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An Invitation from Pope Francis

Pope Francis wants to hear from everyone about how the Church --- the People of God --- can help him discern the Holy Spirit's guidance for the mission that Jesus gave to all baptized Christians.

Parishes and other Catholic ministries throughout the Diocese of Pittsburgh will hold synodal sessions in early 2022. They are the first part of a consultation called a synod, which means journeying together. The Holy Father is inviting us to add our voices to those of Catholics worldwide. Sharing different visions of how to identify the Church's mission in today's world will help all of us grow together in faith, unity, and service to Jesus.

The Holy Father has described the synod as an opportunity to plant dreams and 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, and give strength to our hands.

Synodal sessions will be held in parishes in the Diocese of Pittsburgh as well as among participants in specific ministries, such as education, social service, evangelization, and outreach to the youth and the elderly.

Sessions may also be held for Catholics who are estranged from the Church or feel marginalized within it, and who might not attend a parish session. In some of these cases, the sessions may be very small or informal, so some procedures in these guidelines may be adapted. However, in all cases, the Facilitator will use the questions provided and return the responses in the manner required.

The Diocese of Pittsburgh's Synod Planning Team consists of laity, religious, deacons, and priests in diocesan leadership. If you have any questions about the synod, or would like to host a session, please reach out at synodemail@diopitt.org.
A Welcome from Bishop David A. Zubik

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Thank you for answering the call of Pope Francis to gather, listen, and dream together about how the People of God can help discern the Holy Spirit's guidance for carrying out the mission that Jesus gave to the Church.

I invite you to participate—whether you have found joy and mercy in your Catholic experience or you have been wounded by it in some way, or even if you have left the Church. The Church wants and needs to hear about your experiences.

Together, we are preparing for a worldwide synod, which means journeying together. Holding synods is an ancient Christian practice that dates all the way back to the earliest days of our Faith. The Holy Bible describes the very first synod in the Acts of the Apostles. Since then, the Church has held synods of different sizes and scope, both local and global, at various moments in the life of the Church.

The synodal sessions that we are now holding continue that long line of Catholic tradition. However, we need to understand that these sessions are not meant for debating doctrine, moral teachings, or Church governance. Rather, we're coming together to listen to one another, to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit, and to discover how we might best continue to proclaim the Gospel in our day and age.

The experiences that you will share in these sessions will be synthesized and sent to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The bishops' conference, in turn, will write a synthesis from what they have received from every diocese in the country and forward that document to Rome: as will the bishops' conferences of every other country in the world. In October 2023, bishops from across the globe will gather in Rome to ponder what has been heard, shared, and experienced.
Synod 21-23
communion | participation | mission

How we listen to one another's experiences of the Faith is central to the heart of synodality. As you prepare for your session, I ask you to pray about what the Holy Spirit is calling you to say and that your ears, your mind, and your heart will be open to listen fully to the experiences that your sisters and brothers will share.

May our dear Mother Mary, who was among the disciples at the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost, walk with us and guide our journey on this synodal path.

Grateful for our continued efforts together in being On Mission for The Church Alive! and for our belief that Nothing is Impossible with God, I am,

Your brother in Christ,

+ David A. Zubik

Most Reverend David A. Zubik
Bishop of Pittsburgh
An Introduction

Thank you for choosing to participate as an organizer in our journey together through the synodal encounter that Pope Francis has invited each of us to join.

Although there are specific topics that our Holy Father is asking us to address, he has given each diocese much flexibility in terms of how synodal sessions are facilitated.

This Guide provides a framework to assist you in your role as Point of Contact, Facilitator, or Note Taker. Its details will help to ensure that synodal sessions in the Diocese of Pittsburgh are carried out in a spirit of genuine listening and journeying together so that we can grow closer in the Body of Christ and become more powerful witnesses of His love.

In preparation for your role as Point of Contact, Facilitator, or Note Taker, familiarize yourself with the Participant Guide and spend time praying over the fundamental questions and core topics.

The organizers of each synodal session will work together to:
  * foster an environment where each participant truly listens to the others
  * ensure that all participants have an opportunity to share their experiences related to the fundamental questions and to one or two of the core topics
  * deliver a brief synthesis of each synodal session to the diocesan Synod Planning Team so that the information can be incorporated into the process of creating an overall diocesan synthesis

No two synodal sessions will be exactly alike. The encounter may include as few as two or three people, or may be filled with many participants. In either case remember that communion, participation, and mission are at the heart of the synodal experience.

Please be assured of our gratitude and prayers as we begin this journey together.

