



Parish Toolkit



# Listening Session Toolkit for Parishes



Catholic Diocese of  
**SAGINAW**

Catholic Diocese of Saginaw



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission



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## Introduction

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

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 by listening, dialoguing, praying, discerning, and making decisions together for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis is asking each local diocese to gather - clergy, religious and laity together- to listen to each other’s joys and hopes, and griefs and anxieties (c.f. Gaudium et Spes no. 1). 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.

Additional information:

- Vatican Synod website <https://www.synod.va/en.html>
- USCCB Synod website <https://www.usccb.org/synod>
- Saginaw Diocese Synod website <https://www.saginaw.org/synod2023>



## How to Use This Toolkit

The most important aspect of the 2021-2023 Synod of Bishops is listening. While each diocese is required to submit a report to the USCCB based on listening sessions held in the diocese, this report is secondary to the listening sessions where members of the local Church community can gather in order to pray, listen and dialogue together.

This toolkit will help pastors or directors of parish life (DPL), and parish clergy and staff 1) understand the Diocesan Synod plan; 2) host Synod listening sessions in their parishes; and 3) provide resources for hosting parish-based Synod listening sessions.

### Purpose of Diocesan Synod Sessions

It is hoped that this Synod process will provide parishes an opportunity to be together as we slowly emerge from the COVID- 19 pandemic. Many parish communities have been affected by COVID - 19 through illness, deaths, and missed celebrations like First Communions, funerals, weddings, and graduations. COVID- 19 has also affected parishes through the incredible generosity of community members giving their time and talent.

This Synod is a unique gift for our local Church. It is a gift of time - a chance to take a step back and reconnect with our parish communities. It is an opportunity to invite people not only back to Sunday Mass but also to parish life. This invitation to parish life starts with listening. Listening to each other's joys, hopes, sorrows and anxieties. Listening to each other is the basis of dialogue, friendship and community life. This Synod is not about changing doctrine or church structures, but rather encountering each other as brothers and sisters in Christ in post-pandemic world.

Since this process is meant to help re-engage parish communities after COVID-19, Pastors and DPLs are encouraged to discern with parish clergy and staff, and the parish Pastoral and Finance councils as to how best to implement the listening session process. For example, some parishes may hold a listening session with their Councils in addition to hosting listening session(s) for the general parish community only. Pastors and DPLs may also adapt the process to include Mass or a meal depending on local circumstances.



## Diocesan Synod Overview

The Catholic Diocese of Saginaw has developed a pastoral approach to implementing this Synod. The Diocesan Synod opened on October 24, 2021, with an Opening Mass celebrated by Bishop Gruss at The Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption. From October 17 until early January 2022, diocesan staff has been planning and customizing information for the people of the Diocese of Saginaw. From February through April 2022, parishes will host listening sessions where the clergy, parishioners, religious communities who live near the parish and any other community members will be invited to participate. Parishes will be asked to submit a summary report of their parish's listening. Pastors and DPLs are asked to name a parish group coordinator to lead the effort of the synod at the parish. A Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting will take place on June 7, 2022, where the Pastor or DPL and the Parish Group Coordinator are invited to attend where we will pray together and share with each other the joys and challenges of their parish life so we may accompany and journey together.

After the Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting is complete, a 10-page report will be created by Bishop Gruss with the Diocesan Synod team. Every diocesan report submitted to the USCCB will be summarized to create a national report. This national report will be used during the continental phase of the Synod where episcopal conferences will gather to pray, listen and dialogue together. Continental reports will be submitted to the Synod of Bishops in Rome, which will use the continental reports to create the working report for the 2023 Universal Synod of Bishops.



## Resources in this Toolkit

In this toolkit, you will find several resources to help you plan and host your parish listening session.

This toolkit contains the following resources:

- Parish and Group Leader Responsibilities and Commitment
- Diocese of Saginaw Roadmap – Synod Diocesan Phase
- Parish Timeline
- Listening Session Overview and Checklist
- Homily helps
- Prayers of the Faithful
- Bulletin announcements
- Synod prayer and reflection
- Thematic questions and reflections
- The Fundamental question and reflection
- Parish summary report guidelines
- Definitions

Additionally, the Diocese has prepared a *Participant's Guide* and a *Facilitator's Guide* for the parish listening sessions. These additional resources can be found on the Diocese of Saginaw Synod website ([www.saginaw.org/synod2023](http://www.saginaw.org/synod2023)).

Diocesan staff is here to help you have a successful synod experience. If you need assistance or have questions please contact your Vicariate Liaison or the Diocesan Co-Contacts Don Buchalski, [dbuchalski@dioceseofsaginaw.org](mailto:dbuchalski@dioceseofsaginaw.org) or Joe Stong, [jstong@dioceseofsaginaw.org](mailto:jstong@dioceseofsaginaw.org).

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### Parish and Group Leader Responsibilities and Commitment

1. Become familiar with the synod through self-study
  - Understands the diocesan timeline and is committed to hitting the deadlines established
  - Attends diocesan training sessions for the role
  - Reads the [Preparatory Document](#) from the Vatican
  - Reads the [Vademecum Document](#) from the Vatican
  - Is familiar with the parish resources on the [Diocese of Saginaw synod website](#)
2. Lead efforts for parish
  - Leads meetings with the pastor or Director of Parish Life and/or staff to discern the path forward for the parish
  - Develops and executes an event schedule for the parish
3. Implements, monitors, and guides the synodal consultation process for their parish
  - Host the consultation sessions
  - Collects all the table notes from the consultations
  - Discerns with the pastor or Director of Parish Life and/or staff the final report content to be delivered to the diocese
4. Links with the Diocesan Synodal Team
  - Establishes a link with the Vicariate Liaison for their parish
5. Participate in the Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting on June 7, 2022 (in person meeting)

#### Qualification

- Passionate about their faith and the Catholic Church
- Positive attitude and future focused
- Rapport with the pastor/DPL and the parish staff
- Comfortable recruiting parishioners to serve the parish
- Willingness to ask for help from diocesan contact and parish resource holders
- Has planned past events or is a good organizer
- Can synthesize diverse data input from a large set down to the key messages

## Diocese of Saginaw Roadmap Synod Diocesan Phase







## Synod 2021-2023 Parish Timeline

The activities of the diocesan phase of Synod 2021-2023 coincides with Lent 2022 and is a great opportunity to make this a part of our Lenten journey. Lent is a time of prayer and renewal, a time of retreat before Easter. The synod process is about opening up to the Spirit and discerning where the Spirit is leading us. Making the synod a part of our Lenten prayer and renewal is a unique opportunity for communion, participation, and mission for 2022.

