



DIVE DEEPER INTO SYNODALITY

Reflections on How We Journey Together

Pope Francis has called this Synod for the purpose of focusing on synodality – on how we are “traveling together” as pilgrims on our way to heaven – in order to become a Church that listens well.

You are invited, as the People of God on this journey together, to dive deeper into synodality by reflecting – either individually or as a group – on the following 8 themes which highlight significant aspects of “lived synodality”.¹ This could be as a couple or family, in a prayer group, youth group, retreat, faith formation class, parish council or committee meeting, RCIA program, or with clients in an outreach. Feel free to get creative in how you use these reflections and questions and to adapt them as needed.

OPENING PRAYER

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, the first word of the Latin original meaning, “We stand before You, Holy Spirit,” which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years. As we are called to embrace this synodal path of the Synod 2021-2023, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to operate within us so that we may be a community and a people of grace. You are invited to pray this prayer to begin your time of reflection.

*We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,*

¹ See *Vademecum: For the Synod on Synodality*, 5.3; *Preparatory Document for the Synod for a Synodal Church*, 30.

*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.*

TIME OF REFLECTION AND LISTENING

The following pages contain the themes of synodality as presented in the Vademecum (Handbook) prepared by the Vatican's Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops. You are encouraged to gather your thoughts about each theme and what steps you think the Holy Spirit is calling us to take as a Church. You can submit them online at <https://owensborodiocese.org/synod> and/or bring them to the next step in the synodal process (for example, a parish listening session, regional listening session, etc.).

There is no need to answer each question presented here. Read them through and see where the Holy Spirit leads you by focusing on where your attention is drawn.

CLOSING PRAYER

At the conclusion of the time of reflection and listening, you may close with this prayer or in your own words.

*Loving God,
We praise you and give you glory.
We bless you for calling us to be your holy people.*

*Remain in our hearts,
And guide us in our love and service to one another.
Help us to let our light shine before others
And lead them to the way of faith.*

*Together we pray in the words that Jesus taught us:
Our Father, who art in heaven . . .*

1. Companions on the Journey

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: 1 COR: 12:12-20

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

INVITATION TO LISTEN

As a baptized people, we are a communion, all members of the same Body of Christ. Together we are on a journey. No one is called to walk alone.

"Participation is a requirement of the faith received in baptism. As the Apostle Paul says, 'in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body'. In the Church, everything starts with baptism. Baptism, the source of our life, gives rise to the equal dignity of the children of God, albeit in the diversity of ministries and charisms. Consequently, all the baptized are called to take part in the Church's life and mission. Enabling everyone to participate is an essential ecclesial duty! All the baptized, for baptism is our identity card." (Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod)

- How do you understand accompanying others on their journey of faith?
- In what ways do our parish and diocese look like a group of people journeying together on the same path?
- How do we support and encourage others who are experiencing challenges?
- Who in our community is isolated, weary or lost? How can we better accompany them?

What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together as one?

2. Listening

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: LUKE 1:26-38

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold you will conceive in our womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. But Mary said the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to our word." Then the angel departed from her.

INVITATION TO LISTEN

Listening is an important first step in being a people walking together. Mary opened her heart to listen to the words of the angel Gabriel, even though the message seemed impossible, trusting that with God all things are possible.

"We need a respectful, mutual listening, free of ideology and predetermined agendas. The aim is not to reach agreement by means of a contest between opposing positions, but to journey together to seek God's will, allowing differences to harmonize. Most important of all is the synodal spirit: to meet each other with respect and trust, to believe in our shared unity, and to receive the new thing that the Spirit wishes to reveal to us." ("Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future", Pope Francis)

- What are our challenges when it comes to good efforts at listening?
- Who are the voices in our community that often get overlooked or remain unheard?
- What space exists in our local Church and community for all to share their ideas, concerns, joys and sorrows?

What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our commitment to listen fully to one another?

3. Speaking Out

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: EPHESIANS 6:18-20

With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the holy ones and also for me, that speech may be given me to open my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains, so that I may have the courage to speak as I must.

INVITATION TO LISTEN

In a synodal Church, a listening Church, all are invited to speak boldly, from the heart in freedom, truth and charity.

“What characterizes a synodal path is the role of the Holy Spirit. We listen, we discuss in groups, but above all we pay attention to what the Spirit has to say to us. That is why I ask everyone to speak frankly and to listen carefully to others because, there, too, the Spirit is speaking.” (“Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future”, Pope Francis)

- How does our faith move you to speak?
- What enables us to speak up courageously, honestly, and responsibly in our local church and in society?
- What prevents us from speaking up courageously, honestly, and responsibly in our local church and in society?
- How can we boldly share the Good News of Jesus Christ?

What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in speaking boldly of our faith in Jesus Christ?

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 24:30-32

And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?”

INVITATION TO LISTEN

As Catholics, the most important way we come together is in the celebration of the Mass. We come as the one Body of Christ to worship our God and to receive Jesus in the Eucharist.

