

Catholic Diocese of Lexington

Listening Session Leader Guide



For a synodal Church

communion | participation | mission

How to use this guide

This guide is designed to be a comprehensive resource for priests, parish staff, and lay leaders who will be helping to lead the synodal process at the local level. It includes a listening session template that can be used and adapted to fit your local community's specific needs and circumstances. We know that there is no one-size-fits-all model. What works well at a large, diverse urban parish may not be fruitful or even feasible for a rural mountain community.

It is essential to understand that the Synod is not a one-time process, but a way of being the Church. Pope Francis has exhorted us to implement synodality throughout everything we do. We encourage you to think about how staff meetings, finance council gatherings, youth ministry events, sacramental preparation, and liturgical celebrations, all can reflect a spirit and process of synodality.

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What's a Synod?

Despite what we sometimes might think, Jesus did not leave the apostles with a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church or Code of Canon Law. In fact, he didn't write anything down! The Gospels were not written until decades after Jesus' Ascension, and though they provide an account of Jesus' earthly ministry from the perspective of his followers, they do not purport to offer a comprehensive guide as to how Jesus intended for the community of disciples we call the Church to structure itself and make decisions.

The first Christians were faced with many practical questions. Did Jewish followers of "the Way," (which is how the early Christians described themselves) still have to follow the Mosaic Law on dietary restrictions? Were non-Jewish converts required to get circumcised? Was it possible for Roman soldiers who had already sworn a *sacramentum* (Latin word meaning oath, and the basis for our Christian understanding of "sacraments") to the Empire to become baptized and remain in military service to Rome?

Believing in the importance of maintaining unity among all of the baptized and trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit who had been poured out at Pentecost, the leaders of the early Christian community came together for a series of councils or synods, in order to discuss contested theological and practical matters. The Greek word *synod* means "coming together" or "journeying together." Beginning with the Council of Jerusalem (Acts of the Apostles 15), and continuing through the first centuries of Christianity, the Church modeled a process of synodality in discerning where the Holy Spirit was leading the community.

The Eastern Churches have continued this tradition of synodality down through the centuries, and even as the Roman Church moved in a more hierarchical direction, this process of coming together remained an essential component of discernment and decision-making. The Council of Trent and Second Vatican Council are examples of the Synodal Process at work in more recent centuries.





Following the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, Pope Paul VI, recognizing the value of bringing together representatives of the Church from all around the world, issued the *motu proprio*, *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, establishing the Synod of Bishops for the Universal Church.

The Synod of Bishops serves to provide for “greater and more effective participation” of the universal Church by way of “a closer union and greater cooperation between the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops of the whole world,” and “agreement, at least on essential matters of doctrine and on the course of action to be taken in the life of the Church.” Though consultative, the Synod has no direct ecclesiastical jurisdiction and is subject to the authority of the Holy Father. It is up to the Pope who has convened the Synod, how he will choose to integrate its discussions and whether or not to follow its advice.

The Synod of Bishops has a permanent general Secretariat at the Vatican, composed of the General Secretary and a 15-member council. Cardinal Mario Grech of Malta serves as the current General Secretary, appointed in September 2020 by Pope Francis.

There is no set schedule of meetings for the Synod of Bishops; each Pope decides when and how he would like to convene a session. Generally, the Holy Father announces a particular theme for deliberation, of relevance to the universal Church, e.g. the 2017 Synod on Young People, or to a particular region, e.g. the 2019 Synod on Amazonia. Historically, between 200 and 250 bishops are elected by their respective geographic regions to serve as “Synod Fathers,” and to participate in the sessions held at the Vatican.

For the 2023 Synod, Pope Francis has announced the theme of “Synodality,” inviting the Church to reflect upon the very manner in which we model a Synodal Process at every level of Church life. Moreover, the Holy Father has expanded the Synodal Process to involve not only bishops, but all of the baptized, including the laity, those of other Christian denominations, and those who are no longer active in the life of the Church.

The local phase of the Synod Process, in which listening, deliberation, and discernment take place on the diocesan level, began in October 2021 and runs through August 2022. Each diocese will prepare a report that will be forwarded to the national bishops’ conference, and those reports will be distilled into a synthesis that is sent to the Vatican, in preparation for the global gathering of bishops to take place in October 2023.

But Pope Francis has been explicit in repeating that the goal of this Synod is not to produce a document. Rather, it is an invitation for Christians around the world to renew a synodal way of being the Church, a way of listening attentively, speaking honestly, and discerning collectively where the Holy Spirit is guiding us.

Roles and Responsibilities

Deanery Coordinator

Each Deanery will have one point-person for coordinating a deanery-wide listening session, providing support to the parishes, and collecting reports from the various listening sessions.

Listening Session Facilitator

All listening sessions will be led by a designated facilitator who will help to guide conversation, keep track of time, and promote an experience of prayer and discernment. Deanery coordinators can work with pastors, parish life directors, and parish councils to identify qualified facilitators. This person should be identified in advance of the listening session and be actively involved in planning. Additional information for facilitators can be found in the Appendix.

Listening Session Scribe

A key element of the Synodal Process is recording what is shared during listening sessions, so that the information can be collected and organized into a report prepared at the diocesan level. The Listening Session Scribe should be someone who is an attentive listener, capable of quickly and accurately transcribing remarks and themes that emerge. Following the listening session, the Scribe should prepare a summary report that will be sent to the Deanery Coordinator and Diocesan Synod Leadership Team. The Scribe should be different from the Facilitator, as it is extremely difficult both to guide and record a discussion simultaneously.



Small Group Facilitators

The optimal size for small-group conversation is 5-6 people. For larger gatherings, it is recommended that the Listening Session Facilitator work with clergy and parish leaders to identify individuals who can serve as table facilitators for small group conversations.

Small Group Scribes

For listening sessions that break into small groups, it is good to have someone designated to take notes on the conversation, so that the small group can report back to the larger gathering.

Hospitality Coordinators

Each listening session should involve some form of hospitality, which can range from greeters and nametags to food, beverages, and table settings. Ideally, there would be a separate group of volunteers who help to organize hospitality.

Liturgy/Prayer Coordinator

Depending on the local community, you may wish to identify someone to lead the Lectio Divina, or any other prayer or liturgy you may wish to incorporate. See Appendix for some prayer suggestions.

Bishop

According to the Vatican Preparatory Document, the primary role of the local bishop is to listen. In planning a listening session, parishes are encouraged to reach out and try to find a date in which the Bishop might be able to attend.

Clergy

Priests and deacons should make every effort to attend local listening sessions. It is an opportunity to practice a synodal model that Pope Francis has emphasized must not be a one-time process ending in 2023, but the very way that we exist as a Church.

Parish Staff and Councils

For the same reason, staff and leadership council members are encouraged to participate in the local listening sessions. Ideally, synodality becomes the very framework by which local communities listen to one another, share their own experiences, and discern collectively how they are being guided forward by the Holy Spirit.



Some practical questions to help plan a listening session...