- Parish group coordinator discerns the timeline with Pastor or Director of Parish (DPL), and staff as appropriate, by January 28, 2022. See table below
- Additional local coordinators who will serve as table discussion leaders selected by January 28, 2022
- Local coordinators encouraged to lead and take part in any optional activities.
- The completed parish report is due to the diocese no later than May 8, 2022
- Parish group coordinator and Pastor or DPL are invited to the Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting on June 7, 2022, to discuss the contents of the report to be sent to the USCCB

### Suggested Parish Timeline

<u>Week</u>	<u>Suggested Dates</u>	<u>Date Considerations</u>	<u>Task</u>	<u>Optional Activities</u>
1	February 13, 2022	Start as early as January 23, 2022, but no later than March 13, 2022	Initial Synod Information to parishioners - Bulletin announcement	Discussion group event on the synod documents
2	February 20, 2022		Homily points on the Synod - Pray Synod Prayer - Add to intentions each week - Begin promoting the listening session dates each week	
3	February 27, 2022	One to four weeks depending on how deep you wish to dive into the prayer	Break open the Synod Prayer - Bulletin announcement	Prayer event breaking open the Synod Prayer with an optional social event
4	March 6, 2022	One to five weeks depending on how deep you wish to dive into the questions	Thematic Questions for Reflection - Bulletin announcement	Discussion group event on the reflection on the synod questions
5	March 13, 2022		Fundamental question	



			- Bulletin announcement	
6	March 20, 2022	One to three weeks to complete	<p>Listening Sessions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Two minimum per parish at different days of the week and times.</li> <li>- One directly after Mass is <i>suggested</i> to encourage participation of those who normally do not return to the parish for weekday events.</li> </ul>	Set the dates for the listening sessions early so they can be promoted throughout the process
7	March 27, 2022 – April 15, 2022	Two weeks to complete, with report to diocese no later than May 8, 2022	Prepare parish summary report	Bulletin announcement with results and/or a town hall meeting.

### Additional Considerations:

- Input from the youth is important
  - Consider having a separate listening session specifically for youth
  - Consider having separate table discussion especially for youth
  - Youth should include high school and can include middle school
- Input from all parishioners should be encouraged
  - Try to schedule times and dates to get people who don't normally participate in extra-curricular events at the parish to attend
  - Encourage active parishioners to "bring a friend" to the listening sessions
  - The event should be open to others in the community who are not parishioners because we are "journeying" with them as well

## Overview of Listening Session (90-120 minutes each evening)

Task Time (minutes)	Total Time (minutes)	Description	Comments
5	5	Gathering Prayer	It is encouraged to consider starting the session with a more meaningful prayer experience (i.e., Mass, or morning/evening prayer or adoration, etc.)
15	20	Welcome, Introduction, and Overview of the Synod	Pastor or DPL to welcome participants. The Parish Group Coordinator is host for the event.
5	25	Participant Ground Rules	Host
45-60	70-85	Small Group: The Fundamental Question - Round #1 (15-20 minutes) - Round #2 (15-20 minutes) - Group Discernment (15-20 minutes)	Round #1 and round #2 include time for 1-2 minutes of silent reflection time.  Limit table size to 4-5. If larger, allow more time for participants to all have adequate time to share.
15-30	85-115	Large Group Feedback	Each table shares the Group Discernment
5	90-120	Sending Forth Prayer	Ask participants to complete an evaluation form before leaving.  Can include closing comments from Pastor or DPL or Host before the final prayer.

### General Considerations

- To foster a sense of community, “breaking bread” before the listening session is worth consideration.
- Alternately or additionally, a significant prayer experience before a listening session is also worth consideration. Mass, morning or evening prayer, adoration, rosary, etc. are options.



### Gathering Prayer (Sample)

- Opening song: All Are Welcome or another appropriate hymn
- Word of God: Acts 2:1-11, 14-19 or another scripture passage from the synod documents
- Quiet reflection time
- Synod prayer

### Introduction and Overview of the Synod

- This is a special time of prayer, listening, dialogue, and recommendations
- This is your opportunity to respond to the request from Pope Francis to dream about the Church we are called to be.
  - The synod “is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people’s hopes flourish, to simulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission.”
- By the end of our time together we aim to capture your answers to the basic questions: ***What is the Holy Spirit saying to our Church today?***

### Participant Ground Rules

- We are here today to have a **DIALOGUE** or a conversation to build relationships and exchange perspectives between participants. We want to expand our possibilities by helping to reflect on our collective experiences. Please avoid arguing or comments that seek to advance a personal agenda.
- We will treat what anyone says with reverence and respect.
- During individual sharing, one person speaks at a time, uninterrupted.
- We will listen with an open mind.
- Respect the times of silence when we stop the sharing to reflect and pray.
- We only speak once until everyone has had an opportunity to share.
- When we report themes and experiences it will be done without attributing specific comments to individual participants.

