



Synod  
2021  
2023

For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

# Leader's Toolkit



Catholic Diocese  
of Cleveland



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# INTRODUCTION



**Thank you for participating in this first phase of the upcoming Synod of Bishops.**

The theme for this Synod is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.” Synodality expresses the nature of the Church as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Pope Francis has invited everyone to participate in a dialogue with one another and with the worldwide Catholic Church. In this phase, we are asking all Catholic parishes, schools and organizations in our diocese to gather, listen and discern what it means to be Church and where the Holy Spirit is calling us.

This is a process of communal discernment, rather than individual discernment. As such, we are called to journey through this process together. During our diocesan synodal process, we are inviting everyone to engage in reflection and the practice of Spiritual Conversations using St. Ignatius of Loyola's great prayer of Examen, Scripture meditation or less formal ways of sharing. We will reflect back on our experiences, both collectively and individually, and then project forward and ask “Where is the Holy Spirit leading us as a diocese?”

Each individual matter and each of our experiences is valid and in need of ears to listen. Nobody is excluded - all are welcome. We are on this journey of faith together. In seeking where God has been beckoning us, we also look to where that same call harkens us forward into a new and vibrant way of being Church together.

# OVERVIEW OF THE DIOCESAN PROCESS

This toolkit is offered as a guide to support parishes, schools and Catholic organizations as they implement the diocesan synodal process in their respective communities.

The Diocesan Synodal Team has developed the following listening process in a spirit of prayer that will encourage open conversations guided by the Holy Spirit. The synodal process is not just another event. We are being invited to listen to one another and share an experience that will help us discern God's will and lead us "towards deeper communion, fuller participation and greater openness to fulfilling our mission in the world" (*Vademecum*).

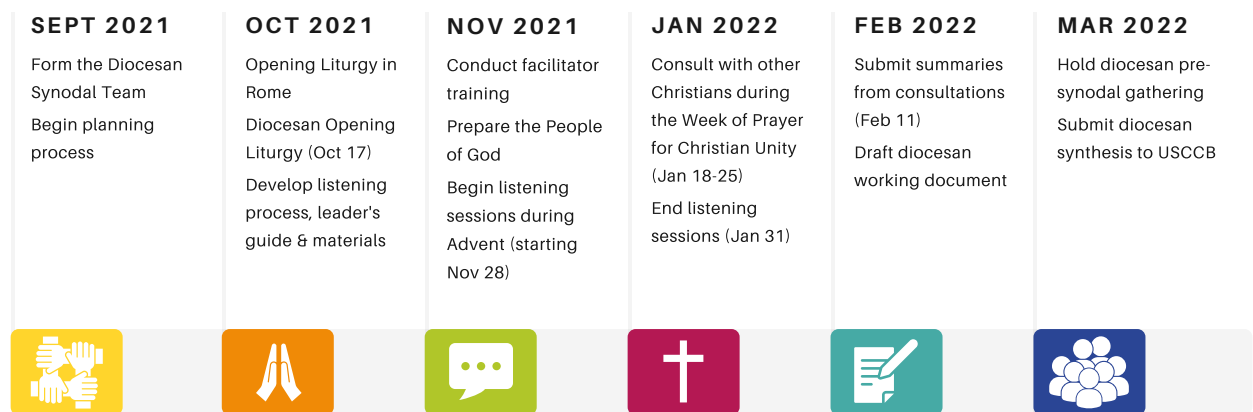
Therefore, the entire People of God are being invited to participate in this process. All the baptized will have the opportunity to share, listen and discern, as together we dream about the Church we are called to be. While our goal at this time is to successfully implement this synodal process within the timeframe we have been given, our hope is that it will also be a means of renewal for the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Cleveland. As Bishop Malesic has said, "We are a pilgrim people, a community of believers on the way to the Father together. How we get there with one another as a Church is the focus of this synodal process. My prayer is that with the Holy Spirit to guide us, what flows from this synod will preserve the fire of faith in Jesus Christ as our savior through the ages."



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# TIMELINE

The diocesan synodal process is only the first phase of the “Synod on Synodality”. Following the diocesan phase, there will be seven pre-synodal continental / international meetings before the general assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2023. Below is an infographic of our diocesan timeline.



# SCOPE OF THE CONSULTATION

We understand that there are many challenges that will affect the implementation of the synodal process. However, this is a tremendous opportunity to consider the pressing questions that we are currently facing as a Church. In order to listen to as many voices as possible during our timeframe, our approach will be to conduct listening sessions via the already-established structures and scheduled activities in our diocese. See infographic below.

