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# Guide to Group Synodal Conversations

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Diocese of Westminster



The Synod is a participative and inclusive process of listening and discerning that offers everyone—within and beyond the worshipping Catholic community—the opportunity to express themselves, to be heard and to contribute to how the People of God can better ‘journey together’.

It is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to learn from one another, to realise the gifts in each and every person, to bind up wounds, to renew relationships and build bridges, to warm hearts and restore strength for our common mission.

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# Introduction

This resource is intended to help a parish or community in the diocese host a listening conversation as part of the diocesan synodal process. We have provided plans for:

- Three conversations over separate 90minutes/2 hour sessions
- A conversation process for a parish/community day
- A simpler one-off session over 2 hours
- Hosting a conversation with a group including with people from beyond the parish/community
- We also offer notes on adapting the sessions for:
- Hosting three conversations immediately after Sunday Mass
- An online conversation or series of conversations

Before you begin ensure you have read the 'Guide to Synodal Pathway' and 'Vision for the Synodal Journey'. These will help you consider how to best organise the synodal pathway in your parish/community and who to invite. We are invited to try to include everyone, both those in our own local Church communities (especially those who we may risk excluding) and those outside.

"No one – no matter their religious affiliation – should be excluded from sharing their perspective and experiences, insofar as they want to help the Church on her synodal journey of seeking what is good and true. This is especially true of those who are most vulnerable or marginalized." (Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality #2.1)

There are a variety of ways suggested in this guide of how to host a conversation, so that you may include as many people as possible. For a parish/community we advise that the most effective way is to arrange the conversation over three different sessions, spaced one or two weeks apart. This allows for depth of sharing and listening. You may also choose to spread this over a 'listening day'. There are also alternative plans provided for hosting 'one off' sessions. These can be used to:

- Offer choice to your community by providing several options to join a group session.
- Host listening sessions for existing parish groups (e.g. the prayer group, SVP, Parish Council)
- Hosting groups to include people beyond the visible parish/community e.g.
  - ☐ o Ecumenical partners
  - ☐ o Interfaith partners
  - ☐ o Local Community leaders/members/partners
  - ☐ o Family members who no longer participate in the community
  - ☐ o Those who experience exclusion from the Church and/or society

NB. The 'Simple question framework' is also available for one-to-one conversations or informal small groups. This may be particularly useful for conversations with people from outside the parish/community. See [www.rcdow.org.uk/synod](http://www.rcdow.org.uk/synod)



# Preparing the Conversation

## Welcome

This process begins with encounter. Give careful attention to how you will prepare your meeting space to enable people to feel welcome and relaxed. Take time to make the space feel warm and comfortable. You may want to include a prayer focus with a candle and open bible. If you can, arrange the chairs in a circle around the room so that everyone can see once another. If it is a large group, you can split into smaller groups later. Please also take time to consider and support any access needs which people may have.

## The Team

Take time to consider who is best to lead the group listening sessions. You may be a gifted group facilitator yourself, but if not who else could you invite to take on a role? For example, you may be a gifted organiser or convener, but are there others in the parish/community who are better placed to facilitate your group synodal conversations? Perhaps a catechist could help, or one of the staff from the school. Invite them to support you and encourage them to attend a training event and to read the preparation resources.

## Facilitating the conversations with a large group

If you are to gather in large groups you will need to split into groups of 5-6. In advance invite people to act as 'listeners' and small group facilitators. Meet together with all the listeners/facilitators to prepare. Use the 'Listening Deeply' resource in the 'Guide to the Synodal Pathway' to help. Ensure each listener/facilitator also has a copy of the Group Recording Form. Look through the session plan together, and decide together how the feedback from each small group will work. Although participants can feedback a short summary of their group, we suggest you also use the interactive ideas provided in the session plans. This will help enable more contributions to be shared in the large group and will also enable you to capture lots of feedback easily. You will need to look to see what you need to prepare (e.g. a wall of flip chart paper) and have markers and sticky notes/pens to hand.