### Small Group

- Round #1 – Individual Sharing
  - What are our experiences of journeying together in communion, participation, and mission in our local Church?
  - What experiences bring you joy and help you grow in your relationship with Jesus?
  - What difficulties or obstacles have you encountered?
  - What wounds did these experiences reveal?
- Silent reflection for 1-2 minutes
- Round #2 – Individual Sharing



- What insights have the experiences shared elicited?
- What do you think the parish does well that we need to continue doing?
- What do you think would make our parish better?
- Who else do we need to reach out to, listen to, or include whose voice is not being heard?
- Silent reflection for 1-2 minutes
- Group Discernment – Facilitator lead discussion
  - What key message from our discussion is the Holy Spirit guiding us toward?
  - To what minority opinion(s) is the Holy Spirit calling us to further consider?
  - Briefly describe the “listening” process experience of the group.

### Large Group Feedback

- Each table facilitator will share a summary of the group discernment.
- If time permits, allow individuals to give personal feedback to the larger group.
- End with the Host explaining that the information from the groups and other listening sessions will be combined into a parish report that will be sent to the chancery. Every effort will be made to faithfully report what was expressed (including contentious or complex issues) in order to respect the trust and communion experienced during the time together.
- The Pastor or DPL and Host will be invited to represent the parish at a larger gathering of the diocese on June 7, 2022, to discern the input to the report which will be sent onto the USCCB.

### Sending Forth Prayer

- Evaluation – paper or electronic (sample)
  - How well has the listening session allowed you the opportunity to share your own experience of Church?
  - What are your hopes for the Church as we “journey together” in terms of communion, participation, and mission?
  - What practical suggestions do you have for your faith community to continue to be a more listening, discerning, and participatory Church?
  - What groups, minorities, or marginalized segments of our community do we still need to reach to hear their voice?
- Prayer (sample)
  - Leader: Let us take a moment of quiet as we reflect on what we have done here today.
  - Reader: James 1:21b-22a, “Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word and not hearers only.”
  - Leader: Come Holy Spirit, we ask you, that by your inspiration, may all our prayers and actions always begin from you and inspire others to know you more deeply. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
  - All: Amen
  - Leader: Let us go forth sharing a sign of peace.



## Resources for Listening Sessions

### Planning before the Listening Session

#### *Equipment and Materials for Listening Session*

#### **Space:**

- A room with enough tables and chairs for all participants (4-5 participants per table)
  - Note: The sessions do not need to take place on church grounds and can be done at any appropriate venue, including virtual meetings with breakout rooms as appropriate
- One microphone for the Pastor and host, as appropriate for the space
- Hospitality table with drinks and snack

#### **At Each Table Place:**

- *Participant's Guide* for the number of chairs at the table
- Pens and/or pencils
- Bible open to Acts 2:14-21

### Checklist

#### Volunteers Checklist:

- \_\_\_ Table Leaders
- \_\_\_ Hospitality Team

#### Materials Checklist:

- \_\_\_ Facilitator Handbook
- \_\_\_ Nametags
- \_\_\_ Sign In Sheet
- \_\_\_ Copies of *Participant's Guide* (one per person)
- \_\_\_ Food/hospitality
- \_\_\_ Copies of Note Takers Sheets
- \_\_\_ Space set-up for small groups
- \_\_\_ Bible open to Acts 2:14-21

#### Before the Listening Session:

- \_\_\_ Invite the community by publicizing the Synod using Flocknote, Facebook, social media, at Masses, and in your bulletin. Be sure to invite those who do not regularly attend Mass or parish



events during the week. Encourage active parishioners to bring along someone who normally does not attend parish events.

\_\_\_ Identify table leaders who can facilitate the conversation.

\_\_\_ Pastors and DPLs, staff, the host, or an outside facilitator should be available during the listening session to help table leaders when a conversation gets sensitive or contentious or out of control.

\_\_\_ Identify someone to serve as secretary to type up small group notes into one parish report

### At the Listening Session:

\_\_\_ Provide hospitality such as food and greeters to create a welcoming environment for all who come.

\_\_\_ Bring nametags to encourage conversation, especially for those who are new.

\_\_\_ Ask participants to sign-in collecting participant name, email, and if they are interested in learning more about the parish community.

\_\_\_ Gather participants in small groups of 4-5 people so that everyone has an opportunity to share and to listen. If you have multiple small groups, ensure that there is a table facilitator for each group.

### After the Listening Session:

\_\_\_ Follow up with the participants. Since the goal of the Listening Session is to consider how they can continue to invite the participants into deeper participation and leadership in the life of the parish, send an email thanking them for coming and consider asking parishioners to follow up with them one-on-one to encourage their involvement in your parish.

\_\_\_ The Parish Group Coordinator will aggregate the feedback and discern the report input with the Pastor or DPL and other leaders.

\_\_\_ Submit your parish feedback by May 8, 2022.



# Resources for Promoting Listening Sessions

## Homily Hints

### *Modern Analogies*

- **Family Dinner:** The Synod is like a big family dinner. Everyone attends: the rebellious teenagers, the grumpy uncle, the cousin who struggles with sobriety, the divorced aunt, your favorite uncle, mom, and dad. The whole family talks before, during, and after. There might be laughter, joy, old stories, and nostalgia. There might be tensions, arguments, and frustrations. There might be a big elephant in the room that no one talks about. Yet, at the end of the day – no matter what, they are all one family. Such is the Church during the Synod process, but bonded more intimately, for the waters of baptism unite more than the waters of the womb.
- **A Road Trip:** The Synod process might seem like a lengthy family road trip. Different members of the family might take turns driving and navigating. There might be good and deep conversations. There might be some conversations that serve only to pass the time. There might be long periods of silence. There could be a detour, a roadblock, a pit-stop, or a much-needed bathroom break. Yet, despite it all, everyone arrives safely home. The Church is like a car in which all family members are traveling to reach their destination. Christ is the map, and the Holy Spirit is the motor. Each member of the family has distinctive roles and importance. Dad is Dad. Mom is Mom—no matter who is driving or who is navigating. In the Church, everyone shares the responsibility to accompany each other on the journey towards the heavenly homeland of the Father's House. The Synod process is one way we accompany each other on the journey home.