- * Who are the people most likely to attend? Which individuals might be willing to serve as facilitators, scribes, and hospitality coordinators? Who will reach out to them?
- * Who are some of the individuals and groups who are least likely to attend? How do we reach out to those people and make every effort to invite and include them?
- * When during the week works best for the majority of people? What are the scheduling and transportation challenges for the elderly and homebound, for working parents, for teens and college students, for other demographics in our community?
- * Where makes the most sense to hold the listening session? What will we need in terms of set-up? Are there groups who can help?
- * What might make people more likely to attend? Food? Beverages? Do we have a budget for some hospitality? Are there individuals who might be willing to volunteer or donate?
- * How can we get the word out to everyone? Email blast? Mass announcements? Bulletin insert? Word of mouth?

Listening Session Outline

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Opening Prayer - Lectio Divina
3. Videos on Synod
4. Ground Rules
5. Small Group Discussions
6. Large Group Recap
7. Evaluations and Next Steps
8. Closing Prayer





1. Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)

As a leader, you play an important role in setting a tone of hospitality and inclusion. It is helpful if people are given nametags when they arrive, and you may wish to consider having a sign-in sheet where people can put their contact information if they would like follow-up via email or phone call. This way, if someone makes a comment during one of the sessions, and the pastor or a member of the parish council would like to reach out privately, it is easier to do so. Those individuals may not be listed in the parish database.

Sample introduction questions for each person:

1. Name
2. Number of years in the parish (if applicable)
3. Ministries, activities, or committees involved with over the years

Keep in mind some people in attendance may not be Catholic, or may not be actively practicing, and it is important to make clear that all are welcome, especially those who aren't sure they want to be there!

2. Opening Prayer - Lectio Divina (15 minutes)

Pope Francis has explicitly urged us “to root the local experience of the Synodal Process in meditation on Scripture, the liturgy, and prayer.”

Our lives are busy, and our time is precious. Even in parish meetings, it can be tempting to rush through an opening prayer and get to agendas, objectives, decisions, and deadlines. The Holy Father wishes for us to begin to practice a different way of coming together, in which we center all that we do and discuss on the Word of God, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our conversation, instead of our own priorities.

“There is one particular way of listening to what the Lord wishes to tell us in his word and of letting ourselves be transformed by the Spirit. It is what we call lectio divina. It consists of reading God’s word in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us.

...During a recollected reading of the text, it is good to ask, for example: ‘Lord, what does this text say to me? What is it about my life that you want to change by this text? What troubles me about this text? Why am I not interested in this? Or perhaps: What do I find pleasant in this text? What is it about this word that moves me? What attracts me? Why does it attract me?’”

– Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium

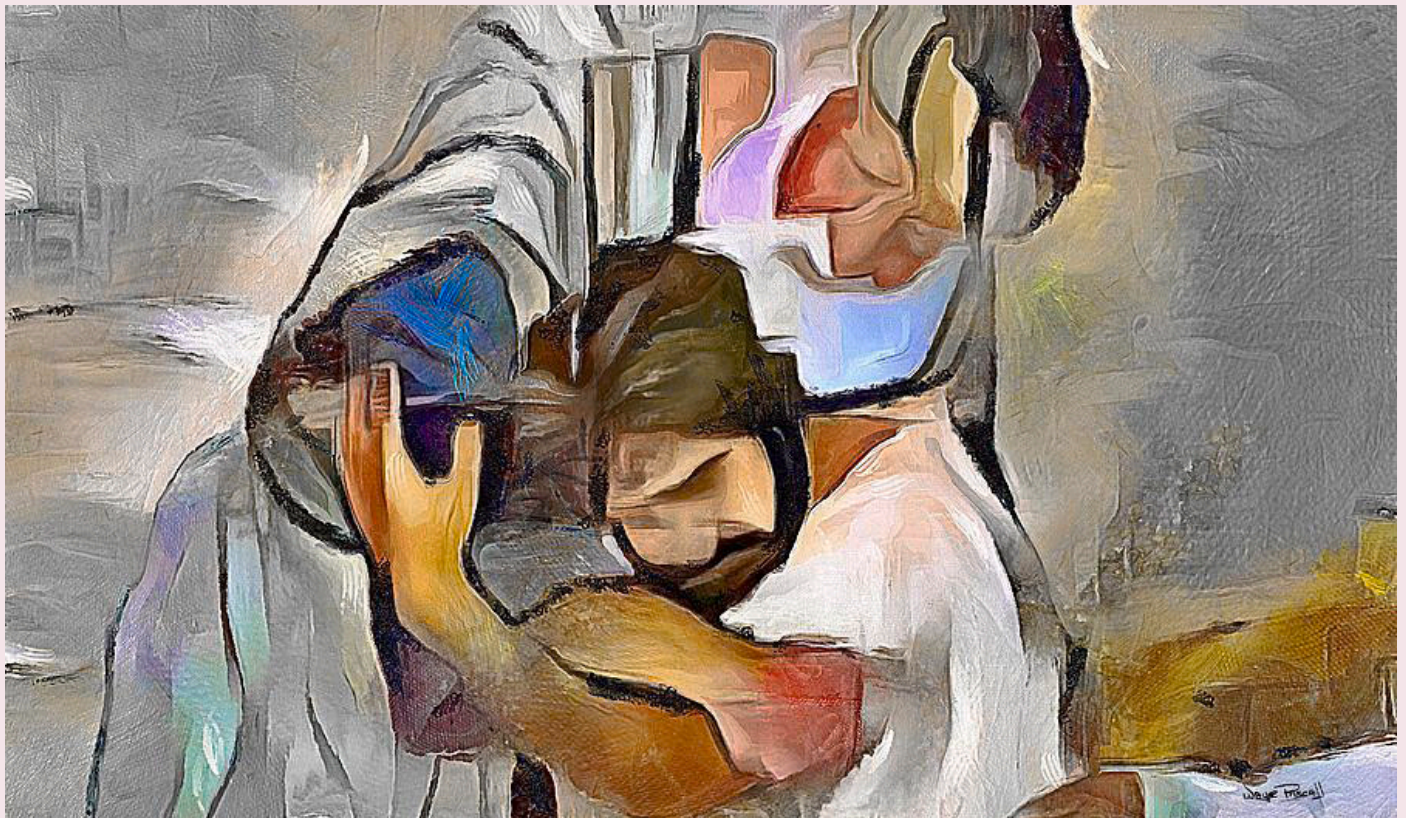
2. Lectio Divina - Luke 15:11-32 (15 minutes)

The Parable of the Lost Son

Then he said, “A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any.

Coming to his senses he thought, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.”’ So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’

Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, ‘Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, ‘Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’ He said to him, ‘My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’”



“Prodigal Son” by artist Wayne Pascall

2. Lectio Divina - Luke 15:11-32 (15 minutes)

Questions for Reflection:

- 1.) In what way can I identify with the younger son, who has strayed from God or the faith community, and is in need of conversion?
- 2.) In what way can I identify with the father, who has been wounded, but who is called to radical forgiveness and compassion?
- 3.) In what way can I identify with the older brother, who is bitter or begrudging of the way that others seem to be celebrated, when we feel overlooked?
- 4.) In what way can I identify as one of the servants, who may not experience full invitation to the banquet and question whether we are even truly members of the family?