 Cathedral Square Plaza	Diocesan Staff	Advisory Committees	Districts		
 Parishes	Staff	Advisory Committees	Ministry Groups	People in the Pews	Outreach
 Schools	Admin Staff	Teachers	Parents	Students	
 Colleges & Universities	Admin Staff	Boards / Committees	Newman Ministry	Student Body	
 Religious Congregations	Boards / Committees	Members			
 Catholic Organizations	Ecclesial & Apostolic Movements	Health Care	Prison Chaplains	Catholic Charities	
 Religious & Civic Leaders	Ad Hoc Gatherings				

# HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

In this toolkit, you will find the outline for the listening sessions, ideas for reaching out to those on the margins and other informal opportunities for sharing and listening, as well as resources for promoting the listening sessions in your community. All resources are available on our website: [dioceseofcleveland.org/synod](https://dioceseofcleveland.org/synod).

## GATHERED

In light of the challenges that we are still experiencing due to the pandemic, we encourage you to be as creative as possible as you organize the listening sessions in your community. We highly recommend that you think of your parish, school or organization as a community made up of many small communities. Invite your staffs, committees, ministry groups, etc. to gather in small groups of 5-7 people for a listening session, either in-person or online. Take time during your scheduled meetings and activities to participate in the reflection and spiritual conversation process.

The listening session has also been adapted for children and youth in [elementary school](#), [middle school](#), [high school](#) and [youth ministry](#). Feel free to adapt the process in other ways to meet the needs of your community. Our main objective is to share an experience, listen to one another, and let the Holy Spirit guide us. Ask the questions that are appropriate for your community and remember to keep the fundamental question in mind - *What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?*

## NON-GATHERED

In an effort to include those who are not connected with a faith community or who choose not to participate in a gathered listening session, we have created an [individual online process](#).

## MISSIONARY ACTION

As part of the synodal process, we have been asked to take special care to reach out to the peripheries, to those who have left the Church, those who rarely or never practice their faith, those who experience poverty or marginalization, refugees, the excluded, the voiceless, etc. We all know someone who is disconnected from the Church. Therefore, we are encouraging everyone who participates to take one extra step as a **missionary action** to have a one-on-one conversation with someone they know that falls into this category. Below are two suggestions for conversation starters.

- **One's life story.** Invite the person to share their story and view of faith. You may wish to use the following questions: *What has been your experience of God and faith in your life? How does the Church play into your story?* Care should be taken to consider what paths these stories open up for the parish, school or organization as we re-envision our journey as Church. In light of what you've heard, what steps does the Spirit invite us to take?
- **Finding the right words.** Invite participants to share words evoked when you say Church and "walking together with Jesus". Participants can be encouraged to explain why they responded the way they did. In light of what you've heard, what steps does the Spirit invite us to take?

These conversation starters can also be used during the listening sessions as an alternative to the Examen or Scripture reflection.

## INFORMAL MOMENTS

There are also a number of informal moments that can serve as opportunities to share and listen. For example, you can provide a conversation starter during coffee hour after Mass, ask people to write down their thoughts about the conversation, and drop their notes into a basket before they go.

Since we will be in the midst of the synodal process during the holidays, we have also provided two additional resources: a **holiday activity for families**, and a **Synodal Celebration of Las Posadas**. Las Posadas is a novena that takes place December 16-24 and commemorates the journey Joseph and Mary made from Nazareth to Bethlehem in search of lodging or an "inn" (literally what posada means) so Mary could give birth to Jesus.

# LISTENING SESSION

The Facilitator Guide, Participant Guide and Missionary Action handout are available at [dioceseofcleveland.org/synod](https://dioceseofcleveland.org/synod).