### *Scriptural Analogies*

- **The Exodus:** A touchstone story for the People of God is their birth as a nation from another nation through their redemption from slavery. They have seen the mighty works of God, know His providence in the manna, and have been given His law. Yet, they continue to complain and murmur. Amid difficulties in the community, Moses gathers others to help him listen to the people, and Moses says: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" Through all the difficulties, ups, and downs, they journey together toward the promised land. The Synodal process is similar in that the People of God have been redeemed by sin by the new Moses. The Church has seen the mighty works of God, knows His providence in the Eucharist, and has been given the Holy Spirit. Moses's words are fulfilled on Pentecost and applied to us at our baptism. We are a prophetic people, and the Synodal process asks us to listen to one another as we journey together toward the Last Day on which every tear will be wiped away.





- The Road to Emmaus: Two disciples are journeying toward Emmaus talking about the death of Christ, and a stranger approaches them, who seemingly does not know the latest news. The two readily share it with Him, and He begins to explain to them the more profound significance of what has happened in the context of salvation history. The disciples listen to the stranger amongst them intently and invite Him to join them for a meal. When He breaks the bread, they realize He is Christ risen from the dead in their midst. Their hearts are burning within them, and they run to tell the Apostles that Christ is risen from the dead.

The faithful disciples journeying is like the Church during this time of Synod. They welcome the stranger, share with Him the latest news, and look at the crisis of today in the light of the saving action of God throughout history. They gather around a feast, see Christ, and the Holy Spirit moves them to engage in the Church's mission: the proclamation of the Risen Christ. An aim of the Synod is to walk together and listen to one another as we look at the signs of the times overshadowed by the cross and come to understand them in the light of the Risen Christ. Then we will participate in the mission of the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit burning in our hearts.

### *Relevant Themes of the Liturgical Seasons*

- Ordinary Time: The three central themes of this season are: the teaching, the miracles, and the hidden life of Christ. If the teachings of Christ are the foundation, light, and guide for the Synod discussions, then miracles will be made known through the People of God by their fidelity to the mission of the Church in their day-to-day lives.
- Lent: The Synod can serve as a parish-wide, diocese spanning, Church encompassing examination of consciousness. It is a time to see where we, as a community, have fallen short of the Gospel, repent, be reconciled to God and our neighbor, and make a firm resolution to do what is necessary to answer the Universal Call to Holiness. Lent and the Synod are a journey in a world darkened by sin that the whole Church makes together toward the light of the Risen Christ. It is a journey we must embark on now. For now, is the right and acceptable time. Now is the day of Salvation.
- Easter: During the time between the Resurrection and the Ascension, Christ appears to many people. He spends the time teaching His disciples about the Kingdom and commissions them to spread the Gospel and baptize the nations. Eastertide is the season to emphasize the evangelical mission of the Synod and encourage all to participate fully in that mission without fear of any kind. For if Christ has conquered death, then His promises are true, and there is nothing to fear. The Synod should be a proclamation of the Risen Christ to the world. Such a gathering of people who genuinely believe that the Crucified God has Risen from the dead will set the world on fire with the Holy Spirit for the glory of God the Father.

Additional liturgical resources are available at the USCCB website, [www.usccb.org/resources/Preaching-HomilyPrompts.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/resources/Preaching-HomilyPrompts.pdf).



### Prayers of the Faithful

The following Prayers of the Faithful were developed by the Synod of Bishops and can be used during Mass to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit during this Synodal process.

- For the Church. That we may journey as companions, side by side one another on the same road. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For listening ears. That our hearts and minds be open to listening to others without prejudice. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For the gift of speaking out. That we be encouraged in this Synodal journey to speak with courage and parrhesia, integrating freedom, truth, and love. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For a Church that celebrates. That our journey together in the coming months will be based on listening together to the Word of God and the celebration on the Eucharist in the communion of the People of God. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For our participation in the Mission of Christ. That through our Synodal journey together, we may grow in our shared responsibility of the mission that is entrusted to us. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For true dialogue in the Church and in Society. That through a path of perseverance, patience, and mutual understanding, we may be attentive to the experience of persons and peoples. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For the unity of Christians. That dialogue between Christians of different denominations, united by one Baptism, may radiate with new brightness on this Synodal journey. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For the exercise of authority and participation in the People of God. That the Synodal roots of the Church will bear fruit in new ways of being at the service of one another at all levels of the Body of Christ. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.



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- For our discernment to be led by the Holy Spirit. That all decisions made on this Synodal path may be discerned through a consensus that flows from our common obedience to the Holy Spirit. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
  
- For a spirituality of journeying together. That we may be formed as disciples of Christ, as families, as communities, and as human beings, through our experience of this Synodal journey. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.

From: Suggestions for the *Liturgy to Celebrate the Opening of the Synod in Local Churches* by the Synod of Bishops. This resource was distributed by the Synod of Bishops to episcopal conferences.



## Bulletin Inserts

Below you'll find communication information about the Synod which aligns with the Parish Timeline. Parishes may consider using this information as bulletin announcements, bulletin inserts, Flocknotes emails, or social media posts. This material will also be made available as separate documents at [www.saginaw.org/synod2023](http://www.saginaw.org/synod2023).

- Introduction to Synod
- The Synod Prayer
- Break open the Synod Prayer
- Thematic Questions for Reflection
- Fundamental Question Reflection



## Introduction to the Synod



Pope Francis invites you and all the faithful to “journey together” by participating in listening sessions as part of the preparation for the 2023 Synod of Bishops: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission." Learn more about the Synod and how you can participate at [www.saginaw.org/synod2023](http://www.saginaw.org/synod2023). Listening sessions at our parish will be held on (insert date). You can also contact (insert parish contact person and contact info) for more information.

