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 synod, 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.
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,

Most Reverend David A. Zubik
Bishop of Pittsburgh
An Introduction

Thank you for choosing to participate 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 wants us to address, he has given each diocese much flexibility in terms of how synodal sessions are facilitated.

This guide provides the framework you need to respond prayerfully and clearly to what Pope Francis is asking of all of us. Its details will help to ensure that synodal sessions in the Diocese of Pittsburgh are carried out in a spirit of journeying together, so that we become closer as the Body of Christ, and powerful witnesses of His love.

Prior to attending your synodal session, please spend time praying about the fundamental questions and discerning which core topics speak to your heart.

As a participant, you will have an opportunity to reflect on the fundamental questions and one or two core topics related to creating a synodal Church. You will share your thoughts and listen to what is in the hearts and minds of others.

No two synodal encounters will be exactly alike. You may join just two or three others, or you may be one of eight or more people at one table in a room of many tables filled with others who answered the call to gather, share, and listen. 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*
Fundamental Questions and Core Topics of the Synod

Pope Francis has identified three “fundamental questions” and 10 core topics that he has asked for us to discern together.

The fundamental questions are the lens through which each of the core topics should be viewed.

The fundamental questions are:

1. What does it mean for a Church to “journey together” in announcing the Gospel?
2. How does “journeying together” happen today in your local Catholic community?
3. What steps does the Spirit invite us to take to grow in our journeying together?

At your synodal session, you will be asked to talk for a minute or two about your thoughts on these fundamental questions. In preparation, take a few minutes to write down your personal reflections (journaling pages are provided on pages 13-14).

In addition to the fundamental questions, listed below you will find the 10 core topics. As you read through them, note one or two to which you would most like to respond. Use the worksheets on pages 15-16 to jot down your thoughts.

1. **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?

2. **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?
3. **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?

4. **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, people with disabilities, or those experiencing poverty, marginalization or social exclusion?

5. **Speaking Out**: What enables or hinders you in speaking up courageously, candidly, charitably, and responsibly in our local Church and society? How do social media and new media (secular and Catholic) impact the mission of the Church? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

6. **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? To which issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: political, cultural, and those who live in poverty?

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

8. **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?
9. **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?

10. **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 exercise of authority in a synodal way?
An Introduction to Listening

No two synodal sessions will be exactly alike, and their size may vary from three or four people to hundreds. Although such differences will affect the experience of small group sharing and listening exercises, one common bond is the importance of *intentional listening*. How can we use this experience 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.

An Outline for Our Time Together

Below is a suggested timetable, intended to provide an idea of the general flow. Your synodal session agenda will be set up to support the specifics of your group. Your session facilitator will walk you through the process.

6:30 PM – 7:00 PM                     Room opens for hospitality
7:00 PM – 7:05 PM                     Welcome and Introduction
7:05 PM – 7:10 PM                     Opening Prayer
7:10 PM – 7:15 PM                     Overview of synod process
7:15 PM – 8:00 PM                     Small groups – Discussion of Fundamental Questions
8:00 PM – 8:50 PM                     Small groups – Discussion of Core Topics
8:50 PM – 8:58 PM                     Large group – Honorable Closure
8:58 PM – 9:00 PM                     Closing Prayer

Small group sessions will consist of each person taking 1-2 minutes to share what’s in their heart about the fundamental questions and specific core topics. When not speaking, your role as a participant is to listen intently to what is being said and to appreciate each person for their reflections.

During the large group Honorable Closure, each participant is invited to share one word describing the synodal experience.
Synod Session Prayers

Opening Prayer

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 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*

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.
Thank You

We are filled with gratitude for your gift of time and in sharing your heartfelt thoughts about what will build a stronger, more unified and 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 synodal 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 listening session, or register to host a session.

If you would like to host a synodal session, please register through that same link. We have resources available to walk you through the process, including a training video for facilitators.

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.
Fundamental Questions Reflection Journaling Pages

Write your personal reflections to the three fundamental questions that Pope Francis has put before the People of God. As you do, think about what experiences the questions bring to mind. What are the joys of Catholic community life? What are the obstacles to a rich experience of Catholic community?

1. What does it mean for a Church to “journey together” in announcing the Gospel?
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2. How does “journeying together” happen today in your local Catholic community?
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3. What steps does the Spirit invite us to take to grow in our journeying together?

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Synodal Session Preparation Worksheets

As you prepare to participate in a synodal session, reflect on the 10 core topics. Use the space below to write down key words for any thoughts you have on each one. Circle one or two topics that you feel most connected with at this time.

Begin with this short prayer: *Open my heart, Oh Lord to hear the prompting of the Holy Spirit.*

1. Companions on the Journey
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   _______________________________________________________

2. Celebration
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

3. Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission
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   _______________________________________________________

4. Listening
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

5. Speaking Out
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
6. Dialogue in Church and Society

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7. Ecumenism

_______________________________________________________________________________________

8. Authority and Participation

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9. Discerning and Deciding

_______________________________________________________________________________________

10. Forming Ourselves in Synodality

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