Time/Duration: 2 – 2.5 hours

Number of participants: Maximum 5-7 per group

Suggested location: Anywhere quiet

- Let's Gather and Pray (15 minutes)
  - Opening prayer
- Let's Reflect (20 minutes)
  - Option 1. Examen
  - Option 2. Scripture Passage (Lectio Divina)
  - Option 3. Missionary Action (Narrative Approach)
- Let's Share and Listen (60 minutes)
  - Round 1. What are the fruits of your individual prayer, and how you are feeling?
  - Round 2. What have you heard the Spirit saying in the voices of the group?
  - Round 3. What seems to be resonating in the conversation and what is the Spirit asking of us?
- Break (10-15 minutes)
- Let's Think Locally (20 minutes)
  - Identify 2 or 3 concrete, practical steps which could be taken to move forward together as a Church.
    - To what actions do we feel strongly called? In our personal life? In our community? As a diocese?
    - What is the most loving response to which the Spirit is calling us?
- Let's Give Thanks (5 minutes)
  - Closing prayer
- Let's Respond
  - Each small group will write up a brief summary of their conversation using the [Listening Session Recorder Form](#) and submit it to the Synod contact person for your parish, school or organization.
  - Encourage participants to carry out a missionary action and have a conversation with at least one person that they know who is disconnected from the Church.
  - Encourage participants to share their thoughts about the listening and discernment experience with their principal, parish priest, DRE, youth minister, etc.
  - The Synod contact person will collect the notes and sign-in sheets from the listening sessions and synthesize the input gathered, developing one summary report of 3-5 pages using the [Synthesis Form for Parishes, Schools and Catholic Organizations](#).  
**Return to Lynette Saenz, Assistant Secretary for Parish Life, at [lsaenz@dioceseofcleveland.org](mailto:lsaenz@dioceseofcleveland.org) before Friday, February 11, 2022.**

# SYNTHESIS

## from Parishes, Schools & Catholic Organizations

*The Synod contact person will collect the notes and sign-in sheets from the listening sessions and synthesize the input gathered, developing one summary report of 3-5 pages. Return to Lynette Saenz, Assistant Secretary for Parish Life, at [lsaenz@dioceseofcleveland.org](mailto:lsaenz@dioceseofcleveland.org) before Friday, February 11, 2022.*

Date:

Name of Parish / School / Organization:

City:

County:

## SUMMARY OF LISTENING SESSIONS

1. What are the most common themes that emerged from the listening sessions? Which points of view were mentioned less but are interesting and noteworthy? What did participants have to say about areas where the Church is in need of healing and conversion? What dreams, desires and aspirations for the Church were expressed by participants?

2. What emerging actions are recommended? What challenges or opportunities do these reflections pose for us in our personal lives, in our communities, and in our diocese? What might be the consequences of not addressing these issues?

## DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Who participated in the listening sessions? (Note: Provide best estimate for percentages.)

Male, all ages:	Percent over age 30:
Female, all ages:	Percent ages 18-29:
Total participation:	Percent under age 18:

2. Briefly describe the participants in the synodal process. [How many? Include cultural self-identification, ecclesial status, and types of involvement with the parish / school / organization.]

3. Briefly describe those encountered on the peripheries as part of any missionary action and why you consider them to be “on the peripheries”.

a. Who they are: [Include number of people/families and number of youth/young adults, adults or families. For example, “Overall, we engaged 55 people, specifically 25 young adults, 15 adults and 15 families.”]

b. Locations: [Include locations where visits occurred. For example, “We engaged 20 people in their homes, 6 in the hospital...”]

c. Gender: [Include breakdown of male and female persons visited on the peripheries. For example, “We encountered 60 women and 40 men, for a percentage total of 60% women and 40% men.”]

d. Catholic identification. [How many identify as Catholic, Non-Catholic, etc.??]

# RESOURCES

## WEBSITE POST & BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT

[Insert parish / school / organization] will be participating in the Synod! Please Read

[INSERT PARISH / SCHOOL / ORGANIZATION] will be participating in listening sessions as part of the diocesan synodal process!

Synodality means journeying together and gathering in assembly as the People of God to proclaim the Gospel. Pope Francis has invited EVERYONE to participate in a dialogue with one another and with the worldwide Catholic Church. Join us!

We hope you will participate in the conversations that will take place from now until the end of January. Each individual matters and each of our experiences is valid and in need of ears to listen. Nobody is excluded – all are welcome. We are all on this journey of faith together!

This is an opportunity to listen to one another in a spirit of prayer and dream about the Church we are called to be. The information gathered from the listening sessions will not only help us discern how we can move forward together as a community, but also as a diocesan and universal Church.

To learn more, please visit our website: [dioceseofcleveland.org/synod](https://dioceseofcleveland.org/synod).

## WAYS TO PUBLICIZE

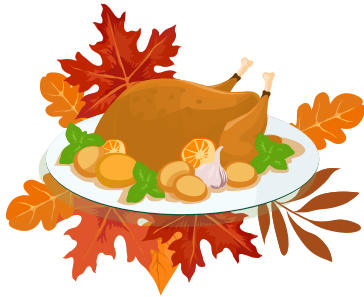
- Virtual Masses and announcements
- Communications to parishioners (ie. Flocknote, emails, phone calls, etc.)
- Website announcements
- Mass announcements
- Bulletin announcements
- Promoted on bulletin boards
- Homily notes, pastor's column and bulletin insert which is a letter from the pastor
- All social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.
- Ministry meetings
- Text reminders to mobile phone list

Additional promotional materials will be available on our website.