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### What is a synod?

The Synod is an assembly of bishops from around the world who assist the Holy Father by providing counsel on important questions facing the Church in a manner that preserves the Church's teaching and strengthens her internal discipline. (see the Vatican website and Code of Canon Law, canon 342) However, in recent years, the Synod has transformed into a global dialogue on particular issues of pastoral concern such as evangelization, Scripture, family life, young people, and synodality itself.

*The purpose of the Synod 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, paragraph 32)

### A spiritual process

Pope Francis is not inviting us to participate in another survey! Instead, he is inviting us into a spiritual process by prayerfully having conversations, sharing our stories, learning about one another, and listening with open minds and hearts—without judgement, without prejudice, without agendas.

Through prayer and from our conversations with one another, Pope Francis hopes that we will discern how the Holy Spirit wants the Church to grow in “deeper communion, fuller participation, and greater openness to fulfilling our mission in the world” (Vademecum, 1.2). We are all on this journey together!



### **Communion, participation, mission**

The three dimensions of the theme for the synod are communion, participation, and mission. There is a dynamic relationship between the three, with each dimension enriching and orienting the other two.

**Communion:** By his gracious will, God gathers us together as diverse peoples of one faith, through the covenant that he offers to his people.

**Participation:** A call for the involvement of all who belong to the People of God – clergy and lay people, including consecrated women and men -- to prayerfully engage in the exercise of deep and respectful listening to one another.

**Mission:** The Church exists to evangelize. As Christians, we should never be solely centered on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the saving love of Jesus Christ in the midst of the whole human family.

### **All are called to participate**

“All the baptized are called to take part in the Church’s life and mission,” Pope Francis reminds us. The Holy Father acknowledges "the frustration and impatience felt by many pastoral workers, members of diocesan and parish consultative bodies and women, who frequently remain on the fringes. Enabling everyone to participate is an essential ecclesial duty! All the baptized, for baptism is our identity card."

### **Discernment**

Pope Francis is asking us to discern the will of the Holy Spirit for the Church. But what is discernment? For Christians, it means to prayerfully open our minds and hearts to allow God to illuminate us about the best path forward. This goes for individuals and for the Church as a whole. However, discernment is not just about getting answers. Discernment is about getting to know God in a deeper way and fostering that relationship.

### **Preparation**

We invite you to begin the first step of the synodal process: prayer.

Pray for the whole Church, that each member no matter how young or old, involved or disconnected, marginalized or integrated, faithful or doubting, answers the call of the Holy Spirit to share their stories and participate in the synod.

Pray for Pope Francis, Bishop Gruss and all of our diocesan, parish and school leaders. Pray for all those who work and volunteer at the various levels of the Church -- that we may listen to the stories of the faithful with open hearts and minds and to discern how God wants to lead the Church in these times.



## Parish Toolkit

Pray for yourself as you embark on this synodal journey to be open to the Holy Spirit and recognize that your story and your experiences are of great value.

We pray that everyone recognize that we do not travel this synodal journey as individuals, but as a community of faith, both local and global, in communion with God and all the angels and saints. We pray that everyone answers the call to participate in the life of the Church -- to share our experiences and listen to the experiences of others. We pray that all of us accept the mission that God has given to his Church: to share the saving love and peace of Jesus Christ with everyone.

This introduction was adapted from original work by Kristyn J. Russell.

Learn more about the Synod and how you can participate at [www.saginaw.org/synod2023](http://www.saginaw.org/synod2023).



## **Prayer for the Synod**

### **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.

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## Break Open the Synod Prayer



Pope Francis invites you and all the faithful to “journey together” by participating in listening sessions as part of the preparation for the 2023 Synod of Bishops: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission. Learn more about the Synod and how you can participate at [www.saginaw.org/synod2023](http://www.saginaw.org/synod2023). Listening sessions at our parish will be held on (insert date). You can also contact (insert parish contact person and contact info) for more information.

During the Second Vatican Council, participants would pray the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* (We stand before You, Holy Spirit) before every session. The prayer has been used at councils, synods, and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years. It is attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 636). The prayer has been adapted for this specific Synodal Process. We will unpack the prayer below to help you know and understand what we’re praying for. We're asking the Holy Spirit to do big things in our lives and in the life of the Church.

*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;*

The first stanza of this prayer is straightforward: we are acknowledging that we stand before the Holy Spirit both as individuals and as a community. However, we are not standing here passively waiting for the Holy Spirit to do something. No, we stand here opening our hearts and minds to the action of the Holy Spirit, ready to play a role in dynamic cooperation with one another, the universal Church, and the Holy Spirit. We stand with our walking shoes on, ready to journey together. We may not know where the Synodal Process will lead us, but we have prepared a place for God to guide us as we move forward.



*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.*

This stanza might be the hardest one to digest. We don't typically like to call attention to our deficits and sin. But it's true that we are weak and we are sinful. We're acknowledging that we have biases and agendas. We're asking the Holy Spirit to help form our hearts, our minds, and our actions. We're asking the Spirit to help us recognize our biases and agendas and, as we participate in the Synodal Process, to be able to discern between what we want and what the Spirit wants. The original Latin says, "do not let us disturb the order of justice." We must remain focused on what is right and just, and not stand in the way of the Holy Spirit.

*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.*

Many of our saints have prayed that their wills be united to the will of God, and that is our prayer here: that together we are joined together with the Spirit as we journey toward eternal life. Our destination is heaven, where we will be in perfect communion with God and with each other. Our communion this side of heaven may not be perfect, but we can work on it. The Synodal Process may be challenging because it demands that we listen to one another. We must hear the stories of our brothers and sisters who are different from us. We are moving forward together in communion, and as long as we let the Spirit who is Wisdom and Love lead us, we will remain on the right and true path.