3. Videos on Synod (10 minutes)

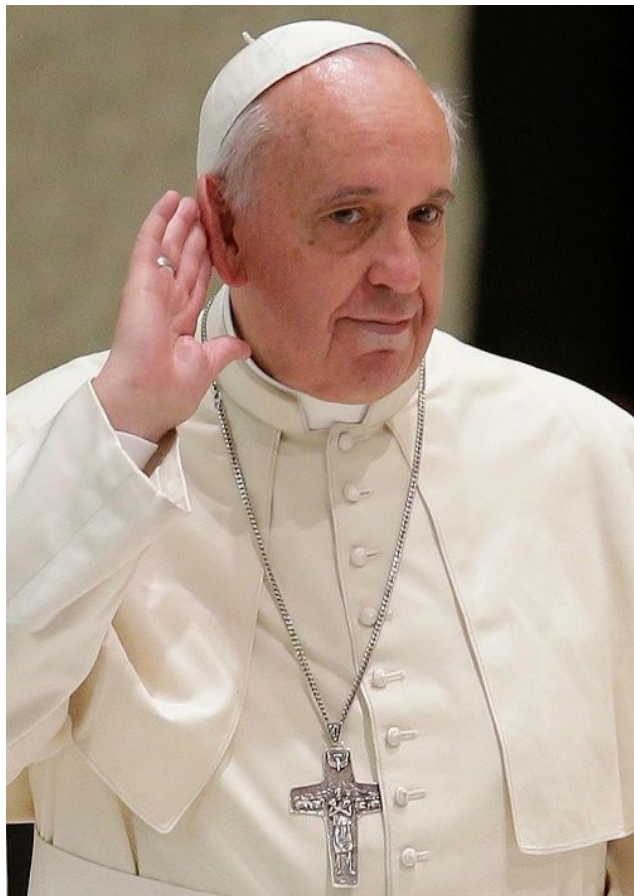
What, exactly, is a Synod? And why are we doing this? There remains a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding around synodality and the “Synodal Process.” In order to answer some of the most common questions and to facilitate the most fruitful discussion, the Diocese has filmed 8 brief, one-minute videos in both English and Spanish that parishes are encouraged to utilize.

- 1) What is a Synod?
- 2) Who can participate?
- 3) Why are we doing this?
- 4) The Fundamental Question
- 5) Listening & Speaking Out
- 6) Discernment & Deciding
- 7) Necessary Attitudes
- 8) Roadblock Attitudes



Reflect

- What particular word, phrase, or theme stood out to you in these videos?
- How do you, personally, understand your role in this Synodal Process?
- What hopes do you have for our conversations today?



Listening to understand

"We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur."

– Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

Our society is full of people speaking, even shouting, at one another. Modeling synodality means showing the world a different way of communicating. There is a great distinction between *listening to respond* and *listening to understand*.

In listening to respond, I may be sifting through your words to find something I agree or disagree with, or something that I can relate to my own experiences and beliefs.

In listening to understand, I am committing to an active, intentional, nonjudgmental, effort to better understand you as a person, your unique experiences and insights, and how God is speaking through you in this moment.

Identifying facilitators

When properly undertaken, synodal gatherings are different from other types of conversations in everyday life. The listening session is not a cable news panel or political town hall. It is not a school board meeting or technical workshop or session of Congress.

It is crucial to identify individuals who can guide the conversation in a manner that maximizes participation, addresses challenges, and yields fruitful dialogue.

Some qualities of a successful facilitator:

- Excellent communicator with strong interpersonal skills
- Emotionally mature with ability to handle uncomfortable situations
- Compassionate, humble, and capable of understanding diverse views
- Able to gently, but firmly, interrupt speakers who begin to dominate the conversation and redirect individuals who lead the discussion off-topic
- Capable of accurately restating complex or convoluted statements in a manner that helps distill and clarify remarks for the larger group
- Sensitive to the experiences of historically marginalized or oppressed communities, including ethnic minorities, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ+ persons, women, disabled individuals, and abuse survivors, with an understanding that some participants may require a level of pastoral care that cannot be provided in a listening session or large group forum

4. Ground Rules for Conversation (5 minutes)

- 1. Listen with love:** we commit to listening to each person with an open mind and heart.
- 2. Listen humbly:** we remind ourselves that each person speaking carries untold burdens and bears unseen wounds. We commit to listen with compassion and without judgment.
- 3. Listen without interrupting:** only one person will speak at a time, and we pledge to do our very best not to interrupt—even if it is to express support or agreement! (“You nailed it!” or “I know exactly what you mean!”) If we hear something that really resonates with us, once the person has finished speaking, we can express our support, sympathy, or shared experience.
- 4. “I Statements”:** we often use “you statements” in everyday language. (“You know how when you’re driving downtown and you see a person on the corner with a cardboard sign, and you feel bad, but you also know that there are services available?”) Similarly, we sometimes invoke generalizations, absolutes, or the opinions of others. (“Everyone loves the annual fish fry!” or “I hear people tell me all the time that they stopped going here because of the music.”) We will be intentional in using “I statements” and sharing firsthand experiences, instead of generalizations or universal assertions.
- 5. Discussion, not debate:** our goal is to listen and discern where God is at work in our lives, not to argue or repeat talking points. We commit to sharing honestly, without snark or sarcasm.
- 6. Sharing, not seminar:** we are here to share about our faith journey, not to debate doctrine or tackle thorny theological questions. People may struggle with particular aspects of Church life or Church teaching, and it is entirely legitimate to share one’s personal experiences, as it pertains to living out the faith. But the conversation should not become an academic seminar or catechesis session.
- 7. Constructive, not complaining:** individuals may have legitimate and important critiques of how the Church has failed fully to live out its mission at all times and in all manners. We pledge to avoid personal attacks and gripe sessions, instead asking how the Holy Spirit would like to use each of us in addressing those failures and shortcomings.
- 8. Confidentiality:** when we share with the larger group or provide a report to the diocese, we will not attribute statements to individuals by name, but say, “One member of our group said...” If we wish to follow up with someone about something that was said, we will do so privately and only with that person’s explicit permission (“My husband has said the same thing about a lack of a men’s group... would you mind if I told him that you would be interested in forming one?”)
- 9. Full participation:** some of us are natural extroverts with lots to say. Others are more introverted and may need more time to process. No one is required to speak, but all should have an equal opportunity. We commit to limiting our own contributions so that there is adequate time for all to respond, and to making sure everyone has had a chance to speak at least once before anyone shares for a second time.
- 10. Silence is okay:** our entire conversation is grounded in prayer and guided by the Holy Spirit. There may be times when the group is silently meditating on a question or pauses to allow a previous speaker’s words to sink in more deeply.