“Just like a plant needs sun and nourishment to survive, every Christian needs the light of Sunday and the sustenance of the Eucharist to truly live. How can we carry out the Gospel without drawing the energy needed to do it, one Sunday after another, from the limitless source of the Eucharist? What kind of Sunday is it for a Christian if an encounter with the Lord is missing?” (Pope Francis, General Audience, December 2017)

- In what ways is our celebration of the Mass a “journeying together”?
- How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the Mass?
- What members of the Body of Christ are missing from the Table of the Lord?
- How do the Sacraments nurture us as we walk together as Church?

What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our celebration as a community?

5. Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 28:18-20

Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

INVITATION TO LISTEN

As baptized people, Jesus has given us the great commission: to go and make disciples of all the nations, sharing with them the Good News of Jesus Christ. This is the mission of the Church. The Church exists in order to evangelize.

"Like the Apostles and the first Christians, we too can say with complete conviction: 'We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:20). Everything we have received from the Lord is meant to be put to good use and freely shared with others. Just as the Apostles saw, heard and touched the saving power of Jesus (1 Jn. 1:1-4), we too can daily touch the sorrowful and glorious flesh of Christ. There we can find the courage to share with everyone we meet a destiny of hope, the sure knowledge that the Lord is ever at our side. As Christians, we cannot keep the Lord to ourselves: the Church's evangelizing mission finds outward fulfillment in the transformation of our world and in the care of creation." (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Mission Day 2021)

- As a community of faith who journeys together, what are simple ways we can make Jesus Christ known to the people in our lives?
- How are we called to participate in the mission of the Church in society? In our places of work and play? In our families?
- What areas of mission might we be neglecting? What is a need of which our Church appears to be unaware?

What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our shared responsibility for our common mission to be evangelizers?

6. Authority and Participation

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: 1 COR 12:4-11

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.

INVITATION TO LISTEN

Through Baptism and Confirmation, we have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, giving us a role to play in building the Kingdom of God. A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church.

“Synodality starts with hearing from the whole People of God. A Church that teaches must be firstly a Church that listens. The Master was a good master because he knew how to be a good disciple (Philippians 2:6-11). Consulting all members of the Church is vital because, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us, the faithful as a whole are anointed by the Holy Spirit and ‘cannot err in matters of belief’ (Lumen Gentium, #12). (“Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future”, Pope Francis)

- How do you understand active participation in a faith community?
- Why is active participation of all people in a faith community important?
- Does it feel difficult to get involved and to be connected to the work of the Church?
- In what ways are we calling forth the gifts and talents of everyone?

What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order or our Church to grow in its efforts to invite everyone to participate and to utilize the gifts of all the baptized?

7. Discerning and Deciding

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 2:1-4

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

INVITATION TO LISTEN

After His ascension into Heaven, Jesus poured out his Holy Spirit upon the Church. Jesus himself had told his disciples that it was good for him to go away, because only then would he send them another Helper, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. And that's exactly what happened on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit descended on the church with power. The same Spirit is with us still, guiding us in the way we should go.

“Dear brothers and sisters, may this Synod be a true season of the Spirit! For we need the Spirit, the ever new breath of God, who sets us free from every form of self-absorption, revives what is moribund, loosens shackles and spreads joy. The Holy Spirit guides us where God wants us to be, not to where our own ideas and personal tastes lead us.” (Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod)

- Decision making in the Church should flow from a process of prayer and discernment guided by the Holy Spirit. What methods and processes do we use in decision-making for our community?
- How do we discern where the Holy Spirit is calling us as a Church?
- What are some ways to better rely on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide our Church?
- Are there ways that we seem to stifle the work of the Holy Spirit?
- What are your dreams for the Church as we journey together?

What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in a spirit of communal discernment?

8. Forming Ourselves in Synodality

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Invitation to Listen

“The Synod offers the opportunity to become a Church of closeness. Let us keep going back to God’s own ‘style’, which is closeness, compassion and tender love. God has always operated that way. If we do not become this Church of closeness with attitudes of compassion and tender love, we will not be the Lord’s Church. Not only with words, but by a presence that can weave greater bonds of friendship with society and the world. A Church that does not stand aloof from life, but immerses herself in today’s problems and needs, bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God. Let us not forget God’s style, which must help us: closeness, compassion and tender love.” (Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod)

- Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning. How does our Church community form people to be more capable of “walking together,” listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue?
- What formation is offered to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal way?
- How can we, as a people of faith, guide and accompany others who are searching for more in life?

What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in synodality?

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“And so, brothers and sisters, let us experience this moment of encounter, listening and reflection as a season of grace. The Synod offers us the opportunity to become a listening Church, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen. To listen to the Spirit in adoration and prayer. To listen to our brothers and sisters speak of their hopes and of the crises of faith present in different parts of the world, of the need for a renewed pastoral life and of the signals we are receiving from those on the ground.” (Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod)



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