*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.*

Whether we pray together or individually, we're asking for something amazing! We're asking the Holy Spirit to move in and move among us. This is the same Spirit who was there at the beginning of time; the same Spirit who descended at Pentecost; the same Spirit who has touched the hearts of sinners and unbelievers with the grace of conversion, and who has inspired saints, believers, movements, councils and synods and in ways we cannot comprehend. The same Spirit who is eternally in communion with the Father and Son in the Holy Trinity. The Spirit is always on the move and is moving with us during this Synod.



## Parish Toolkit

Learn more about the Synod, the Synod Prayer, and how you can participate at [www.saginaw.org/synod2023](http://www.saginaw.org/synod2023).

This reflection was adapted from original work by Kristyn J. Russell



## Thematic Questions for Reflection



### Parishes may consider using the language below in their bulletins

Pope Francis invites you and all the faithful to “journey together” by participating in listening sessions as part of the preparation for the 2023 Synod of Bishops: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission. Learn more about the Synod and how you can participate at [www.saginaw.org/synod2023](http://www.saginaw.org/synod2023). Listening sessions at our parish will be held on (insert date). You can also contact (insert parish contact person and contact info) for more information.

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Questions to reflect upon in preparation for listening sessions:

### Companions on the Journey

In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road. In our local Church, who are those who “walk together”? Who are those who seem further apart? How are we called to grow as companions? What groups or individuals are left on the margins?

### Listening

Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice. How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore? How are the laity listened to, especially women and young people? What facilitates or inhibits our listening? How well do we listen to those on the peripheries? How is the contribution of consecrated men and women integrated? What are some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than our own? What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?



### **Speaking Out**

All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity. What enables or hinders speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and in society? When and how do we manage to say what is important to us? How does the relationship with the local media work (not only Catholic media)? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

### **Celebration**

“Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. How do prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy? What space is given to participating in the ministries of lector and acolyte?

### **Co-Responsible in the Mission**

Synodality is at the service of the Church’s mission, in which all her members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is each Baptized person called to be a protagonist in the mission? How does the community support its members committed to service in society (social and political commitment, in scientific research and teaching, in the promotion of social justice, in the protection of human rights, and in caring for the Common home, etc.)? How do you help them to live out these commitments in a logic of mission? How is discernment about mission-related choices made, and who participates in it? How are the different traditions that constitute the patrimony of many Churches, especially the Oriental ones, integrated and adapted, with respect to the synodal style, in view of an effective Christian witness? How does collaboration work in territories where different sui iuris Churches are present?

### **Forming Ourselves in Synodality**

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?

### **Dialogue in Church and Society and with Other Christian Denominations**

Dialogue is a path of perseverance that also includes silence and suffering, but which is capable of gathering the experience of persons and peoples. How are divergences of vision, the conflicts, the difficulties addressed? How do we promote collaboration with neighboring Dioceses, with and among religious communities in the area, with and among lay associations and movements, etc.? What



experiences of dialogue and shared commitment do we have with believers of other religions and with non-believers? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the world of politics, economics, culture, civil society, the poor...? The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one Baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relations do we have with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations?

### **Authority and Participation**

A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How do we identify the goals to be pursued, the way to achieve them, and the steps to be taken? How is authority exercised within our particular Church? What are the practices of teamwork and co-responsibility? How are lay ministries and the assumption of responsibility by the Faithful promoted?

### **Discerning and Deciding**

In a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit. By what procedures and methods do we discern together and make decisions? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchically structured communities? How do we articulate the consultative phase with the deliberative one, the process of decision-making with the moment of decision-taking? How and with what tools do we promote transparency and accountability?

Learn more about the Synod, other resources for study and reflection, and how you can participate at [www.saginaw.org/synod2023](http://www.saginaw.org/synod2023).

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## Fundamental Question Reflection

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### The Fundamental Question

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

### Reflection Questions

Addressing the fundamental question requires listening to the Holy Spirit, who like the wind “blows where it will; you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (John 3:8), remaining open to the surprises that the Spirit will certainly prepare us for the listening sessions.

In a prayerful way, ask yourself what experiences in your particular Church the fundamental question calls to mind?

What joys do these experiences provoke? What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered? What wounds have they brought to light? What insights have they elicited?

Where in these experiences does the voice of the Spirit resound? What is he asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken?

### Two Perspectives

“Journeying together” can be understood from two different perspectives, which are strongly interconnected. The first perspective looks at the internal life of the particular Churches, at the relationships between their constituent parts. The second perspective considers how the People of God journey together with the entire human family.

Learn more about the Synod and how you can participate at [www.saginaw.org/synod2023](http://www.saginaw.org/synod2023).



### Parish Summary Report

The main report should be no more than five pages in length. If longer, please provide an executive summary or abstract. Additional information can be attached as an appendix to the main report to capture additional details as appropriate.

Name of parish:

- Parish city:

Name of Pastor or DPL:

- Phone number:
- Email address:

Name of parish group coordinator:

- Phone number:
- Email address:

Describe your process of the listening sessions

- How many listening sessions did you have?
- List any special sessions (i.e., Parish Council, Parish Finance Council, Youth focused, etc.)
- Did you use the standard questions or were they modified to fit the audience?
- How many people participated in the listening sessions?
- Describe your audience (i.e., active parishioners, fallen away Catholics, community members, etc.)?
- Were there any special or marginalized groups especially noteworthy?
- What main challenges did you need to overcome to get people to participate?
- What would you do differently if you had to do it again?

Narrative of the listening sessions

- Provide a summary of the Fundamental Question feedback
  - What were the most significant discernment finding of the whole experience?
  - What were the main positive points?
  - What were the main points of tension or disagreement?
  - What wounds were uncovered?
  - What was particularly surprising or unexpected?
  - What input from special sessions (i.e., youth, young adults, women, etc..) is noteworthy.