5. Small Group Discussions (1 hour)

The small group discussions consist of 8 prompts arranged into 4 sets of pairs. It is recommended that each of the 4 sessions run 15 minutes, for a total of 1 hour of discussion. It will be up to the small group facilitator to help guide the conversation so that each person has an opportunity to speak, and the conversation moves forward with enough time to touch upon each of the prompts. The large group facilitator may wish to offer time updates to the entire gathering, e.g. "Just want to let everyone know we are approaching a half hour, so you should be wrapping up discussion around your first 4 prompts and preparing to start the second 4." If a small group scribe has not been designated in advance, the facilitator should ask if there are any volunteers.

Notes about the prompts:

- Each area for celebration is **paired** with an opportunity for growth
- They are focused, intentionally, on **personal experience** and not generalized observations
- **Focusing on "one thing"** forces people to zero in on their top answer, and it makes it less likely that some speakers will dominate the conversation by listing multiple responses, which may prevent others from having time to share
- Sticking to "one thing" makes it much easier both to **summarize the responses** for the scribes and to **collect quantifiable data** at a diocesan level, e.g. "More than 3/4 of people say one thing that our local community does really well is the music at Mass."
- For the same reason, it makes it much easier to sync the in-person listening sessions with a **digital survey**—"one thing" responses are easier to collect and analyze while still allowing for open-ended responses
- The discussion ends on a high note, asking the participants what gives them hope moving forward, which **encourages follow-up sessions** among interested participants to discuss, "How do we make this happen in our local community?"

Synod 2024

Listening & Discerning

Discussion 1 (15 minutes)

- 1) One thing our parish does really well is...
- 2) One thing I think we could do a better job with is...

Discussion 2 (15 minutes)

- 3) One thing that is a source of joy or sustenance for me, spiritually, is...
- 4) One thing that is a struggle for me, personally, in the faith is...

Discussion 3 (15 minutes)

- 5) When I show up to church, the one thing I am most looking for is...
- 6) One gift that I, personally, bring to the church is...

Discussion 4 (15 minutes)

- 7) One thing that breaks my heart about things going on in the church is...
- 8) One specific hope I have for the church moving forward is...





6. Large Group Recap (15 minutes)

Following small group discussions, the large group facilitator should reconvene the assembly and invite the small group scribes to share the fruits of their conversations. It will be impossible for each scribe to provide an exhaustive accounting of the conversations, so it would be ideal if their notes could be shared with the primary scribe following the listening session, to be integrated into the final report.

The small group scribes should not try to go through each participant's response to each of the 8 prompts. Instead, the scribe may pull out themes and common responses, e.g. "In our discussion, numerous people pointed to the food pantry as something we do really well." Or, "On the question of what breaks people's hearts, almost everyone in the group lamented the extent to which it feels like our Church is divided, in a similar way that our society feels divided."

7. Evaluations and Next Steps (10 minutes)

How did people experience this Synodal gathering? Did participants feel listened to? Did they feel like it was a good use of their time? We encourage you to provide each participant with the one-page evaluation form so that both local and diocesan leaders can work to provide the most impactful experiences moving forward.

At the same time, we encourage someone from the local parish to ask the question, "What would we like to see happen next?" The parishes will have all of the notes from the scribes at the listening sessions, along with the data from the larger diocesan Synodal process. One specific suggestion would be to have a sign-up form where interested individuals could write their name, phone, and email address to be included in information about any follow-up sessions or working groups that might emerge.



8. Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

To conclude the session, there should be a closing prayer or prayer service. This can take many forms, one of which could be to integrate a Prayer of the Faithful, in which the assembly is invited to pray for various individuals, communities, or ministries.

The prayer included below, “Patient Trust,” by the 20th Century Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin, was used at the opening session of the diocesan synod process at the Cathedral in Lexington. Other examples of closing prayers would be “The Road Ahead” by Thomas Merton, “Prophets of a Future Not Our Own,” by Bishop Ken Untener, or The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. Ideally, the closing prayer communicates that the synodal process is not complete, but just beginning, and that everyone in the community is missioned forth to continue the work.

Patient Trust

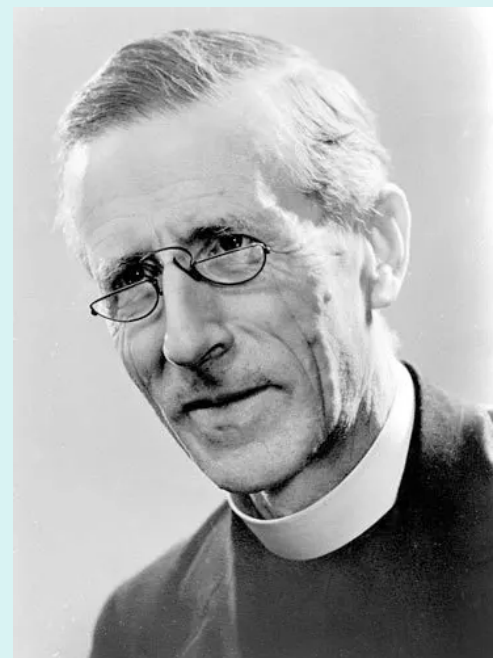
by Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.



Synod 2024

Appendix of Resources



Facilitator Tips & Strategies



Some Tips for Group Facilitation

1. Establish expectations and review ground rules.

"Just a reminder that our conversation today covers a lot of important topics, and we probably won't be able to get to everything in as much depth as we'd like. Thank you in advance for listening without interrupting and making sure everyone has a chance to speak!"

2. Keep an eye on the time and be prepared to give updates throughout the conversation.

"We have 2 minutes left in this session, so I want to make sure that those who haven't had a chance to share yet are able to do so."

3. Gently interrupt speakers who exceed reasonable time limits, veer off-topic, or begin to take the discussion in an unconstructive direction.

"That's a really significant issue you're raising, and we probably aren't going to be able to solve that today! I want to make sure we're able to hear everyone's response to the current question."

4. Pause to paraphrase or clarify after long or complex contributions.

"Thank you for that—you made a lot of good points! I heard you say that one thing that you struggle with personally is the lack of formal roles for women in decision-making in the Church. Is that right?"

5. Respond compassionately to individuals who express hurt or anger. Be prepared to suggest that additional pastoral care may be necessary, or that a different venue might be appropriate, depending on the circumstances.

"I am so sorry to hear that you had that experience. It sounds incredibly painful. Thank you for having the courage to share. Perhaps following today's session, I could help you reach out to someone who might be able to provide support, if that's something you might find helpful."

6. Be attentive to individuals who have not spoken and intentional about providing an invitation without pressuring them to do so.

"Thanks for this great conversation! I notice that a couple people have not yet weighed in, which is fine! No pressure! But I want to make sure you know that we would love to hear from you."

