



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

Participant Guide

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 this listening 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 matters and each of our experiences are 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 to us, we also look to where that same call harkens us forward into a new and vibrant way of being Church together.



Catholic Diocese
of Cleveland

LET'S PREPARE

The listening and discernment experience



Time/Duration: 2 – 2.5 hours

Number of participants: Maximum 5-7 per group

Suggested location: Anywhere quiet

Respectful Communication Guidelines*

R: take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel, and speak with words others can hear and understand

E: use EMPATHETIC listening, not just words but also feelings being expressed, nonverbal language including silence

S: be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

P: PONDER on what you hear and feel before you speak

E: EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C: keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T: TRUST the process because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong but to experience true dialogue

LET'S GATHER & PRAY TOGETHER

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.



15 min

*Retrieved on November 3, 2022 from <https://www.usccb.org/committees/cultural-diversity-church/bicm-appendices>.

LET'S REFLECT



The facilitator will lead participants in a reflection on the Examen, a Scripture passage or another conversation starter.

LET'S SHARE & LISTEN

This practice of Spiritual Conversations is taken from the Ignatian tradition. It is a part of the communal discernment process and provides a way for groups of people to listen to God by listening to one another. It is a way for us to listen for the voice of the Spirit.

Anyone in the group can begin, and the person on their left is the next person to share. If that person is not ready to share, move on to the next person but remember to come back around. Continue clockwise around the circle, until each person in the group who wishes to share has had their turn. When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.



What are the fruits of your individual prayer, how you are feeling?
When sharing, you might like to begin with these words:

"In my prayer today... And I feel..."

Reflect for 5 minutes in silence

"What am I hearing the Holy Spirit saying to us?"



What have you heard the Spirit saying in the voices of the group?
When sharing, you might like to begin with these words:

**"Listening to the Holy Spirit through the voices of this group,
I have heard... And it leaves me feeling..."**

This time when sharing, do not add anything new to the conversation – just your response to what you have already heard.

Reflect for 5 minutes in silence

**"How am I feeling about my experience
of prayer and listening today?"**



What seems to be resonating in the conversation and what the Spirit is asking of us? When sharing, you might like to begin with these words:

**"From our prayer and conversation today, and thinking about how God
is calling us to be a Church that journeys together..."**



*Spiritual Conversation process adapted from Plenary Council 2020, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. Retrieved on October 22, 2020 from https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Final-Draft-Listen-Discern_2-Bleed.pdf

LET'S THINK LOCALLY



Reflect for 5 minutes in silence

Think about the concrete, practical steps which could be taken to move forward together as a Church.

Group discussion, towards decision

When others are sharing their ideas, remember to listen with an open and humble heart. You can ask the person sharing questions about their idea for understanding, but be sure to resist critique.

- What concrete, practical steps can be taken to move forward together as 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?

Identify 2 or 3 emerging actions. Remember, these actions need to be:

- clear
- stated as a positive
- as specific as possible
- a real action (practical, achievable and measurable)

Reflect

Take some time to reflect and pray individually on the emerging actions the group has identified. Ask God for a feeling of consolation – a feeling of peace or fullness of your heart about your decision if it is indeed where the Holy Spirit is guiding you.

LET'S GIVE THANKS



Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
That my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
That my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
That I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
To defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
That I always may be holy.

-Holy Spirit Prayer of Saint Augustine

LET'S RESPOND

The synodal process is an opportunity to carefully listen to others and the Holy Spirit as we dream and discern how we are called to live as and be Church. During this process, it is important to not only connect and listen to those in the Church, but also those who are, for one reason or another, on the periphery, away from the Church, or disconnected. Their voices and input can be vitally important for our efforts and must be included. To this end, now that you have completed this listening and discernment experience, you are encouraged to reach out to someone who is away from and/or not connected to the Church.

While this experience can be uncomfortable, sharing the love of Christ must become part of the day-to-day interactions of a missionary disciple, especially to those on the periphery, as we actively listen to and journey with one another. A synodal Church must become comfortable with the uncomfortable. Our conversations are not about converting people or trying to get them to join anything. Rather, we are asking for their insight and perspective. Using this input, we can re-envision our own role within a missionary church on the journey.

Below are a few considerations as you reach out to those who may not be connected to the Church. Use the reverse side of this paper to jot down insights you learn as you listen.

Return your notes from the missionary action to the Synod contact person for your parish, school or organization.

- **Be hospitable and gracious** when you approach someone and ask to speak with them. Allow enough time for sharing. Do not rush anything.
- **Be clear** on why you would like to gather their insight for the Synod process. It is about listening to others and learning from each other's experiences, insights, and dreams.
- **Simply listen** with an open heart. Use the questions and prompts provided to aid your conversation. Do not add your input to their sharing or try to debate or persuade them.
- **Lead with a loving and joyful disposition** and make the conversation about their experience. Allow the conversation to flow naturally. Do not try to force any kind of response or fish for an answer.
- **Be non-judgmental** in your words, actions, and posture. Do not add "leading" questions to your consultation.
- **Offer a brief prayer** of gratitude at the end of the consultation.
- **Thank the participant** and ask if they would like to learn more about how the Church will be using the Synod process in its future visioning and planning.
- **Follow up** with the participant after a few days and thank them again for their time. Reiterate that if they would like to learn more about the Church, to connect with you.