## Parish Toolkit

- What minority opinion(s) are noteworthy?
- What points of discernment did the Holy Spirit speak to your parish community?
  - What did the participants have to say about areas where the Church needs healing and conversion in its spiritual life, culture, attitudes, structures, pastoral practices, relationships, and missionary outreach?
  - What dreams, desires, and aspirations for the church were expressed by the participants?
- Describe the listening process and how participants and leaders reacted to the experience of the process.
- What changes in your parish will you make based on the outcome of your local listening sessions output?

### Appendix

- Individual or group listening session input can be attached as an addendum to the report as deemed appropriate.

NOTE: The team is encouraged to share the final report with parishioners and those who attended the listening sessions.



## Definitions

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

### **Authority:**

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

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

### **Baptism and Confirmation:**

Baptism is the sacrament by which we enter into the People of God, freed from original sin and adopted as sons and daughters of God in Christ. Baptism is the fundamental identity of all the faithful, including priests, religious, and lay people. Pope Francis describes the mission of every baptized person as that of being a missionary disciple in the midst of the People of God, to bring the light of the Gospel to every corner of the world.

In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”. If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!” (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him “because of the woman’s testimony” (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his



encounter with Jesus Christ, “immediately proclaimed Jesus” (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for? (Evangelii Gaudium, no. 120)

Confirmation is the sacrament by which the faithful receive the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In Confirmation, we become fully equipped for the mission entrusted to us at our baptism. The Spirit poured out upon us enables us to live ever more deeply our primordial vocation as sons and daughters of God who cry out “Abba, Father!” (Romans 8:15) We are not only called to live out our call as sons and daughters of God, but also to invite others into this filial relationship with the Father in Christ, of which the Holy Spirit makes us partakers.

### **Charisms:**

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

### **Church:**

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

### **Consensus:**

Consensus in the context of the Synodal Process does not mean uniformity or a democratic majority. This would ignore the fact that the Holy Spirit can speak through the words of one single member of the People of God or a small group. Rather, consensus in synodal key refers to the process of listening to one another in order to discern the common path that God is calling us to in a spirit of communion, guided by the Holy Spirit.

### **Consultation:**

In previous Synods, consultation was sought by means of questionnaires that were circulated among the faithful prior to a gathering of the Synod of Bishops in Rome on a particular topic. This current Synod seeks to broaden the experience of “consultation” in order to move towards a more synodal Church that more fully listens to and engages the entire People of God. In this way, “consultation” is now taking the form of a wider “participation.” The



Synod of Bishops in Rome is no longer the sum total of the experience of Synodality in the Church, but rather the culmination of a long process by which the voice of the Spirit resounds throughout the whole Church, at the diocesan, national, continental, and universal levels.

### **Communion:**

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

### **Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting:**

Each local Church culminates the diocesan phase with a Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting. This gathering provides the opportunity for diverse members of the diocese to come together for a liturgical celebration, to pray together, to reflect on their experience of the Synodal Process in the diocese, to listen the feedback that has been raised, to dialogue about the current reality of the local Church and the signs of the times, and to discern the Spirit's call for the diocese in relation to its growth in synodal conversion. While much of the consultation process during the Diocesan Phase might have occurred within specific communities of the local Church, such as parishes, ministries, youth and other groups, the objective of the Diocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting is to bring together a representative cross-section of the whole diocese, including minority groups and those on the peripheries, and enable participants to listen, reflect, and discern together. Thereafter the outcome of the meeting should be part of the diocesan synthesis, as described in Part 4 of the Vademecum.

### **Diocesan Synodal Team:**

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

### **Discernment:**

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



### **Ecclesial:**

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

### **Episcopal:**

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

### **Instrumentum Laboris:**

The Instrumentum Laboris is the “Working Document” that is used as the basis for the discussions, interventions, and exchanges that take at the Synod of Bishops. It is a document published by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. Unlike previous Synods, the current Synodal process will involve two versions of the Instrumentum Laboris. One version will be published after the listening phase at the diocesan level has been synthesized at the national level. This first draft will then serve as the “Working Document” for the meetings that will take place at the continental level. Based on the work of the continental phase, a second draft of the Instrumentum Laboris will then be published, which will serve as the basis for the meeting of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023.

### **Local Church:**

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

The historical, linguistic and cultural links that mold interpersonal communication in the local Church and describe its particular features facilitate the adoption of a synodal style in its daily life and are the basis for effective



missionary conversion. In the local Church Christian witness is embodied in specific human and social situations, which allows for an incisive initiation of synodal structures which serve mission. As Pope Francis has emphasized, “only to the extent that these organizations keep connected to the ‘base’ and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape” [91]. (ITC, Syn., no. 77)

### **Listening:**

Pope Francis has affirmed that: “A synodal Church is a Church which listens. [...] The faithful People, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other; and all listening to the Holy Spirit.” The International Theological Commission explained this central role of listening as follows (ICT, Syn., no. 111): Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate where one speaker tries to get the better of the others or counters their positions with brusque arguments, but about expressing whatever seems to have been suggested by the Holy Spirit as useful for communal discernment, at the same time being open to accepting whatever has been suggested by the same Spirit in other people’s positions, “for the general good” (1 Corinthians 12,7).

### **Mission:**

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

### **Parrhesia:**

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

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

### **Participation:**

A synodal Church is a Church of participation and co-responsibility. In exercising synodality she is called to give expression to the participation of all, according to each one’s calling, with the authority conferred by Christ on the College of Bishops headed by the Pope. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit. The authority of Pastors is a specific gift of the Spirit of Christ the Head for the building up of the entire Body, not a delegated and representative function of the people. (ITC, Syn., no. 67)



The distinction between deliberative and consultative votes must not allow us to underrate the opinions expressed and votes made in various synodal assemblies and councils. The expression *votum tantum consultivum*, which indicates the weight of evaluations and proposals in such august assemblies, is inadequate if it is understood according to the means of civil law in its various expressions [81].