7. To the best of your ability, listen nonjudgmentally and do not take things personally.

"I personally did not arrange the food options for today, but I hear your point about the lack of gluten free options. That might be helpful for people to hear in the evaluation."

8. Thank everyone for their participation and solicit feedback for future discussions.

"I am really enjoying the conversation. Do you feel like everyone is getting a chance to share? Is there anything we could do for the remaining sessions to make sure everyone can participate?"

Facilitator Tips for Particular Personalities

1. Argumentative Adam

Adam loves to debate. Bouncing things back and forth is his preferred way to work through things. You will need to interject immediately in a gentle but firm way that thanks Adam for his energy but reminds everyone that this is not the time to debate or argue.

2. Dominating Daniella

Daniella is an extrovert with lots to say. She is just bursting forth with thoughts on each of the prompts and may not even realize that she is talking so much that others do not have the opportunity to share or have become intimidated. If you notice her beginning to speak for more than a minute or two, gently interrupt to thank her for her contribution and remind her that there will be follow-ups and opportunities to continue this synod process.

3. Interrupting Ingrid

In everyday conversations, Ingrid connects with people by expressing her empathy or shared experience. *"Me too!" "I know exactly what you mean!" "Oh that's just awful!"* Well-intentioned as this is, the tendency to interrupt can derail the person speaking or lead to their story being co-opted by others. Gently remind the group that we want to honor each person's unique experience by listening without interrupting. After everyone has had an opportunity to share, people can follow up with one another, e.g. *"What you said about having young children at Mass really resonated with me."*

4. Sarcastic Steve

Steve is a bit cynical about this whole Synod process. He showed up to hear what is said, but he's already read some articles on the internet and had conversations with friends that lead him to believe the whole thing is a waste of time. Instead of offering a constructive perspective, he may quip or scoff, e.g. *"Like that'll ever happen,"* to someone's proposal. It may be helpful to invite Steve to ask what he, personally, would like to see come about as part of the synod process.

5. Shy Shelley

Shelley is an introvert who needs time to process before she's prepared to speak. The short time allotted for discussion makes her feel like she does not have her thoughts fully organized yet. You may consider inviting her to share if she does not do so on her own, while being explicit that there is no pressure to do so. You might offer that the group discussion is enriched by hearing from each person's unique viewpoint, and remind her that there are no right or wrong answers.

6. Wounded William

William has been hurt by the Church. William may be LGBTQ+, divorced, an abuse survivor, or have had some hurtful experience with a priest or parish leader. William's perspective is immensely important to be included in this synod process, and every effort should be made to listen compassionately. It may be that William requires a level of healing or pastoral care that the synod listening sessions cannot provide, and you may need to make sure that the small group does not become a sort of therapy session.

7. Doctrinaire Dave

Dave knows his Catechism. He may even serve as a catechist or teacher. When listening to people's contributions, his natural inclination is to correct things that are inaccurate or that would seem to be at odds with Church teaching. For example, someone might express a struggle with the fact that the Church does not ordain women, and he may respond by citing the Pope that the Church does not have the authority to ordain women. Gently remind him that this is not a time to get into doctrines, but to allow each person to share their firsthand experiences.

8. Prophetic Paula

Paula is a prophet, and she comes to this synod prepared to issue admonitions and ultimatums. *"If the Church doesn't do X, the pews are going to be empty in a few years."* *"If the bishops would spend less time focused on Y..."* Try to refocus Paula on her personal, firsthand responses to the prompts, rather than broad assertions about the state of the Church.

Listening Session

Planning Checklist

- ☐ Name of Parish/es or School: _____
- ☐ Pastor: _____ Deanery: _____
- ☐ Date and Time of Listening Session: _____
- ☐ Location: _____
- ☐ Listening Session Facilitator: _____
- ☐ Listening Session Scribe: _____
- ☐ Hospitality Coordinator/s: _____
- ☐ Liturgy/Prayer Coordinator/s: _____
- ☐ Communications Point Persons and Deadlines:
 - ☐ Bulletin
 - ☐ Website
 - ☐ E-Newsletter
 - ☐ Facebook
 - ☐ Other



Listening Session

Planning Checklist

- ☐ How many people do we think might show up for the listening session? _____
- ☐ Room set-up: How many tables/chairs? _____
- ☐ Will there be food and beverages? _____
- ☐ What type of food/beverage? _____
- ☐ Options for those with dietary restrictions? _____

Supply Checklist

- ☐ Nametags and Markers
- ☐ Pens for taking notes
- ☐ Print-out copies of Listening Session Participant Sheet
- ☐ Audio/Visual for Videos - Sound System and TV or Projector
- ☐ Microphone for Facilitator
- ☐ Hospitality Supplies
 - ☐ Water
 - ☐ Coffee / Tea
 - ☐ Soft Drinks
 - ☐ Finger Foods
 - ☐ Meal
 - ☐ Paper Products (Plates, Napkins, Cups)
 - ☐ Plastic Cutlery
 - ☐ Tablecloths

Additional Notes (e.g. Possible Small Group Facilitators, Groups to Involve, etc.)

Synod 2024

Listening Session

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Opening Prayer - Lectio Divina
3. Videos on Synod
4. Ground Rules for Conversation
5. Small Group Discussions
6. Large Group Recap
7. Evaluations and Next Steps
8. Closing Prayer



Discussion 1 (15 minutes)

- 1) One thing our parish does really well is...
- 2) One thing I think we could do a better job with is...

Discussion 2 (15 minutes)

- 3) One thing that is a source of joy or sustenance for me, spiritually, is...
- 4) One thing that is a struggle for me, personally, in the faith is...

Discussion 3 (15 minutes)

- 5) When I show up to church, the one thing I am most looking for is...
- 6) One gift that I, personally, bring to the church is...

Discussion 4 (15 minutes)

- 7) One thing that breaks my heart about things going on in the church is...
- 8) One specific hope I have for the church moving forward is...

