



Regional Listening Session PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

The Roman Catholic
Archdiocese of
Washington

Table of Contents

Introduction: Journeying Together	4
History of Synods in the Catholic Church	4
What is Synodality?.....	5
Regional Listening Session Overview	6
Opening Prayer for the Regional Listening Session	7
Regional Listening Session Participant Ground Rules	8
Regional Listening Session Group Process	9
Small Group Process: First Question for Consultation	9
Small Group Process: Second Question for Consultation	11
Small Group Process: Third Question for Consultation	12
Small Group Process: The Final Question	13
Closing Synthesis	14
Prayer for the Synod	15

Introduction: Journeying Together

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

Synod is a Greek word (*synodos*) meaning a meeting or assembly. The two Greek words that make up Synod are *syn* meaning together and *hodos* meaning way or journey.

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

to the world!

Pope Francis is asking each local diocese to gather together- clergy, religious and laity- to first listen to each other's joys and hopes, and griefs and anxieties (c.f. *Gaudium et Spes* no. 1). After we listen to each other, we are called to dialogue together on ways we can accompany each other as we seek to grow in holiness. Listening and speaking within the Church always involves prayer. We are listening, dialoguing and praying together so that we can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. The "goal" of this journeying together is not to create a new vision or pastoral plan with objectives. Rather, the goal of our journeying together is to be present with one another, to listen and learn with each other, and to grow closer to the Lord and His Church.

History of Synods in the Catholic Church

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

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

The practice of Synodality continued into the second millennium, even as decision-making was reserved more and more to bishops and the Holy See. The Second Vatican Council, an ecumenical council, emphasized the communion of the Church and reclaimed the image

of the Church as the Pilgrim People of God journeying together towards holiness. "...there is but one People of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly and not an earthly nature. For all the faithful scattered throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit..." (*Lumen Gentium* no. 13).

St. Pope Paul VI created the modern structure of the Synod of Bishops in 1965 after the close of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Paul wanted to ensure that the collaboration and dialogue between bishops, theologians, religious and the lay faithful continued after the Second Vatican Council. Since 1967, the Church has held a Synod of Bishops roughly every 2-3 years to examine an issue affecting the Church. At each of these Synods since 1967, bishops have consulted with members of the clergy, religious and the laity. In fact, at these Synods, priests, deacons, religious and laity have been present and have addressed the bishops and Pope. While the "new" aspect of this modern Synod, "*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*" is asking each diocesan bishop to listen and consult with his flock, the Synodal process of listening and consulting with the entire People of God is an ancient practice of the Church.

What is Synodality?

Throughout this process, we hear the words: Synod, Synodality, and Synodal process. What do these words mean? Do they mean the same thing?

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

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

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

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

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

Pastors, adheres to the sacred deposit of the Word of God entrusted to the Church, perseveres constantly in the teaching of the Apostles, in fraternal communion, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer, 'so that holding to, practicing, and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the Bishops and Faithful a single common effort'" (*Preparatory Document* no. 13).

Synodality and the Synodal process are not about engaging others for the purpose of deciding matters through a parliamentary vote. Nor is the primary purpose of Synodality to introduce democratic methods into the Church, where the majority determines how the Church will act. Synodality is also not about promulgating strategic plans or managing pastoral parish ministries through objectives. Synodality is about the entire People of God journeying together to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to become holy.

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

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

Regional Listening Session Overview

Saturday Listening Session (2.5 hours)

- Hospitality
- Welcome and Introduction (2 minutes)
- Opening Prayer (10 minutes)
- Overview of Synod Process (5 minutes)
- Participant Ground Rules (3 minutes)
- Small Group: Consultation of 1st Question (30 minutes)
 - Reflection on Scripture and Synod Principles
 - Small Group Sharing
 - Facilitated Dialogue
- Break (10 minutes)
- Small Group: Consultation of 2nd Question (30 minutes)
 - Reflection on Scripture and Synod Principles
 - Small Group Sharing
 - Facilitated Dialogue
- Small Group: Consultation of 3rd Question (30 minutes)
 - Reflection on Scripture and Synod Principles
 - Small Group Sharing
 - Facilitated Dialogue
- Break (10 minutes)
- Small Group: Consultation of the Final Question (30 minutes)
 - Reflection on Scripture and Synod Principles
 - Small Group Sharing
 - Facilitated Dialogue
- Closing (10 minutes)
 - Synthesis of Feedback
 - Closing Prayer
- Vigil Mass

Opening Prayer for the Regional Listening Session

Opening Prayer:

L: Come, Holy Spirit

R: Fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love.

L: Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

R: and you shall renew the face of the earth

L: O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit instructed the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Spirit we may know what is right and always rejoice in his consolation, through Christ our Lord.

R: Amen

Psalm 100

R/ Serve the Lord with Gladness

L/ Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Serve the Lord with gladness

Come before him, singing for joy.

R/ Serve the Lord with Gladness

Know that he, the Lord, is God.

He made us, we belong to him,

We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

R/ Serve the Lord with Gladness

Go within his gates, giving thanks.

Enter his courts with songs of praise.

Give thanks to him and bless his name.

R/ Serve the Lord with Gladness

Closing Prayer: We make our prayer complete and perfect by praying together

Our Father...