[DIOCESEOFCLEVELAND.ORG/SYNOD](https://dioceseofcleveland.org/synod)

# HOMILY NOTES ABOUT THE SYNOD

From Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 2021 through the Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 19, 2021



## Thanksgiving Day

I Corinthians 1:3-9

*"I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way...so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift."*

Christians have received much and it does not matter whether they be lay or religious or clergy. In the process of the Synod every one of us has something to offer and we should not doubt that we have spiritual and natural gifts to share that can build and enhance the Church.



## First Sunday of Advent

I Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

*"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all..."*

The sharing that goes on in our Synod gathering is an opportunity not only to increase our love but to make it more abounding as we discipline ourselves to be good listeners. In Synodal dialogue every person shares from their heart how the Lord has helped them in the journey of their lives and identifies ways they have accompanied others in the community, the Church.

Luke 21:34-36

*"Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life... Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man."*

As we share with each other, we speak to the anxieties and tribulations in life that we endure and persevere through as a community of faith. The Lord sends forth grace through the Holy Spirit to strengthen us, bring peace in times of chaos, comfort in distress, and compassionate presence in times of isolation.

## Second Sunday of Advent

Baruch 5:1-9

*“Up Jerusalem! Stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children gathered from the east and the west at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God.”*

The synod is meant to gather people from all cultural, social, and economic backgrounds so that they might realize they, as a diverse community of faith, are being asked to respond to the Word of God and to realize it is because they are in the memory of God that their memories are so important to the Church.

Philippians 1:4-6; 8-11

*“I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the Gospel.”*

Catholics often forget that each member of the Church is a partner for the Gospel and so what they experience and how they have lived their faith is important for all the others who share the Good News of Christ. If we do not know what our partner is experiencing, our partnership will suffer. But if we listen with love, the sharing will enhance our partnership for the Gospel.

Luke 3:1-6

*“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea...the word of God came to John.”*

Sometimes we feel as though God only speaks in the past, but the mention of the past in Scripture is to assert that in each time and moment God has a word for us human beings here and now. God is using our present situation as a moment to address something to us today. We must recognize this in our conversations.



## The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Genesis 3:9

*“After the man Adam had eaten of the tree, the Lord God called to the man and asked him ‘Where are you?’”*

Of course, God knew where he was on a map! The Lord was asking Adam as he is of you, “where are you in life right now?” The Synod is not asking you to anticipate anything nor even to make excuses. Rather, this process requires that you share where you are right now in living your life and how that life is touched by others, whether they be believers or unbelievers, whether they have been helpful or not.

### Third Sunday of Advent

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

*“Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged! The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty savior.”*

The synodal discussion is always taking place in an atmosphere of the presence of God, and that is why it is not just a discussion or a sharing time, but it is always to be part of a real moment of prayer and opening to the Holy Spirit. Only then will we find this a moment that encourages us to live our Christian lives rather than become discouraged in our listening to each other.

Philippians 4:4-7

*“The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”*

Again, the atmosphere of prayer is something that is to permeate these synod sessions so that, as we express ourselves, we experience a peace that only the Lord Jesus can guarantee.

Luke 3:10-18

*“His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”*

The image of the winnowing fan is very strange to us who never harvest wheat from the grain and separate it from chaff, which is not usable. The person doing the harvesting, after getting the whole grain of wheat gathered in a barn, would then set out to use a fan rake and throw the grain up in the air. The chaff that is not good for making wheat into flour would literally blow away. What is left is the usable wheat to be turned into flour. The exercise of synodal sharing is really a way for us to apply the winnowing fan to what we have harvested from our lives and to allow the Spirit (the Breath of God) to burn away the chaff of our existence and so allow real growth in our journey.

### Fourth of Sunday of Advent

Micah 5:1-4a

*“You Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Juda, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel...”*

“I am too insignificant to mean anything for the Church.” How sad so many Catholics often feel that way. And yet the Synod is an attempt to remind us that each of us has something to offer. Do not be intimidated by others. Bethlehem did not rank in terms of power and prestige, and yet she would bring forth the Savior.

Luke 1:39-45

*“Blessed are you among women ... And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”*

Elizabeth did not feel worthy of Mary’s visit, and yet Mary made the effort to go to her since Elizabeth was part of the blessedness of the plan of God for the Salvation of the world. Like Mary and Elizabeth, we all are called to usher into the world a voice that brings people closer to God.

## PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

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

That we may journey as companions, side by side with 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, 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 of 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 for 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 by 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.**

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.**



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communion | participation | mission