Ground Rules for Conversation

- 1. Listen with love:** we commit to listening to each person with an open mind and heart.
- 2. Listen humbly:** we remind ourselves that each person speaking carries untold burdens and bears unseen wounds. We commit to listen with compassion and without judgment.
- 3. Listen without interrupting:** only one person will speak at a time, and we pledge to do our very best not to interrupt—even if it is to express support or agreement! (“You nailed it!” or “I know exactly what you mean!”) If we hear something that really resonates with us, once the person has finished speaking, we can express our support, sympathy, or shared experience.
- 4. “I Statements”:** we often use “you statements” in everyday language. (“You know how when you’re driving downtown and you see a person on the corner with a cardboard sign, and you feel bad, but you also know that there are services available?”) Similarly, we sometimes invoke generalizations, absolutes, or the opinions of others. (“Everyone loves the annual fish fry!” or “I hear people tell me all the time that they stopped going here because of the music.”) We will be intentional in using “I statements” and sharing firsthand experiences, instead of generalizations or universal assertions.
- 5. Discussion, not debate:** our goal is to listen and discern where God is at work in our lives, not to argue or repeat talking points. We commit to sharing honestly, without snark or sarcasm.
- 6. Sharing, not seminar:** we are here to share about our faith journey, not to debate doctrine or tackle thorny theological questions. People may struggle with particular aspects of Church life or Church teaching, and it is entirely legitimate to share one’s personal experiences, as it pertains to living out the faith. But the conversation should not become an academic seminar or catechesis session.
- 7. Constructive, not complaining:** individuals may have legitimate and important critiques of how the Church has failed fully to live out its mission at all times and in all manners. We pledge to avoid personal attacks and gripe sessions, instead utilizing these experiences as a starting point to ask how the Holy Spirit would like to utilize each of us in addressing those failures and shortcomings.
- 8. Confidentiality:** when we share with the larger group or provide a report to the diocese, we will not attribute statements to individuals by name, but say, “One member of our group said...” If we wish to follow up with someone about something that was said, we will do so privately and only with that person’s explicit permission (“My husband has said the same thing about a lack of a men’s group... would you mind if I told him that you would be interested in forming one?”)
- 9. Full participation:** some of us are natural extroverts with lots to say. Others are more introverted and may need more time to process. No one is required to speak, but all should have an equal opportunity. We commit to limiting our own contributions so that there is adequate time for all to respond, and to making sure everyone has had a chance to speak at least once before anyone shares for a second time.
- 10. Silence is okay:** our entire conversation is grounded in prayer and guided by the Holy Spirit. There may be times when the group is silently meditating on a question or pauses to allow a previous speaker’s words to sink in more deeply.

Synod 2024

Youth Listening Session

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Opening Prayer - Lectio Divina
3. Videos on Synod
4. Ground Rules for Conversation
5. Small Group Discussions
6. Large Group Recap
7. Evaluations and Next Steps
8. Closing Prayer



Discussion 1

- 1) One good experience I have had at church is...
- 2) One thing I think our church could do a better job with is...

Discussion 2

- 3) One thing I get out of my faith is...
- 4) One thing that is a struggle for me, personally, with the faith is...

Discussion 3

- 5) The one thing I am most looking for from church is...
- 6) One gift that I, personally, bring to the church is...

Discussion 4

- 7) One reason some people I know stop going to church is...
- 8) One specific hope I have for the church moving forward is...

Ground Rules for Conversation

1. We will listen to each person respectfully and non-judgmentally. We will not be on our phones or having side conversations.
2. Only one person speaks at a time. We will not interrupt, even if it is to agree with the person.
3. We will use, "I statements," and speak to our own personal experience, not try to say what "everybody" or "a lot of people" think or feel about something.
4. This is not a time to debate. We will listen to try to understand where the other person is coming from, not to convince them of anything.
5. This isn't a class. There are no right or wrong answers. It's not about who has the most knowledge of Catholicism, but about each person's honest response to the questions.
6. Even if we have areas where we struggle or disagree, we will try our best not to turn this into a complaint session.
7. When we are telling people about our conversation, we won't use people's names. We won't go back to people who weren't here and say, "Can you believe [so and so] said this?" We will say, "One person in our group said [X]."
8. Everyone should feel invited (but not pressured!) to share. Some people have lots to say, others might want time to think. But those of us with lots of thoughts will limit how much we speak so that everyone has a chance to share before we speak a second or third time.
9. It's okay if there are periods of silence! It's good to pause and let what people said sink in more deeply.

Synod 2024

Parish Council Meeting

1. Opening Prayer - Lectio Divina
2. Videos on Synod (Optional)
3. Ground Rules for Conversation
4. Group Discussion
5. Action Items
6. Closing Prayer



Discussion 1 (15 minutes)

- 1) One thing our parish does really well is...
- 2) One thing I think we could do a better job with is...

Discussion 2 (15 minutes)

- 3) One thing that is a source of joy or sustenance for me, spiritually, is...
- 4) One thing that is a struggle for me, personally, in the faith is...

Discussion 3 (15 minutes)

- 5) One top priority for us in the coming year should be...
- 6) One thing we could really use support from the diocese on is...

Action Items

Ground Rules for Conversation

- 1. Listen with love:** we commit to listening to each person with an open mind and heart.
- 2. Listen humbly:** we remind ourselves that each person speaking carries untold burdens and bears unseen wounds. We commit to listen with compassion and without judgment.
- 3. Listen without interrupting:** only one person will speak at a time, and we pledge to do our very best not to interrupt—even if it is to express support or agreement! (“You nailed it!” or “I know exactly what you mean!”) If we hear something that really resonates with us, once the person has finished speaking, we can express our support, sympathy, or shared experience.
- 4. “I Statements”:** we often use “you statements” in everyday language. (“You know how when you’re driving downtown and you see a person on the corner with a cardboard sign, and you feel bad, but you also know that there are services available?”) Similarly, we sometimes invoke generalizations, absolutes, or the opinions of others. (“Everyone loves the annual fish fry!” or “I hear people tell me all the time that they stopped going here because of the music.”) We will be intentional in using “I statements” and sharing firsthand experiences, instead of generalizations or universal assertions.
- 5. Discussion, not debate:** our goal is to listen and discern where God is at work in our lives, not to argue or repeat talking points. We commit to sharing honestly, without snark or sarcasm.
- 6. Sharing, not seminar:** we are here to share about our faith journey, not to debate doctrine or tackle thorny theological questions. People may struggle with particular aspects of Church life or Church teaching, and it is entirely legitimate to share one’s personal experiences, as it pertains to living out the faith. But the conversation should not become an academic seminar or catechesis session.
- 7. Constructive, not complaining:** individuals may have legitimate and important critiques of how the Church has failed fully to live out its mission at all times and in all manners. We pledge to avoid personal attacks and gripe sessions, instead utilizing these experiences as a starting point to ask how the Holy Spirit would like to utilize each of us in addressing those failures and shortcomings.
- 8. Confidentiality:** when we share with the larger group or provide a report to the diocese, we will not attribute statements to individuals by name, but say, “One member of our group said...” If we wish to follow up with someone about something that was said, we will do so privately and only with that person’s explicit permission (“My husband has said the same thing about a lack of a men’s group... would you mind if I told him that you would be interested in forming one?”)
- 9. Full participation:** some of us are natural extroverts with lots to say. Others are more introverted and may need more time to process. No one is required to speak, but all should have an equal opportunity. We commit to limiting our own contributions so that there is adequate time for all to respond, and to making sure everyone has had a chance to speak at least once before anyone shares for a second time.
- 10. Silence is okay:** our entire conversation is grounded in prayer and guided by the Holy Spirit. There may be times when the group is silently meditating on a question or pauses to allow a previous speaker’s words to sink in more deeply.

Synod 2024

Listening Session Evaluation Form



Name of Parish: _____

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1. The discussion prompts were helpful.			
2. We got to all of the prompts.			
3. I felt like each person had the opportunity to share.			
4. I felt listened to.			
5. I gained something from listening to other people's experiences.			
6. The videos helped me better understand the Synod process.			
7. I would have preferred a longer event with more time for discussion.			
8. Overall, I am glad that I attended the session.			
9. I would be interested in attending follow-up sessions.			
10. I have hope that this Synod process might benefit our faith community.			