Regional Listening Session: Participant Ground Rules

Respectful Communication Guidelines (from the USCCB)

- R:** take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel, and speak with words others can hear and understand
- E:** use EMPATHETIC listening, not just words but also feelings being expressed, non-verbal language including silence
- S:** be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles
- P:** PONDER on what you hear and feel before you speak
- E:** EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions
- C:** keep CONFIDENTIALITY
- T:** TRUST the process because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong but to experience true dialogue

The Invitation Method is a way to include all people in the conversation in a very respectful atmosphere. While each person is speaking, the others listen. No one may interrupt the speaker or jump in to speak without being invited by name.

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

Facilitator & Note Taker Roles

The role of listening session facilitators is to guide the conversations. Please listen to their instructions. There will be a secretary at your table taking notes. The notes will be anonymous. The notes from the small groups will be summarized into one regional report. The regional listening sessions will be included in the final report that will be submitted to the Synod of Bishops.

Regional Listening Session Group Process

Small Group Process: First Question for Consultation

Reflection on Scripture and Synod Principles

Core principle:

"The challenges, difficulties, and hardships facing our world and our Church are many. Nevertheless, fixating on the problems will only lead us to be overwhelmed, discouraged, and cynical. We can miss the light if we focus only on the darkness. Instead of focusing only on what is not going well, let us appreciate where the Holy Spirit is generating life and see how we can let God work more fully." (Vademecum no. 2.4.3)

Word of God:

A Reading from the Gospel of John (John 14:15-17; 21; 26-27)

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you. Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him. The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."

Small Group Sharing on the First Question

The First Question for Consultation:

What were the high points and low points of your parish Synod consultation?

What topics or issues arose in your parish listening sessions (positive and negative challenges)?

What was significant, surprising or unexpected from the topics or issues that arose from your parish listening sessions?

Personal Reflection:

Take a moment to write down your personal thoughts and reflections about this question in your booklet.

Group Sharing At Tables:

In your small group, share your reflections on the First Question. Remember, each person shares without interruption, while other group members listen.

Large Group Sharing:

To the larger gathering, have one person from your table share two key insights about this question that were learned from your small group sharing discussion. Please do not repeat what another table has already said.

Small Group Sharing on the Second Question

"The entire People of God share a common dignity and vocation through Baptism. All of us are called in virtue of our Baptism to be active participants in the life of the Church. In parishes, small Christian communities, lay movements, religious communities, and other forms of communion, women and men, young people and the elderly, we are all invited to listen to one another in order to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who comes to guide our human efforts, breathing life and vitality into the Church and leading us into deeper communion for our mission in the world. As the Church embarks on this synodal journey, we must strive to ground ourselves in experiences of authentic listening and discernment on the path of becoming the Church that God calls us to be." (Vademecum 1.2)

The Second Question for Consultation:

How do you hear the Holy Spirit calling your entire parish community to address the topics and issues that arose in your parish listening sessions?

How do you hear the Holy Spirit calling your entire parish community to strengthen, unify and convert the Church in her pastoral practices, evangelization efforts and structures?

Personal Reflection:

Take a moment to write down your personal thoughts and reflections about this question in your booklet.

Group Sharing At Tables:

In your small group, share your reflections on the Second Question. Remember, each person shares without interruption, while other group members listen.

Large Group Sharing:

To the larger gathering, have one person from your table share two key insights about this question that were learned from your small group sharing discussion. Please do not repeat what another table has already said.

“We can often be resistant to what the Holy Spirit is trying to inspire us to undertake. We are called to abandon attitudes of complacency and comfort that lead us to make decisions purely on the basis of how things have been done in the past. By listening, the Church follows the example of God himself, who listens to the cry of his people. The Synodal Process provides us with the opportunity to open ourselves to listen in an authentic way, without resorting to ready-made answers or pre-formulated judgments.” (Vademecum no. 3.2)

In what ways is the Holy Spirit inviting the local church to become more synodal?

Personal Reflection:

Take a moment to write down your personal thoughts and reflections about this question in your booklet.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

In your small group, share your reflections on the Third Question. Remember, each person shares without interruption, while other group members listen.

To the larger gathering, have one person from your table share two key insights about this question that were learned from your small group sharing discussion. Please do not repeat what another table has already said.

"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." (1 Corinthians 12: 4-11).

The Final Question for Consultation:

From your small group sharing, name one insight where you heard the voice of the Holy Spirit today?

Personal Reflection:

Take a moment to write down your personal thoughts and reflections about this question in your booklet.

[illegible]

Group Sharing At Tables:

In your small group, share your reflections on the Final Question. Remember, each person shares without interruption, while other group members listen.

Large Group Sharing:

To the larger gathering, have one person from your table share two key insights about this question that were learned from your small group sharing discussion. Please do not repeat what another table has already said.

Synthesis of Day's Feedback:

Reflection on Scripture and Synod Principles

"We recall that the purpose of the Synod, and therefore of this consultation, is not to produce documents, but 'to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.'" (Preparatory Document no. 32)

A Reading from the Gospel of John (John 13: 34-35)

[illegible]

Prayer for the Synod

Adsumus (We Stand Before You)

The *Adsumus* prayer calls upon the Holy Spirit to guide a Church gathering. Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the bishops and Holy Father praying this prayer. This prayer is attributed to St. Isidore of Seville (c.560- April 4, 636). For the 2021-2023 Synod, the Holy Father is proposing that the entire People of God pray this simplified version of the *Adsumus*.

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.

Learn more about this prayer at:

<https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/document/common/adsumus/EN-ADSUMUS.pdf>



Regional Listening Session PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

adw.org/synod



The Roman Catholic
Archdiocese of
Washington