*The Diocese of Pittsburgh Synod Planning Team*
Key Roles and Responsibilities of Synodal Session Organizers

There are three key roles required to organize the sessions. In small sessions, one person may take on all three roles. In large sessions, more volunteers will be needed, especially to ensure that adequate notes are taken from each small group. A person(s) should be identified for the following roles:

1. **Point of Contact** for diocesan representatives and potential participants
2. **Facilitator** to help guide and synthesize the experience of the entire session
3. **Note Taker(s)** to record responses and experiences

Each of these roles must be carried out by people with the right skill set and temperament. The hosting group (parish Pastor, school administration, etc.) should identify the Point of Contact as soon as possible. The Point of Contact will work with the hosting group to identify and select the Facilitator and Note Taker(s) who have the characteristics described under each role.

**Role of the Point of Contact**

The Point of Contact will:
- Organize the logistics of each session, including date, time, and location
- Identify the Facilitator and Note Taker(s), in collaboration with the hosting group
- Create registration process as needed
- Organize hospitality for each session
- Communicate with participants and respond to their questions regarding the synod
- Communicate with the diocese via email at synodemail@diopitt.org

The ideal skill set for the person who is the Point of Contact includes:
- Strong attention to detail
- Ability to multitask
- Effective project management, ability to track key dates and action items

The Point of Contact should have a thorough understanding of the synodal process. Members of the diocesan Synod Planning Team will provide advice and assistance when needed.
Role of the Facilitator

All Facilitators must first register on the diocesan website at: https://www.diopitt.org/journeying-together.

The Facilitator will oversee synodal sessions to ensure that all participants are given the opportunity to speak and to respectfully listen to others. The Facilitator is not to guide discussions toward any particular idea or conclusion, but to help all of those present to express their thoughts and to share their experiences. The Facilitator is to create a positive, safe environment that promotes engagement and participation.

Another key responsibility of the Facilitator is to write and submit a brief synthesis of the experience of each synodal session. This person should gather and identify the key elements and moments without focusing on every detail. The synthesis is to be short and concise. It is important to include a full range of viewpoints to accurately represent the experience. The synthesis should acknowledge views that were shared but may not have been the majority opinion. This does not mean that every comment must be recorded, but that the synthesis accurately reflects the diversity of the experiences that were shared.

The Facilitator will guide each session, monitor the time, and keep participants focused on the questions. The Facilitator will work closely with the Note Taker(s) and should have contact information for each of them.

The ideal skill set for a Facilitator is the ability to:
- Enable participants to listen, reflect, and discern together
- Conduct focus groups, forums, and assemblies
- Organize ideas accurately, fairly, and succinctly into a written document
- Capture key elements and experiences without focusing on the details
- Manage time effectively
- Maintain neutrality
- Observe social dynamics
- Guide each session while maintaining balance and respect among participants avoiding unnecessary detours and friction
A brief, online training video is required for each Facilitator to review prior to the session(s). You can find it at https://www.diopitt.org/journeying-together. If you have any questions or concerns that you would like to discuss with a member of the diocesan Synod Planning Team, please email us at synodemail@diopitt.org.

**Facilitator Responsibilities after the Session**

The Facilitator will take the lead in analyzing and synthesizing the feedback gathered in each session and is responsible for delivering the synthesis to the diocesan Synod Planning Team within 10 days of each session. The synthesis should be composed in collaboration with the Note Takers as best determined in each local setting.

When submitting the synthesis online, the facilitator will respond to both general questions and essay questions. They are provided below for the facilitator to begin thinking about how to accurately provide general information as well as to synthesize the overall experience of each session. Please note that the length of the synthesis will be limited to 1,000 characters (about 200 words) for each of the essay questions.

**General Questions:**

1. What is your parish/organization/group name? (For example: Saint Joseph Parish/ Knights of Columbus Council 9999/ A small group of my family and friends)
2. How many people participated?
3. What were the ages of the participants?
4. What was the general demographic makeup of the participants?

**Essay Questions:**

*Answers are limited to 1,000 characters (about 200 words) per question*

1. What was particularly significant, surprising or unexpected?
2. What new perspectives or new horizons opened up?
3. Which stories or personal experiences were especially moving and why?
4. Which points of view seem to have strong resonance?
5. Which points of view were mentioned less but are noteworthy?

**Submitting the Synthesis:** Once registered, each Facilitator will be emailed specific information about how to submit the synthesis.
Role of the Note Taker(s)

The Note Taker(s) at each small group table will record the reflections and experiences shared during the synodal session. Note Taker(s) should also include relevant demographic information, such as gender and approximate ages of participants, but participants are not to be identified by name. If possible, notes should be written on a digital device, such as an iPad, Chromebook or laptop.*

The Note Taker(s) does not need to transcribe each and every word said at the table but should record key words, phrases, and experiences heard as well as dynamics observed in the small group. Make note of unique experiences that were not necessarily common to the whole group.