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

### **People of God:**

The Second Vatican Council focused on the Church as the "People of God." This makes clear that the Church is not only a hierarchical structure, but a people on pilgrimage together, guided by God on its journey. God brings us into unity with one another as He draws us into union with Himself: "God does not make men and women holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness." (Lumen Gentium, 9) This people was first made manifest in Israel, whom God chose as His own and with whom he established his first covenant. In Jesus Christ, entry into the People of God has been extended to every people and nation: "Go therefore, make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). God invites all peoples to be part of the people that is particularly his own: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10) The mission of the Church is to gather the People of God throughout its journey through history in view of the Kingdom of God. In this sense, the Church is the sign and instrument of "intimate union with God and the unity of the entire human race" (Lumen Gentium, 1). The Church is at the service of the mission of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who brings all of humanity together in himself: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:16)

### **Power:**

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



In terms of re-vitalizing synodal practice on the level of the universal Church, Blessed Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops. It is a “permanent Council of Bishops for the universal Church”, directly and immediately subject to the power of the Pope, “providing information and offering advice”, which “can also enjoy the power of making decisions when such power is conferred upon it by the Roman Pontiff” [41]. This institution aims to continue to extend to the People of God the benefits of communion lived during the Council. (ITC, Syn., no. 41)

### **Sensus fidei:**

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

### **Signs of the times:**

The Second Vatican Council took a decisive step forward towards the importance of the Church reading the “signs of the times.” This means that the Church does not carry out her mission in a vacuum, detached from the realities of the world around her. Rather, the Church is sent out in the midst of the world, in order to unite men and women of every time and place to God and one another. The Church must therefore be attentive to the needs, realities, and concerns of the world in every era in order to carry out her mission in the service of humanity. The Church must thus read the signs of the times in the light of the faith, in order to discern how God is calling her to respond amid the circumstances and events of every period of time. Ultimately, reading the signs of the times is a means of realizing the profound solidarity between the Church and humanity: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.” (Gaudium et Spes, 1)

### **Synod:**

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

### **Synodal Process:**

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





## **Synodality:**

Synodality, as defined by the International Theological Commission in 2018, is “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.”

Pope Francis describes a synodal Church as a “listening Church knowing that listening is more than feeling. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. We must all listen to the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Truth to know what the Spirit is saying to the Church. [...] This is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium.” (Address at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015)

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

## **Vocation of All the People of God:**

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

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

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

## **Vademecum:**

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

## **Vatican II:**

Pope John XXIII convoked the twenty-first ecumenical council in the history of the Church, which gathered all the bishops of the world between 1962 and 1965 at the Vatican. In the opening address of the Council, John XXIII characterized its purpose in this way:

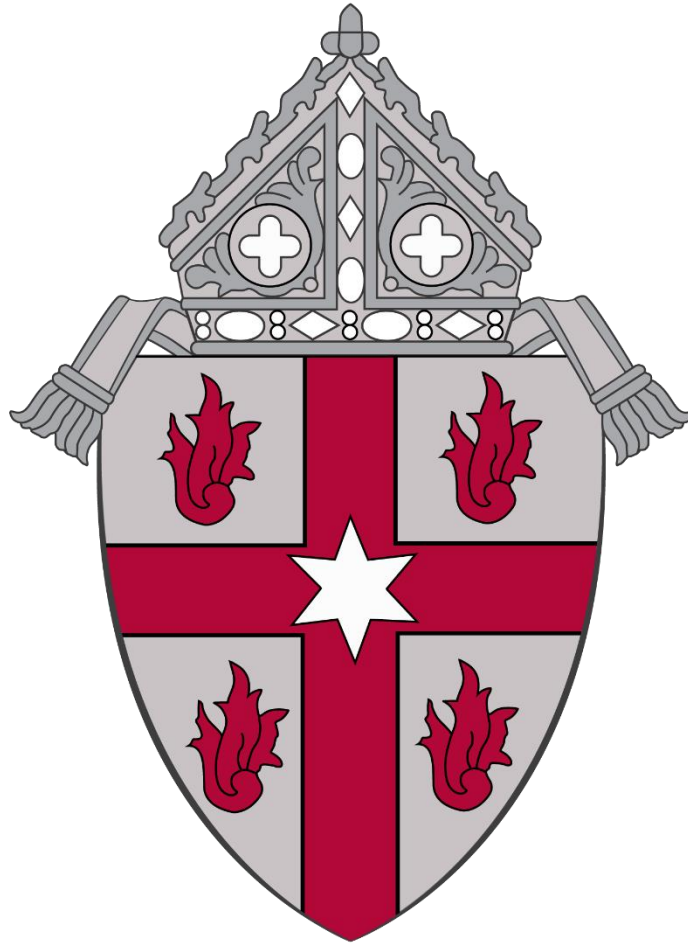
What is necessary today is that the whole of Christian doctrine, with no part of it lost, be received in our times by all with a new fervor, in serenity and peace, in that traditional and precise conceptuality and expression which is especially displayed in the acts of the Councils of Trent and Vatican I. [...] What is needed is that this certain and unchangeable doctrine, to which loyal submission is due, be investigated and presented in the way demanded by our times. For the deposit of faith, the truths contained in our venerable doctrine, are one thing; the fashion in which they are expressed, but with the same meaning and the same judgement, is another thing. This way of



## Parish Toolkit

speaking will require a great deal of work and, it may be, much patience: types of presentation must be introduced which are more in accord with a teaching authority which is primarily pastoral in character. (Gaudet Mater Ecclesia, 11 October 1962)

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



# Catholic Diocese of **SAGINAW**