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The Synodal Church Facilitator's Document

Objective: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together:" How is this "journeying together" happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?

(PD, 26)

A basic question prompts and guides us: How does this "journeying together," which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?

(PD, 2)

"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 be nourished, 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."

(PD, 32)

Goal of discussions: "Within this context, synodality represents the main road for the Church, called to renew herself under the action of the Spirit and by listening to the Word." *(PD, 9)*

- ***Imagining a different future for the Church***
- ***Being a prophetic witness to the human family, which needs to be united around a common goal***

"These sessions will cover three interconnected themes: 1) Our fundamental question of how we journey together; 2) How do we keep our hearts and minds open to listening to each other as we discern our path forward for ourselves and the Church, and how do we share responsibility to participate in the mission of our Church; and 3) How does scripture and our celebration of the Eucharist inspire and guide our actions moving forward? The goal is to delve into the lights and the shadows of our Church from several perspectives in order to understand how the Catholic Church inspires us to live our faith at the core of our being, with openness to all God's people."

Materials Checklist: pens for all, copies of Synod prayer on back of questions for Session 1 with extra paper for taking notes, Scribe Template

Session 1) Intro of rules and Fundamental Questions

2:50 Hospitality and Fellowship

3:00 Explanation of a synod, what we are doing, and why.

Divide into small groups/pass out papers

Facilitator says: “As a reminder, this is your opportunity to respond to the request from Pope Francis to dream about how we are called to be Christ for each other.” All say prayer together (on back of questions passed out).

Go over ground rules for discussion:

- Before we begin sharing with one another, we ask that everyone in the group take turns sharing their reflections one at a time, without interruption, while others listen. The note taker (introduce or assign) will summarize reflections anonymously.
- Please keep your responses to 2-3 minutes per person. I will assist moving through each question as well as encouraging us to stay on topic. (Moderators can say something like: “Name”, I hear you saying this _____. 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.”)
- Please allow others to speak without correction or criticism. Our purpose should be to advance the conversation, and not to advance a personal agenda.
- This consultation is a safe place to talk: We ask that you treat each other with respect and reverence. Let’s listen to each other with an open mind. Avoid minimizing or dismissing other people’s thoughts or experiences.
- The notes passed on will be anonymous, and we ask that as participants, if we speak outside of this room, we not attribute anything to a particular person.
- Silence is okay! Speak when you wish to, not to fill a void.
- Be attentive to your own thoughts, feelings, and prejudices.
- Use empathetic listening, being attentive not just to words but also to feelings being expressed.

Session 1 questions:

The Fundamental Question: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeys together.’ How is this “journeying together” happening today in our school/community/parish? How is the Holy Spirit inviting our school community to grow in its journey together?

Question #1: (Read questions and give participants a few minutes to prayerfully consider them; encourage them to write down their thoughts.)

- **What does “journeying together” as a school community mean to you? What experiences come to mind?**
- **Where are the “lights”, the joys you have experienced in our Catholic school community?**
- **Where do “shadows” exist? Where have you or your students encountered difficulties or obstacles to journeying together? What keeps some from an active and vibrant participation in the spiritual life of our community? What wounds do these experiences reveal?**

Question #2: (Again, read and ask participants to jot down some ideas.)

- **Where in these experiences do you hear the Holy Spirit inviting growth? What insights have those experiences elicited? Where do we hear consensus? What paths forward are opening up for our local Church, or for the larger institutional Church?**

Conclusion of Session 1: It’s time to wrap up this discussion. I would like to thank you all for both sharing and listening with an open heart. As a reminder, please practice confidentiality if talking to others about the discussions that took place here today. Also, you will receive our next set of questions in an email. Let’s end with a prayer: **Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.**

Session 2) Key Themes and Supporting Questions:

Begin with Synod Prayer (on back of additional copies of questions)

Review Ground Rules for Discussions.

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. Think of lights and shadows.

Question #1: (Read questions and give participants time to take notes.)

- **Reflect on how you and your students listen to God’s voice authentically every day. How is God speaking to us through the voices of our students and others that are in our midst, including those on the peripheries, (the poor, the marginalized, socially excluded, disaffiliated, etc.)?**
- **How well does our school/community provide for listening and sharing (speaking freely) among all the members as well as those not regularly connected to our community?**
- **How can we together discern God’s will in our school/community, and what role should consultation with others play?**

Co-Responsibility & Participation: Pope Francis talks about “journeying together” or “walking together” down the same road. This means we are all members called to participate, collaborate together, and share responsibility for the building up of the whole Church. All the baptized are co-responsible for the mission of the Church.. We ARE Church. As you reflect on the questions below, describe how you have or have not experienced walking together.

