

*For a Synodal Church:  
Communion, Participation, and Mission*

# Resources for Facilitating the Synodal Process

Diocese of Charlottetown  
October 2021 – August 2022

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## Prayer for the Synod

### **Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus**

*Prayer of invocation to the Holy Spirit for an ecclesial assembly of governance or discernment*

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer Adsumus Sancte Spiritus, the first word of the Latin original meaning, “We stand before You, Holy Spirit,” which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years, being attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 -4 April 636). As we are called to embrace this synodal path of the Synod 2021-2023, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to operate within us so that we may be a community and a people of grace. For the Synod 2021-2023, we propose to use this simplified version, so that any group or liturgical assembly can pray more easily.

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.

## What is a Synod?

A Synod is a gathering of a group of people to assist in the governance of the Church, usually through consultative vote. In the Latin Church, there are two main kinds of synods: the Synod of Bishops (see canon 342) and the diocesan synod (see canon 460). The process we are taking part in right now is to prepare for a meeting of the Synod of Bishops.

## Purpose, Process and Outcomes (for this Synod)

**The theme of the upcoming Synod of Bishops** is 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission'. It is an opportunity for us to relearn what it means to walk together in the way of the Lord and to put it into practice in our parishes and diocese.

**The purpose of this synodal process** is to allow the Church, at all levels, to listen to the People of God. This encompasses all people in your parish: those who regularly attend, those who attend occasionally, the young, the old, parents, grandparents, and children. The synodal process is not simply about having more meetings for the sake of meetings, or create more documents to read, but to create space to listen, dream, and deepen relationships within our parishes. Through this process, trust can grow, bridges may be built, and strength restored (Vademecum 1.3).

As Pope Francis reminds us, the Holy Spirit guides the synodal process "... preventing it from becoming a Church convention, a study group or a political gathering, a parliament, but rather a grace-filled event, a process of healing guided by the Spirit" (Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Opening of the Synodal Path, Oct. 10, 2021). Therefore, the synodal process "...unfolds in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God." (Pope Francis, Homily 10 Nov 2021).

**The synodal process** will follow a series of consultations at various levels within our Church. You are being invited to participate in the Diocesan Consultation Phase, which began in October 2021 and concludes in August 2022.

During the Diocesan Consultation Phase, groups of Catholics are being asked to pray about and discuss a series of themes and questions. This may be done through a series of events organized by parish councils, priests, or lay pastoral associates. But it can be as simple as any group of Catholics who already meet for prayer, bible study, or fellowship, gathering to prayerfully discuss these themes and topics.

After these conversations, a representative of the group is asked to summarize the conversation using the Consultation Feedback Form (included in this document) and submit it, following the guidelines outlined below. When these forms have been gathered, the Diocesan Synod Team will prayerfully review the feedback, and summarize key learnings, insights, and challenges into a Diocesan Report which will be submitted to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops for further summary and synthesis.

This document outlines possibilities for structuring these conversations, as well as how to submit your feedback to be included in the Diocesan Report.

**The outcome of the synodal process** is for the Church, both local parishes, and the universal Church, to become more aware of the synodal process and better implement it as part of our regular journey of faith as the People of God.

While the consultation for this Synod of Bishops will conclude in August 2022, the hope is that the synodal nature of the Church can be reintroduced to our parishes and diocese, and will be utilized on a regular basis to discern how the Holy Spirit is leading us.

## Synod Questions

The purpose of these questions is to start your conversation, within the context of the Guiding Question. Please don't feel restricted to them, or feel that you need to answer all of them. Go where the Holy Spirit leads.

### **Guiding Question:**

*A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together."*

*How is this "journeying together" happening today in your local Church?*

*What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?*

Keeping the Guiding Question in mind, prayerfully consider and discuss the following:

### **Listening**

- Think of a time when you have been listened to. What did it feel like?
- What can I do that would help others feel listened to when they interact with me?
- How does God speak to me? How do I know it is God?
- How does our parish community/pastoral unit listen to God? What processes or opportunities do we have to listen to God?

### **Participating**

- Why do I participate (or not) in the life of my parish community/pastoral unit?
- If I do participate, what does my participation involve?
- If I don't participate, what needs to change so that I would participate?

### **Community**

- What does 'parish community' or 'pastoral unit' mean to me?
- Why am I a part of a parish community or pastoral unit?
- Who do I journey with in our parish community or pastoral unit?
- Who do I need to reach out to?
- Why would someone want to be a member of our parish community/pastoral unit?
- How are we growing as a parish community/pastoral unit? What are the areas we can improve?