One highlight from this listening session:

One thing I would change about this listening session:

I would like to talk further about my experience (Please Circle): Yes No

I would be willing to help out with future Synod related events: Yes No

Name (Optional) _____

Best Email or Phone # (Optional) _____

Any additional comments:

Synod 2024

Video Scripts

Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky



Video 1: What is a Synod?

The Greek word, synod, means, “coming together,” or “journeying together.”

In the early centuries, as Christianity spread around the world, synodality—this process of coming together; walking together; listening to one another; and discerning the path along which the Holy Spirit is leading us—was understood to be an essential part of our mission as a Church.

Over the years, our sisters and brothers in the Eastern Churches have maintained and affirmed the centrality of synodality. And, emerging from the Second Vatican Council, which describes the Church as a pilgrim people on a journey, the Synod of Bishops was established by Pope Paul VI to carry forward this synodal process.

Our current Holy Father, Pope Francis, has taken synodality a step further, insisting that this journeying together is not solely the role of bishops, but of all the faithful. He is inviting you, me, priests and religious and laity, young and the old—all of us to participate in this journey of listening, sharing, and discerning an answer to the question: where is the Holy Spirit leading us?

Video 2: Who can participate?

Who can participate in this synod? In a word... everyone!

Pope Francis is asking that all baptized Christians participate in this synod. The Holy Father has emphasized that this process must not be solely for bishops, priests, or parish councils. We are being asked to go out of our way to involve individuals and groups whose voices are not always present at the highest levels of our Church—particularly young people, women, ethnic minorities, immigrants, and historically marginalized groups.

Furthermore, the Pope is urging us to seek out the perspective of Christians from other denominations, believers from other faith traditions, and those who have no religious affiliation.

Finally, in a particular way, it is important that the Church listens to those who were raised in the Christian faith, but who no longer practice or have felt pushed away. Everyone is guaranteed a seat at the table, and, in many cases, that will require us moving the table outside of the church building to where people are.

Video 3: Why are we doing this?

Why are we doing this? That's a great question.

The Church is not a building or an institution, but a living, breathing community of believers who are on a journey together. And that journey has taken us through centuries, across continents, and into a contemporary world in which we must answer the question, on a daily basis: what does it look like to live the Gospel today?

What does it look like to live as a Christian while posting on social media? How do we, as a Church, respond to pressing and overwhelming issues like climate change, economic inequality, systemic racism, and pervasive assaults on the dignity of human life? How do we model reconciliation and communion in a world that feels increasingly divided?

These are big questions, and not ones any of us can answer alone. For this reason, we come together, to listen to one another, and to ask the question: where is God in all of this? And what is the path forward that the Holy Spirit is inviting us, as a community of believers, to follow?

Video 4: The Fundamental Question

The fundamental question posed to us in this synod process is: how are we already doing the work of journeying together, and how might that journey look in the years ahead? If journeying together means listening to one another, sharing our own experiences, and discerning where the Holy Spirit is leading us—how is that already happening in our parishes? In our schools? Across our diocese?

How are we journeying with the elderly and homebound? With persons who are incarcerated and separated from their families? How are we, as a Church, journeying with immigrants and refugees, with survivors of abuse, with LGBT persons?

How does it look when we journey together with couples preparing for marriage, parents bringing their child for baptism, and teenagers showing up to youth group? How are we inviting full participation for those with disabilities and providing support for individuals struggling with mental illness, addiction, or unemployment?

This is the fundamental question posed to us—how do we journey with every single person we encounter, and how are we called to model the Gospel to the broader world by doing so?





Video 5: Listening and Speaking Out

In “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis tells us, “We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of the heart.”

Listening with open hearts is the first and most important step in the synodal process. The Holy Father challenges us, in a particular way, to listen to those who have different views from us; insisting that listening only to people with whom we already agree bears little fruit, and reminding us that, “God often speaks through the voices of those that we can easily exclude, cast aside, or discount.”

When it is our turn to speak, we are invited to do so with courage, humility, and compassion. Speak boldly, speak truthfully, and speak with love. We can share our experiences boldly and truthfully, but as St. Paul emphasizes, if we do so without love, we are nothing more than noisy gongs. The synod invites us to turn off cable news, to leave our echo chambers, and to show the world what it looks like to speak with truth and listen with love.

Video 6: Discernment and Deciding

Listening to one another is a necessary first step along the synodal path, but it cannot end there. We listen to better understand the person in front of us, but we also listen for the purpose of discerning what God wishes for us to hear through that person.

Discernment invites each of us to ask: where is God at work inside of me, in the person before me, in my community, and in the broader society? We are then asked to decide how, practically, we are called to live the Gospel in those places.

Discernment ensures that our decisions, as a Church, are not based on any one person’s or group’s desire to move the Church in a predetermined direction, but that we are following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Sustained by prayer and the sacraments, our communal discernment fosters deeper communion with one another, fuller participation in the life of the Church, and greater fulfillment of our baptismal vocation to live as disciples of Jesus in the world.



Video 7: Necessary Attitudes

For starters, synodality requires our time.

We lead busy lives. Between work and school and sports and family, we are pulled in many directions—and the idea of carving out time for all of this might feel overwhelming. But synodality is not one more event on the calendar, like a back-to-school night or volunteer training. Pope Francis is inviting us to see synodality—listening to one another, walking with one another through life's ups and downs—as the very way we exist, as a Church.

Once we commit to journeying together, we must approach one another with openness, humility, and a genuine desire to listen and not judge. It's essential that we maintain an open heart and an open mind. If we dismiss someone else because we think we already know their politics or ideology or agenda, we will not be able to listen to what God wants us to hear through that person.

Most importantly, we need love. It might sound obvious, but it must be said. How will our conversations look, if we view each interaction as an opportunity to get down on our knees and wash the feet of the person in front of us, as Jesus did?

Video 8: Roadblock Attitudes

This process of journeying together as a community of faith won't work if we are not prepared to put down our own personal agendas, prejudices, and defensiveness. It would be easy for this synodal process to turn into a series of gripe sessions, or for people to show up with a list of demands about how the Church needs to change.

The Body of Christ bears the wounds of both personal and structural sin. Every one of us enters into this process having been hurt by the institutional Church or by other members of the community in some way. There is a reason that we have sacraments of healing, and the synodal process invites us to become living sacraments of reconciliation and healing to one another and to the broader world.

We cannot approach synodality as though we are panelists on cable news invited to give our opinion on a hot-button topic. Rather, we must pray with one another, listen to one another, be attentive to the joys and struggles and hurts and hopes of one another. And to discern where the Holy Spirit is leading us, together

Synod Prayer Resource



For a synodal Church

communion | participation | mission



Catholic Diocese of Lexington

Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus

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.