At the conclusion of each synodal session, the Note Taker(s) should review the notes and correct spelling, but should not change content. The Note Taker(s) should then immediately email the information to the Facilitator. If necessary, hand written notes should be given to the Facilitator at the end of the synodal session.

The ideal skill set for the Note Taker(s) is the ability to:
- Remain neutral and avoid biased opinions.
- Listen carefully and filter out distractions
- Stay focused and on task

*The following digital resources may be helpful to Note Takers:
- Audio Note Software - AudioNote | Luminant Software
- Digital Pens - Livescribe: Never Miss A Word
- Note taking Apps - The 5 best note taking apps of 2021 | Zapier
- Cloud-based Note Taking Software - Sonocent
Preparing for a Synodal Session

These suggested instructions are intended for a large, formal group. Each Facilitator and Point of Contact should adapt these suggestions to meet their local circumstances, including the consideration of holding virtual sessions if needed. In all cases, the final synthesis must be submitted following instructions provided to the Facilitator.

Registration
For larger, more formal sessions, it is strongly recommended that you ask participants to register for the session beforehand. This will help when making preparations to set up the space. More importantly, it provides the crucial opportunity to encourage the participants to prepare for the session in advance. Each participant should be instructed to download, read, and complete the worksheets in the Participant Guide. Participants should be advised to bring their Guide to the synodal session. Paper copies should be made available for pick-up in advance for those unable to print the guide. Thinking about and praying over the topics found in the Participant Guide is essential to fostering a genuine synodal experience. When the participants register for a session, direct them to the Participant Guide at: https://www.ciopitt.org/journeying-together. Please make sure that all leaders are familiar with the Participant Guide.

Registration will also be valuable to ensure adequate planning, including preparation of the facility, hospitality, and number of Note Takers needed.

Facility and Equipment Recommendations for Large Group Synodal Sessions:
- Large meeting space set with round tables when possible
- Table set up with 6-8 chairs around each table
- Podium or table set in front of room
- Microphone (larger groups may require more microphones)
- Refreshment table
- Hospitality table with name tags, markers, and volunteer greeters
- Extra copies of the Participant Guide along with pens, pencils, and paper
- Handouts of the Fundamental Questions and Core Topics
- Handouts of the Opening and Closing Prayer
Overview of a Synodal Session

The sample agenda below recommends a two-hour session. That timeframe includes opening and closing prayer, two opportunities for small group discussion, and large group Honorable Closure. Smaller groups may be able to accomplish the key components of a session in a shorter amount of time.

In the first small group discussion, participants will consider the fundamental questions that Pope Francis proposed for the synod. In the second small group discussion, they will consider one or two of the ten core topics. The Participant Guide recommends that each person reflect on one or two questions of their choice. However, table groups may be given the option to choose common questions for discussion. Organizers of more specialized synodal sessions may decide ahead of time on one or both questions. It will be important for participants to understand how the questions are selected.

Sample Agenda

The agenda below is for an evening session, but you may choose a time that works better for your community.

6:30 PM – 7:00 PM  
I. Room opens for hospitality

7:00 PM – 7:05 PM  
II. Welcome and Introduction

7:05 PM – 7:10 PM  
III. Opening Prayer

7:10 PM – 7:15 PM  
IV. Overview of synod process

7:15 PM – 8:00 PM  
V. Small groups – Discussion of Fundamental Questions

8:00 PM – 8:50 PM  
VI. Small groups – Discussion of Core Topics

8:50 PM – 8:58 PM  
VII. Large group – Honorable Closure

8:58 PM – 9:00 PM  
VIII. Invitation to Continue Synodal Process and Closing Prayer
Script and Instructions for Facilitators

Sections in italicized font are suggested scripts. Please use language that is comfortable, but make sure to cover the key points in the scripts.

Part of the Facilitator's role is to track the time devoted to each section and to provide regular time updates (e.g., You have five more minutes for this), in order to move the group through the conversations.

I. Hospitality (30 minutes prior to start - Point of Contact)

II. Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)

Begin on time. Introduce the session and welcome participants. Introduce yourself. Invite the leader of the host organization and the Point of Contact to introduce themselves to the large group. Invite Participants and the Note Taker(s) to introduce themselves at the table.

III. Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

The leader of the host organization or Facilitator leads the opening prayer.