### **Taking Action**

- What are my hopes and dreams for my parish community/pastoral unit?
- What procedures/processes are in place for our parish community/pastoral unit to discern where the Spirit is leading us?
- What are our goals and how do we evaluate them?
- How has the synodal process worked in our parish? How might we tweak it in the future?

## Facilitating the Synodal Process

### **Step 1: Prepare for the Process**

- Determine when and where you will host the listening process. Who will you invite? How many times will you meet? How will you facilitate the process (see 'Guidelines for Spiritual Conversation' in Appendix A and/or the Diocesan Synod Website)?
- Review questions from the list provided (see Synod Questions), and adapt as necessary for your particular group.

### **Step 2: Communicate with Participants**

- Communicate the details of the listening session with participants
- Send participants the questions with an invitation to prayerfully consider their answers

### **Step 3: Host the Listening Session**

- Create a welcoming space for participants, as Covid guidelines allow.
- Ensure that you record the fruit of your conversation. This could be on paper during the meeting and/or an audio recording that notes are taken from later.

### **Step 4: Submit Your Report**

- Review the 'Submit Your Report' section.
- Prayerfully review the listening session(s), including any notes you might have, as you keep in mind the sections needed in the report.
- Summarize any insights that arise from the listening session(s) and your notes.
- Submit the report following the guidelines below.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q: Who should be consulted?**

A: Pope Francis wants the consultation process to be wide and varied. To assist with this, consider the different people/groups who are presently meeting in your parish/pastoral unit: parish council, finance council, the CWL, the Knights of Columbus, catechists, prayer groups, youth programs or catechism classes. Invite each of these groups to engage in a conversation about the questions and submit a report.

In your circumstances, it might be beneficial to gather a group of parishioners with the sole intention to journey through this process. In this case, you would want to ensure that as many groups within your Parish/Pastoral Unit are represented.

**Q: Do we have to answer all the questions?**

A: Ideally, you will discuss all of these themes throughout your conversation. However, it is not necessary to answer each question individually, or cover them in any particular order. The purpose of the questions is to be a starting point for the conversation. Where the conversation goes is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

**Q: Do we have to cover all of these questions in one meeting?**

A: The short answer: no. Depending on the group of people you gathered, a series of shorter meetings might be more fruitful than a single longer meeting. Each of these shorter meetings could focus on a single theme.

**Q: How can I record the event?**

A: This is a matter of personal preference. You could have a minute-taker/scribe for the group, or perhaps record the session to listen to again after it is complete. The most important aspect of keeping a record for the event is that it summarizes major themes and insights, rather than keeping track of who specifically said what.

**Q: When do I need to submit my report?**

A: All reports need to be submitted to the Diocesan Synod Team by April 22, 2022. See the 'Submitting Your Report' section for more details.

**Q: Do I need to submit a report about each individual meeting my group had?**

A: Each group only needs to submit one report about their experience of discussing the questions, regardless of how many times you met. The report can note that you meet several times, and contain a summary of the insights you had during those meetings.

## Submitting Your Report

When you have completed your listening session(s), compile a report using the following categories and headings. The report can be submitted by:

- **Email** with the Subject: Synod Consultations, to [rc@dioceseofcharlottetown.com](mailto:rc@dioceseofcharlottetown.com).
- **Mail** to Synodal Process Team, Diocese of Charlottetown PO Box 907 Charlottetown, PE C1A 7L9

Please ensure that reports are submitted no later than **May 31, 2022**.

### Consultation Feedback

Parish Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parish Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

#### The Process

- Briefly describe the people consulted. Was it a group of friends? A parish group? A membership organization?, etc.
- Describe how the groups proceeded. Did you use the Spiritual Conversation resource? Did you pray separately? Together?
- What were the main questions posed?

#### The Experience

- What was most significant about the experience?
- What were the high points and low points, or the consolations and desolations?
- What dispositions, attitudes, or feelings were notable?
- What tensions or disagreements emerged from the listening process?
- What topics or issues gave rise to divisive points of view?
- Overall what were the fruits that the Holy Spirit has brought about through this experience?

#### The Feedback

- Was there anything particularly significant, surprising or unexpected during your gathering(s)?
- What new perspectives?
- Which stories or real-life experiences were especially moving and why?
- Which points of view seem to have strong resonance?
- 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, in its spiritual life, culture, attitudes, structures, pastoral practices, relationships, and missionary outreach?

**Invitation to Grow**

- What dreams, desires, and aspirations for the church were expressed by participants?
- What are the next steps forward for our diocese on the path of synodality, in communion with the whole Church?