Consider the timing of your session. The timing allows for feedback from several breakout groups. If you don't have any breakout groups you may want to allow more time for main conversations.

## Structure of the Listening Process

The group sessions follow the same basic format, sometimes split over several sessions:

- Connecting the group and introductions

- Inviting the group to focus on listening deeply
- Reflecting on Scripture
- Sharing our experience
  - Beginning with our experience of the Pandemic
  - 'Rereading' our experience in light of the three connected themes: Communion, participation, mission.
- Discerning – 'Gathering the fruits' and asking: what may the Spirit of God be saying?
- Concluding

## A Note About the Reflection Questions

The stages of the listening process include questions for reflection. In some sections we suggest that you take all the questions together. Read them through as a group. Let the 3 questions sink in, and then begin to share, allowing the direction of conversation to emerge from the group. This helps avoid using them as questions to 'work through'.

Before the listening phase begins handouts will be made available for the participants with the reflection questions. However, these are optional. You may not want to use them in the session, and rather chart up the questions one by one on a flipchart. See [www.rcdow.org.uk/synod](http://www.rcdow.org.uk/synod)

## Preparing Yourself

Before you start a session take time to pray. Use the 'Listening Deeply' resource in the 'Guide to the Synodal Pathway' to focus on your role of listening deeply to the group.

## Adapting for Online Use

You may choose to adapt one of the session guides for an online listening session. First, consider who in your community is already skilled at hosting online events. There is bound to be someone who is skilled at hosting, creating breakout rooms and ensuring that everything works well. Work with this person to adapt the session plans. We feel it is best to have three listening events over several weeks and to follow the main 'Three Session Group Listening' guide below. Remember that you will still need a team of listeners/facilitators for the breakout rooms. Use chat or the 'white board' function to collect feedback.

## A Note About Feedback

We will invite you to collate a summary report of your communities synodal process by 17 December 2021. A template will be provided on [www.rcdow.org.uk/synod](http://www.rcdow.org.uk/synod) (It will be live in November). To assist you in completing this overall feedback please use the 'Group Session Record Forms' for each group conversation (see appendix). If the session consisted of smaller groups, invite each 'group listener' to gather with you to record their reflections, or encourage them to complete their own feedback.

NB - The 'Group Session Record Forms' forms are available at [www.rcdow.org.uk/synod](http://www.rcdow.org.uk/synod) in a separate Word document for ease of completing

Please see the 'Guide to the Synodal Pathway' for more details on Feedback.





# Three Session Group Listening: Session One

## Connecting (7 mins)

Begin by welcoming everyone. In a small group ask everyone to share for one minute on the two 'connecting' questions below. If there are more than 6-8 people, ask people to discuss the questions in pairs/threes and then simply to introduce themselves by name to the larger group.

- Who are you and where are you from?
- How are you as we begin this conversation?