Note: Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer Adsumus Sancte Spiritus, the first words of which mean, "We stand before You, Holy Spirit." The prayer is attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville and has been used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years.

Lectio Divina: Some Suggested Passages

- Matthew 15:21-28 - Faith of the Canaanite Woman
- Matthew 19:16-30 - Inheriting Eternal Life
- Mark 10:46-52 - Healing of Bartimaeus
- Luke 8:40-56 - Jairus' Daughter and Woman with Hemorrhage
- Luke 15:11-32 - Parable of the Lost Son
- Luke 18:35-43 - Healing of the Blind Beggar
- Acts 2:42-47 - Life in the Early Christian Community
- Acts 4:32-37 - Life in the Early Christian Community
- Acts 15:1-35 - The Council of Jerusalem
- 1 Corinthians 3:5-23 - Role of God's Ministers
- 1 Peter 2:1-10 - The Church of Living Stones

Questions for Reflection

1. What is a word or phrase that stands out to me?
2. Where do I see myself in this passage?
3. What do I struggle with in this passage?



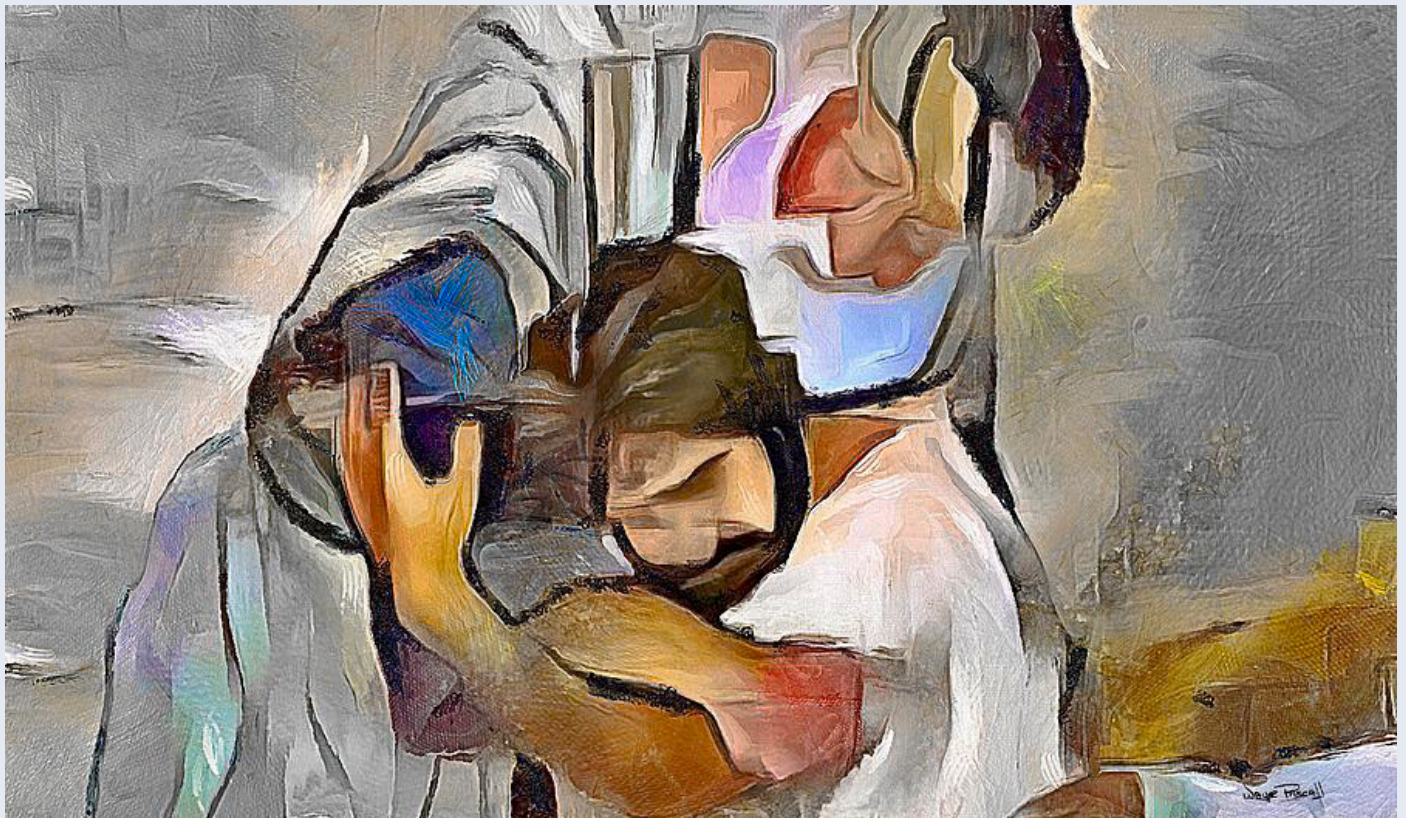
Lectio Divina: Luke 15: 11-32

The Parable of the Lost Son

Then he said, "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any.

Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.'

Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'



"Prodigal Son" by artist Wayne Pascall

Praying the Rosary

The Joyful Mysteries

1. The Annunciation

How is the Good News announced in our parish?

2. The Visitation

How do we carry the Good News to the elderly, homebound, and isolated?

3. The Nativity

How is Christ incarnate our community?

4. The Presentation

How do we present Jesus to the broader world?

5. The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

How do we remain open to encountering Jesus already at work in the world?

The Sorrowful Mysteries

1. The Agony in the Garden

How do we sit with those who are suffering?

2. The Scourging at the Pillar

How do we experience backlash for our faith?

3. The Crowning with Thorns

In what ways are we, ourselves, drawn into mocking or hurting others?

4. The Carrying of the Cross

How do we assist those carrying heavy crosses in our community?

5. The Crucifixion

How have we, ourselves, suffered and been wounded?





Image: "Pentecost" by Jen Norton

The Glorious Mysteries

1. The Resurrection

How have we experienced newness of life, even amid the pandemic?

2. The Ascension

How does our community act as a beacon of hope towards Eternal Life?

3. The Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

How do we experience the Holy Spirit at work in our community?

4. The Assumption of Mary

How do we follow Mary's model of unfailing faith, even at the foot of the cross?

5. The Crowning of Mary as Queen of Heaven

How do we draw on the inspiration of the saints—all those in heaven, both canonized and from our community?

The Luminous Mysteries

1. The Baptism of the Lord

How do we welcome new members into our local community?

2. The Wedding at Cana

How do we help couples prepare for, celebrate, and live the sacrament of marriage?

3. The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

How do we form everyone—children, parents, teens, young adults, the elderly—to be missionary disciples?

4. The Transfiguration of Jesus

How does the ministry of our clergy help reveal to us the priesthood of Jesus?

5. The Institution of the Eucharist

How do our parish liturgies nourish and rededicate us to the work of the Gospel?

Patient Trust

by Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

The Road Ahead

by Thomas Merton

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think that I am following
your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road
though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.
Amen.