## Appendix A: Guidelines for Spiritual Conversation

**Purpose of Spiritual Conversation:** to assist a group in discernment or decision-making by intentionally listening to how the Spirit is moving in each member of the group, and the group as a whole.

### Key components of Spiritual Conversation:

- *Personal Prayer (preparation)* – during this time, pay attention to
  - What thoughts energize you; what thoughts exhaust you
  - What thoughts make you feel closer to God; what thoughts make you feel farther from God
- *Listening (during the conversation)* – when it is your turn to listen, consider the following:
  - Listen with an open mind – Be curious and appreciative of what you are listening to. Listen for new ideas instead of judging and evaluating
  - Listen for understanding – You do not have to agree with what you hear to listen to understand the other person
  - Listen with patience and presence – Listening well takes time and your full presence
  - Listen for the Spirit at work in the other
  - Be free of attachment to your own opinion – consider reasons on both sides without showing attachment to either one
- *Sharing (during the conversation)* – the intention is not to respond to what others have said, but to share what you have experienced
  - Listen to yourself – be in touch with your inner voice. Ask “What wants to be said next?”
  - When sharing your opinion, speak with humility and sincerity
  - Be considerate and kind on matters being discussed

### Rounds of Spiritual Conversation

1. *Spiritual Conversation Round 1* – Sharing the fruit of our personal prayer about the topic at hand
  - a. Here each person takes 3-5 minutes to share something of their personal prayer with the material provided
  - b. The round will conclude with a time of silence for awareness and discernment
2. *Spiritual Conversation Round 2* – Spiritual Conversation about the topic at hand
  - a. Each person shares what they have heard, either in the first round or in your personal prayer in preparation for the meeting

- i. This round might include summarizing points of overlap from the first round, that resonated with you in a particular way
    - b. The round will conclude with a time of silence for awareness and discernment
- 3. *Spiritual Conversation Round 3* – Discernment of Spirits about the topic at hand
  - a. Each person discusses where they have discerned the presence of the Spirit in the previous two rounds.
  - b. The round will conclude with silence and a short prayer as a way of expressing gratitude and transitioning back to the large group

## Appendix B: Attitudes for Participating in the Synodal Process

The following are attitudes that will help to create a truly synodal experience for participants. Facilitators are encouraged to be aware of these and intentionally foster them in their group. (from the Vademecum, section 2.3)

- Being synodal requires time for sharing: We are invited to speak with authentic courage and honesty (parrhesia) in order to integrate freedom, truth, and charity. Everyone can grow in understanding through dialogue.
- Humility in listening must correspond to courage in speaking: Everyone has the right to be heard, just as everyone has the right to speak. Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate to convince others. Rather, it is welcoming what others say as a way by which the Holy Spirit can speak for the good of all (1 Corinthians 12:7).
- Dialogue leads us to newness: We must be willing to change our opinions based on what we have heard from others.
- Openness to conversion and change: We can often be resistant to what the Holy Spirit is trying to inspire us to undertake. We are called to abandon attitudes of complacency and comfort that lead us to make decisions purely on the basis of how things have been done in the past.
- Synods are an ecclesial exercise in discernment: Discernment is based on the conviction that God is at work in the world and we are called to listen to what the Spirit suggests to us.
- We are signs of a Church that listens and journeys: By listening, the Church follows the example of God himself, who listens to the cry of his people. The Synodal Process provides us with the opportunity to open ourselves to listen in an authentic way, without resorting to ready-made answers or pre-formulated judgments.
- Leave behind prejudices and stereotypes: We can be weighed down by our weaknesses and sinfulness. The first step towards listening is freeing our minds and hearts from prejudices and stereotypes that lead us on the wrong path, towards ignorance and division.
- Overcome the scourge of clericalism: The Church is the Body of Christ filled with different charisms in which each member has a unique role to play. We are all interdependent on one another and we all share an equal dignity amidst the holy People of God. In the image of Christ, true power is service. Synodality calls upon pastors to listen attentively to the flock entrusted to their care, just as it calls the laity to freely and honestly express their views. Everyone listens to one other out of love, in a spirit of communion and our common mission. Thus the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in manifold ways in and through the entire People of God.