Leader: Please turn to page 10 in the Participant Guide or the handout on the table for our Opening Prayer. The Adsumus Sancte Spiritus is adapted from a sixth century prayer for the Holy Spirit to guide the Church. All the bishops of the Church prayed it together before each session of the Second Vatican Council. Let's begin our session by praying it together.

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Everyone:
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.

IV. Overview of Synod Process: (5 minutes)

Facilitator: Pope Francis has called every Catholic worldwide to help prepare for the upcoming Synod of Bishops. “Synod” can be understood to mean “journeying together.” Our gathering is part of a worldwide journey of the entire People of God – to train ourselves to listen more closely to the Holy Spirit by listening attentively to the experiences of our brothers and sisters. This entire process is in the service of the one great mission that Jesus gave us, to proclaim the Good News to every nation, and to invite all people into the life of the Kingdom of God.

At this gathering, we will listen to each other, pray with one another, and discern together. Afterwards, a synthesis of our shared experience will be sent to the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The diocesan Synod Planning Team will synthesize all the experiences held throughout the diocese and send it to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Bishops’ Conference will, in turn, send to Rome a synthesis of all the diocesan reports. In October 2023, bishops from around the world will gather in Rome to discern the spiritual fruits that have grown out of this global process.
Keep in mind that the point of the process is not to produce documents. Rather, the purpose of our gathering, and of every synodal session held throughout the world, is to foster a greater sense and awareness of the need to journey together in our lives of Faith.

On page 8 of the Participant Guide, there are recommendations which promote respectful communication and intentional listening. During this process, we should all remember to:

- Take responsibility for what you say and feel, speak in words that others can hear and understand
- Use empathetic listening, to words, as well as feelings and non-verbal language, including silence
- Be sensitive to differences in communication styles
- Ponder what you hear and feel before you speak
- Examine your own assumptions and perceptions
- Keep confidentiality
- Trust the process, not for debating who is right or wrong, but for experiencing true dialogue.

Participants are asked to limit their comments to no more than 1-2 minutes per question. This allows all participants the opportunity to speak and be heard without interruption.

V. Small Groups - Discussion of Fundamental Questions (45 minutes)

Facilitator: Your small group will have 45 minutes to discuss the three fundamental questions that Pope Francis has put before the People of God. These fundamental questions are at the heart of this synod. Participants are now invited to take one to two minutes to speak about each fundamental question, while others focus on listening to the experiences that these topics evoke in your neighbors.

Please refer to page 5 of the Participant Guide or the handout on the table for the fundamental questions.

As you begin this discussion, please be aware that I will remind you when we are halfway through the time and again when there are five minutes remaining.
Fundamental Questions

- What does it mean for a community to walk together?
- What does walking together look like today in our community?
- What steps does the Spirit invite us to take to grow in our walking together?

VI. Small Group – Discussion of Core Topics (50 minutes)

The Session Organizers are to decide on the approach in advance of this discussion based on these options:
1. Encourage each participant to speak about one or two core topic(s) that are most important to them. (This is the approach recommended in the Participant Guide).
2. Indicate that each small group has 5 minutes to work together to choose one or two of the ten core topics to discuss.
3. Indicate specific topics that have been chosen for this session and start the discussion.
4. Indicate that one topic has been chosen for the session and each table has 5 minutes to choose a second.

The following script text should be adapted to your particular circumstance and how you will proceed. If another approach has been decided, please alter this script as needed.

Facilitator: Each participant will now speak about one or two core topics that most resonates with you.

Please refer to the Participant Guide pages 5 through 7 or to the handout found on the table for these topics.

As you begin this discussion, please be aware that I will remind you when we are halfway through the time and again when there are five minutes remaining.
VII. Large Group - Honorable Closure (8 minutes)

Facilitator: I will now facilitate an Honorable Closure which is a process of allowing each participant to share one word that describes your synodal experience. I will ask a table to begin by inviting one participant to share their word. We will then proceed clockwise around the table until everyone has had an opportunity.

The facilitator will select one table to begin the process and then will indicate which table should follow, allowing all tables to participate.

VIII. Invitation to Continue Synodal Process and Closing prayer

Facilitator: As we conclude our time together this evening, I would like to take the opportunity to invite everyone to continue growing in the synodal spirit. The ability to truly listen to our sisters and brothers is an attitude that will continually need to be fostered in each of us long after we finish this formal process.

One of the hopes that Pope Francis has for this synodal journey is that everyone, no matter who they are, might have a chance to participate. If you think that you might be able to organize and facilitate a session like this, perhaps something less formal in your living room with family and friends, especially if you would be able to invite people who are estranged from the Church to participate, please consider visiting the Synod page on the diocesan website to find out how you can register to do so.