Question #2: (Same as before: read and reflect)

- **Reflect on your experiences of being Church for your students, your co-workers, your families. Where are the “lights” that encourage you to participate, to take responsibility for sharing our faith? Where are there “shadows” that hinder your participation?**
- **How have you been called and empowered to participate in the Church’s mission to proclaim the Gospel to our students and children beyond a religious curriculum?**
- **What obstacles to active discipleship and participation do you see?**
- **How are teamwork and co-responsibility for mission put into practice in our school/community/parish?**

Conclude with thanks, reminder of anonymity, and prayer: Glory Be...

Session 3) Key Themes and Supporting Questions:

Begin with Synod Prayer (on back of Session 3 Questions)

Review Ground Rules

Prayer & Celebration: Central to “walking together” is the communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. Lights and shadows.

Question #1: Read and reflect before sharing

- **How have prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially school Masses and services, inspired and guided our school/community in our shared life and mission?**
- **How does listening to the Word of God together (e.g. Mass, Rosary, Stations of the Cross, Morning Prayer etc. inspire our students/community’s most important decisions?**
- **Are there better ways we can encourage the active participation of our students in prayer, the liturgy, and the sacraments?**

Concluding Question #2 – Listening to the Holy Spirit

Facilitator says: In the first session, we were told Pope Francis said: “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 be nourished, 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.” Please take a few minutes of silence to call forth the Holy Spirit for insight, courage, and fortitude. Name one insight where you heard the voice of the Holy Spirit today or throughout this process, or share one insight that is on your heart as we have journeyed together.

Share:

Conclude with thanks, reminder of anonymity, and prayer: Glory Be...

Christian Synod Questions

As a non-Catholic working in a Catholic environment, you have a unique perspective on how the Church and St. Thomas More Catholic School in particular is welcoming and serving our students and others. Thank you for taking the time to discuss these questions over the next three sessions.

Please use the same Ground Rules above. You may begin and end with the Synod Prayer or one of your own choosing.

Session 1 questions:

The Fundamental Question: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeys together.’ How is this “journeying together” happening today in our school/community/parish? Look for the lights (joys) and shadows (challenges).

Question #1: (Read questions and give participants a few minutes to prayerfully consider them; encourage them to write down their thoughts.)

- **What does “journeying together” as a school community mean to you? How do you think our non-Catholic students feel on this journey? What experiences come to mind?**
- **Where are the “lights”, the joys you have experienced in our school community? When have non-Catholics felt welcome and accepted?**
- **Where do “shadows” exist? Where have you or our Christian students encountered difficulties or obstacles to journeying together? What keeps some from an active and vibrant participation in the spiritual life of our community? What wounds do these experiences reveal?**

Question #2: Again, read and reflect before sharing.

- **What insights have those experiences elicited? What paths forward should open up for our local school community to grow in this journey together?**

Conclusion of Session 1: It’s time to wrap up this discussion. Thank you all for both sharing and listening with an open heart. As a reminder, please practice confidentiality if talking to others about the discussions that took place here today. Also, you will receive our next set of questions in an email. Let’s end with a prayer:

Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.

Session 2) 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. Consider the lights and the shadows.

Question #1: As before, read and reflect, perhaps taking notes before sharing.

- **Reflect on how you and our students listen to God’s voice authentically every day? How is God speaking to us through the voices of our students and others that are in our midst, including those on the peripheries, (the poor, the marginalized, socially excluded, disaffiliated, etc.)? Who is excluded or marginalized and how?**
- **How well does our school/community provide for listening and sharing (speaking freely) among all the members as well as those not regularly connected to our community?**
- **Are you aware of the ways the Catholic Church walks together with people of other faiths? How can this be strengthened?**

Co-Responsibility & Participation: Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate, to BE Church for others. All the baptized are co-responsible for the mission of the Church.

Question #2: Read, reflect, share

- **Reflect on your experiences of sharing your God’s message of love with your students/community. Where are the “lights” that encourage you to speak up courageously and responsibly in our school community on matters of faith? Where are there “shadows” that hinder your speaking up?**
- **How are you called on and empowered to participate in the Church’s mission to proclaim the Gospel to our students?**
- **What obstacles to active discipleship and participation do you see around our community?**
- **How are teamwork and co-responsibility for our STM mission put into practice in our school community? How can we do better?**

Concluding thanks, reminder of anonymity, and closing prayer: Glory be...

Session 3) Key Themes and Supporting Questions:

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

Question #1: Read, reflect, then share. Consider the lights and the shadows.

- **How do prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially school Masses and services, inspire and guide our school/community in our shared life and mission? How does listening to the Word of God together inspire and guide our students'/community's most important decisions?**
- **Are there better ways we can encourage the active participation of our students in their faith? How do we sometimes discourage it?**
- **What does your church/faith experience do well that you would recommend the Catholic Church try?**

Concluding Question #2 – Listening to God's call.

After several minutes of silence with your group, invoke the Spirit of our Lord.

Name one insight where you heard the voice of the Lord today or throughout this process, or share one insight that is on your heart as we have journeyed together.

Conclusion: Thanks, reminder of anonymity, and prayer: Glory be...