- Cure the virus of self-sufficiency: We are all in the same boat. Together we form the Body of Christ. Setting aside the mirage of self-sufficiency, we are able to learn from each other, journey together, and be at the service of one another. We can build bridges beyond the walls that sometimes threaten to separate us – age, gender, wealth, ability, education, etc.
- Overcoming ideologies: We must avoid the risk of giving greater importance to ideas than to the reality of the life of faith that people live in a concrete way.
- Give rise to hope: Doing what is right and true does not seek to attract attention or make headlines, but rather aims at being faithful to God and serving His People. We are called to be beacons of hope, not prophets of doom.
- Synods are a time to dream and “spend time with the future”: We are encouraged to create a local process that inspires people, with no one excluded to create a vision of the future filled with the joy of the Gospel. The following dispositions will help participants (cf. Christus Vivit):
  - An innovative outlook: To develop new approaches, with creativity and a certain audacity.
  - Being inclusive: A participatory and co-responsible Church, capable of appreciating its own rich variety, embraces all those we often forget or ignore.
  - An open mind: Let us avoid ideological labels and make use of all methodologies that have borne fruit.
  - Listening to each and every one: By learning from one another, we can better reflect the wonderful multi-faceted reality that Christ’s Church is meant to be.
  - An understanding of “journeying together”: To walk the path that God calls the Church to undertake for the third millennium.
  - Understanding the concept of a co-responsible Church: To value and involve the unique role and vocation of each member of the Body of Christ, for the renewal and building up of the whole Church.
- Reaching out through ecumenical and interreligious dialogue: To dream together and journey with one another throughout the entire human family.

## Appendix C: Avoiding Pitfalls to Synodality

As on any journey, we need to be aware of possible pitfalls that could hamper our progress during this time of synodality. The following are several pitfalls that must be avoided in order to promote the vitality and fruitfulness of the Synodal Process.

1. The temptation of wanting to lead ourselves instead of being led by God. Synodality is not a corporate strategic exercise. Rather it is a spiritual process that is led by the Holy Spirit. We can be tempted to forget that we are pilgrims and servants on the path marked out for us by God. Our humble efforts of organization and coordination are at the service of God who guides us on our way. We are clay in the hands of the divine Potter (Isaiah 64:8).
2. The temptation to focus on ourselves and our immediate concerns. The Synodal Process is an opportunity to open up, to look around us, to see things from other points of view, and to move out in missionary outreach to the peripheries. This requires us to think long-term. This also means broadening our perspectives to the dimensions of the entire Church and asking questions, such as: What is God's plan for the Church here and now? How can we implement God's dream for the Church on the local level?
3. The temptation to only see "problems." The challenges, difficulties, and hardships facing our world and our Church are many. Nevertheless, fixating on the problems will only lead us to be overwhelmed, discouraged, and cynical. We can miss the light if we focus only on the darkness. Instead of focusing only on what is not going well, let us appreciate where the Holy Spirit is generating life and see how we can let God work more fully.
4. The temptation of focusing only on structures. The Synodal Process will naturally call for a renewal of structures at various levels of the Church, in order to foster deeper communion, fuller participation, and more fruitful mission. At the same time, the experience of synodality should not focus first and foremost on structures, but on the experience of journeying together to discerning the path forward, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The conversion and renewal of structures will come about only through the on-going conversion and renewal of all the members of the Body of Christ.
5. The temptation not to look beyond the visible confines of the Church. In expressing the Gospel in our lives, lay women and men act as a leaven in the world in which we live and work. A Synodal Process is a time to dialogue with people from the worlds of economics and science, politics and culture, arts and sport, the media and social initiatives. It will be a time to reflect on ecology and peace, life issues and migration. We must keep the bigger picture in view to fulfil our mission in the world. It is also an opportunity to deepen the ecumenical journey with other Christian denominations and to deepen our understanding with other faith traditions.

6. The temptation to lose focus of the objectives of the Synodal Process. As we proceed along the journey of the Synod, we need to be careful that, while our discussions might be wide-ranging, the Synodal Process maintains the goal of discerning how God calls us to walk forward together. No one Synodal Process is going to resolve all our concerns and problems. Synodality is an attitude and an approach of moving forward in a co-responsible way that is open to welcoming God's fruits together over time.
7. The temptation of conflict and division. "That they may all be one" (John 17:21). This is the ardent prayer of Jesus to the Father, asking for unity among his disciples. The Holy Spirit leads us deeper into communion with God and one another. The seeds of division bear no fruit. It is vain to try to impose one's ideas on the whole Body through pressure or to discredit those who feel differently.
8. The temptation to treat the Synod as a kind of a parliament. This confuses synodality with a 'political battle' in which in order to govern one side must defeat the other. It is contrary to the spirit of synodality to antagonize others or to encourage divisive conflicts that threaten the unity and communion of the Church,
9. The temptation to listen only to those who are already involved in Church activities. This approach may be easier to manage, but it ultimately ignores a significant proportion of the People of God.