Now, so that we may close our time together in prayer, I ask everyone to please turn to page 11 of the Participant Guide or to look at the handouts on the tables.
Prayer of Pope Francis at the opening of the Synod on Synodality

Everyone:
Come, Holy Spirit!

You inspire new tongues and place words of life on our lips: keep us from becoming a museum Church, beautiful but mute, with much past and little future.

Come among us, so that in this synodal experience we will not lose our enthusiasm, dilute the power of prophecy, or descend into useless and unproductive discussions.

Come, Spirit of love! Open our hearts to hear your voice.

Come, Holy Spirit of holiness! Renew the holy and faithful People of God.

Come, Creator Spirit! Renew the face of the earth! Amen.

Facilitator: Thank everyone for coming and dismiss the group.
Thank You!

We are filled with gratitude to you for your gift of time and in sharing from your heart and mind in an effort to help build a stronger, more unified, more vibrant universal Church. We hope that this experience has been deeply meaningful to you and that it will inspire you to invite others to participate in a synod session. Please direct anyone who may be interested to www.diopitt.org/journeying-together, where they can sign up for text messages, find a synod session, or register to host a session.

May God continue to bless you and those you love as we journey together in Jesus’ name to attract more people to Him and to build His Church in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.
Appendix: An Introduction to Listening

No two synodal sessions will be exactly alike. Some sessions may consist of just 3-4 people, others may be much larger. Although small group sharing and listening exercises will take on a different feel depending on how many are involved, one common bond for all is the importance of intentional listening. How can we use this experience as an opportunity to grow closer as sisters and brothers in Christ?

Below are guidelines on respectful communication:

R: Take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel, speak in words that others can hear and understand
E: Use EMPATHETIC listening, to words, as well as feelings and non-verbal language, including silence
S: Be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles
P: PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak
E: EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions
C: Keep CONFIDENTIALITY
T: TRUST the process, not for debating who is right or wrong, but for experiencing true dialogue.

Each participant will have an opportunity to speak while others listen (no interruptions). Please be respectful of each other's time and keep your comments within the allotted time per person for your group.

Opening Prayer

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Everyone:
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.

Closing Prayer

Prayer of Pope Francis at the Opening of the Synod on Synodality

Everyone:
Come, Holy Spirit!
You inspire new tongues and place words of life on our lips: keep us from becoming a
“museum Church,” beautiful but mute, with much past and little future.
Come among us, so that in this synodal experience we will not lose our enthusiasm, dilute
the power of prophecy, or descend into useless and unproductive discussions.
Come, Spirit of love! Open our hearts to hear your voice.
Come, Holy Spirit of holiness! Renew the holy and faithful People of God.
Come, Creator Spirit! Renew the face of the earth! Amen.
The Fundamental Questions

- What does it mean for a community to walk together?
- What does walking together look like today in our community?
- What steps does the Spirit invite us to take to grow in our walking together?

The Core Topics

**Companions on the journey:** 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?

**Celebration:** How do prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially Mass, inspire and guide our common life and mission? How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy?

**Sharing responsibility for our common mission:** How is every baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church? What hinders them? How does the Church help its members to serve Jesus and society in a missionary way? What areas of mission are we neglecting? How do we engage in discernment about missionary choices?

**Listening:** How is God speaking to us through voices in our midst, including those we sometimes ignore? What space is there to listen to voices on the peripheries, especially cultural groups, women, disabled persons or those experiencing poverty, marginalization or social exclusion?

**Speaking out:** What enables or hinders you in speaking up courageously, candidly, charitably and responsibly in our local Church and in society? How do social media and news media (secular and Catholic) impact the mission of the Church? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?
Dialogue in Church and society: To what extent do people of diverse backgrounds or viewpoints come together in our community for dialogue? How do we promote such conversations in our Catholic community? What issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: political, cultural and those who live in poverty?

Ecumenism: What relationships does our community have with members of other Christian traditions? What do we share and how do we journey together? What are the fruits and difficulties of walking together? What are the difficulties? How can we take the next step in walking forward together?

Authority and participation: How does our Church community identify goals to be pursued, ways to reach them and to carry out the subsequent evaluation? How is governance exercised? How are teamwork, co-responsibility and the ministries of laity promoted and put into practice? How effective are local synodal bodies (e.g. Pastoral councils, presbyteral councils)? How can we foster a more synodal approach to Church life?

Discerning and deciding: How does our Catholic community make decisions, and do those methods and processes rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit? How can our ways of discerning and deciding be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures, so that we listen to the whole People of God? What tools and procedures do we use to promote transparency and accountability? How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment?

Forming ourselves in synodality: 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?