established his first covenant. In Jesus Christ, entry into the People of God has been extended to every people and nation: "Go therefore, make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). God invites all peoples to be part of the people that is particularly his own: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10) The mission of the Church is to gather the People of God throughout its journey through history in view of the Kingdom of God. In this sense, the Church is the sign and instrument of "intimate union with God and the unity of the entire human race" (Lumen Gentium, 1). The Church is at the service of the mission of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who brings all of humanity together in himself: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:16)

Power

The New Testament uses a specific term to express the power Jesus received from the Father to grant salvation, which He exercises over all creatures in the power (*δύναμις*) of the Holy Spirit: *ἐξουσία* (authority). It consists in imparting the grace that makes us "children of God" (cf. John 1,12). The Apostles receive this *ἐξουσία* from the risen Lord, who sends them to teach the nations by baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe all He has commanded (cf. Matthew 28,19-20). By virtue of baptism, every member of the People of God is given a share in this authority, having received the "anointing of the Holy Spirit" (cf. 1 John 2,20.27), having been taught by God (cf. John 6,45) and having been guided "to the complete truth" (cf. John 16,13). (ITC, Syn., no. 17)

In terms of re-vitalising synodal practice on the level of the universal Church, Blessed Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops. It is a "permanent Council of Bishops for the universal Church", directly and immediately subject to the power of the Pope, "providing information and offering advice", which "can also enjoy the power of making decisions when such power is

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conferred upon it by the Roman Pontiff"[41]. This institution aims to continue to extend to the People of God the benefits of communion lived during the Council. (ITC, Syn., no. 41)

Sensus fidei

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is manifested in the *sensus fidei* of the faithful [65]. "In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The People of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible in *credo*. This means that it does not err in faith, even when it cannot find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of His mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith – *sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain *connaturalità* with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively"[66]. This *connaturalità* shows itself in a "*sentire cum Ecclesia*: to feel, sense and perceive in harmony with the Church. This is required not just of theologians, but of all the faithful; it unites all the members of the People of God as they make their pilgrim journey. It is the key to their 'walking together.'"[67] (ITC, Syn., no. 56)

Signs of the times

The Second Vatican Council took a decisive step forward towards the importance of the Church reading the "signs of the times." This means that the Church does not carry out her mission in a vacuum, detached from the realities of the world around her. Rather, the Church is sent out in the midst of the world, in order to unite men and women of every time and place to God and one another. The Church must therefore be attentive to the needs, realities, and concerns of the world in every era in order to carry out her mission in the service of humanity. The Church must thus read the signs of the times in the light of the faith, in order to discern how God is calling her to respond amid the circumstances and events of every period of time. Ultimately, reading the signs of the times is a means of realizing the profound solidarity between the Church and humanity: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of

Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts." (Gaudium et Spes, 1)

Synod

The Synod is "the program of those synodal events in which the Church is called together by the competent authority in accordance with the specific procedures laid down by ecclesiastical discipline, involving the whole People of God in various ways on local, regional and universal levels, presided over by the Bishops in collegial communion with the Bishop of Rome, to discern the way forward and other particular questions, and to take particular decisions and directions with the aim of fulfilling its evangelising mission." (ITC, Syn., no.70)

Synodal Process

Synodality is not so much an event but an ongoing path and process. The Synodal Process that is currently being undertaken by the Church involves the entire People of God. It begins with a diocesan phase, which has been detailed in this *Vademecum*, followed by a national phase, continental phase, and finally a culminating phase of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome.

Synodality

Synodality, as defined by the International Theological Commission in 2018, is "the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God." Pope Francis describes a synodal Church as a "listening Church knowing that listening is more than feeling. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. We must all listen to the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Truth to know what the Spirit is saying to the Church. [...] This is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium." (Address at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015)

Synodality creates the opportunity to listen to all and provide opportunities to listen to the Holy Spirit and the People of God in order to discern together and walk forward on a common path. Pope Francis understands this as walking together and accompanying each other on the spiritual journey to live out our call to mission in communion with one another.

Vocation of All the People of God

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This vocation of all the People of God, the community of believers in Jesus Christ, is to bring about the Kingdom of God. All members of the Church, laity, religious, and clergy according to their proper charisms and roles collaborate in the responsibility for fulfilling its mission. Vatican Council II urged active involvement in the life of the church by emphasizing the principles of collaborative responsibility, consultation and lay participation.

The laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church, their activity is so necessary within church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness. (Apostolicam Actuositatem, 10)

Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary they understand that it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their service and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart. (Lumen Gentium, 30)

Vademecum

The Vademecum is a handbook to support the efforts of all of the People of God to contribute to the listening and discernment that is the foundation for the Synod on Synodality. It is a stimulus and a practical guide offering ideas for those appointed as a diocesan (or parish) contact person or team, mindful that each local Church has its own culture, traditions, recent history, and resources.

Vatican II

Pope John XXIII convoked the twenty-first ecumenical council in the history of the Church, which gathered all the bishops of the world between 1962 and 1965 at the Vatican. In the opening address of the Council, John XXIII characterised its purpose in this way: What is necessary today is that the whole of Christian doctrine, with no part of it lost, be received in our times by all with a new fervour, in serenity and peace, in that traditional and precise conceptuality and expression which is especially displayed in the acts of the Councils of Trent and Vatican I. [...] What is needed is that this certain and unchangeable doctrine, to which loyal submission is due, be investigated and presented in the way demanded by our times. For the deposit of faith, the truths

contained in our venerable doctrine, are one thing; the fashion in which they are expressed, but with the same meaning and the same judgement, is another thing. This way of speaking will require a great deal of work and, it may be, much patience: types of presentation must be introduced which are more in accord with a teaching authority which is primarily pastoral in character. (Gaudet Mater Ecclesia, 11 October 1962)

Pope Paul VI brought the Council to its conclusion and implemented many of its reforms, including the use of the vernacular in the liturgy as well as promoting unity between Christians and within the entire human family. Some of the decisive turning points of the Second Vatican Council include: a new openness to dialogue and unity with non-Christians and Christians who are not Catholic (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*); a new approach to the relationship between the Church and the world (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*); and a renewed understanding of the nature of the Church, particularly as the "People of God" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*). The Synod of Bishops was instituted in 1975 as a way of continuing the fraternal and collegial experience of the Second Vatican Council, to continue discerning the signs of the times in each successive era in a spirit of communion and mission.

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