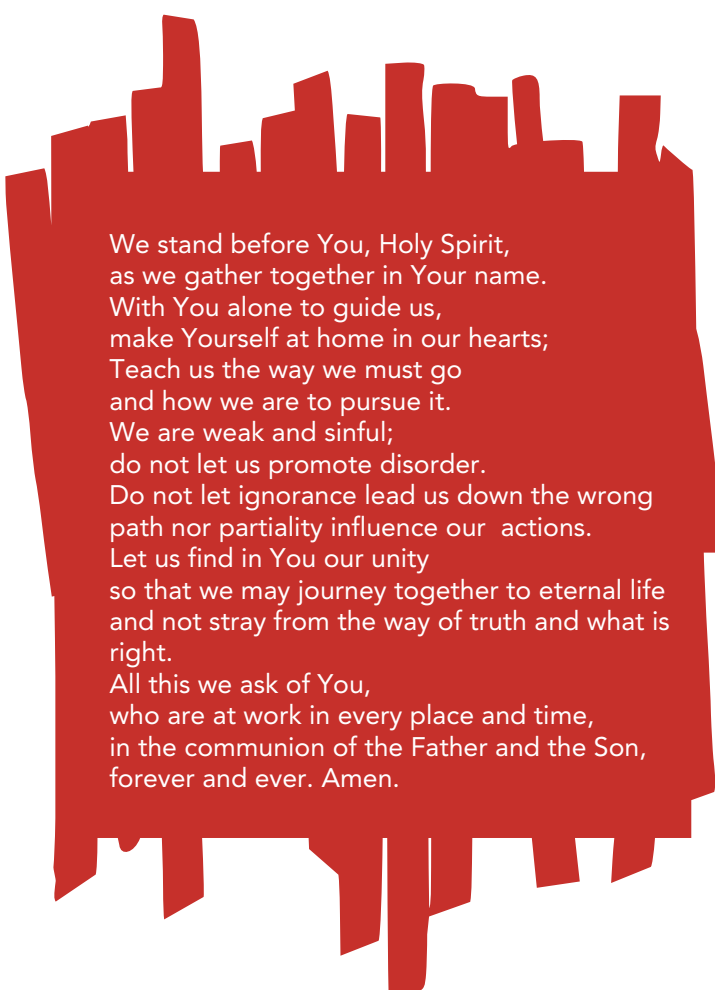
## Introduction (5 mins)

Explain a little bit about the Synod process [see also 'Vision for the Synodal Journey' document]

- Synod means 'journeying together'. Pope Francis is calling us to recognise that God is expecting the Church of today to be a Church which 'journeys together' – a Synodal Church – as it announces the Gospel to the world. Pope Francis is asking the whole Church to listen to God and one another to address a fundamental question:
  - ❑ How is this 'journeying together' happening in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our 'journeying together'?
- "The purpose of the synod ... is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission." (Vademecum, #1.3.)
- The synodal pathway is about sharing our experience of journeying together as Church, and discerning steps forward. This is different to having debates about Church doctrine:
  - ❑ Pope Francis says "what is under discussion at synodal gatherings are not the traditional truths of Christian doctrine. The Synod is concerned mainly with how teaching can be lived and applied in the changing contexts of our time." (Let us Dream, 84-85).
- Invite everyone to speak from the heart and to listen deeply to one another during this conversation. In this gathering we are not here to debate, to develop strategies or 'solve problems', but to listen and share experience. Refer to the 'Participant's Guide'. You may want to read through 'Active Listening' and 'Speaking from the Heart' sections.
- Explain that you will take some notes and may share a summary (anonymously) as part of your community's participation in the Synod process. If you need to split into smaller groups, explain how this will work, and that you have invited people in advance to act as group listeners.

## Prayer (3 mins)

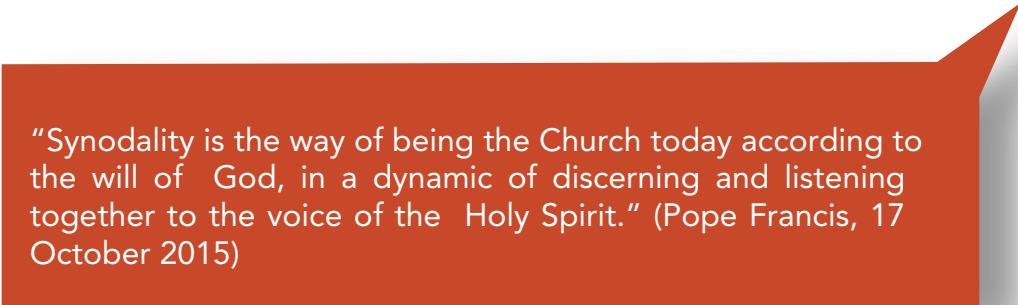
Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, ("We stand before You, Holy Spirit"). It has been used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years. For the Synod 2021-2023, we use this simplified version.



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.

## The Call to Listen to God's Spirit (10 mins)

Pope Francis envisages what is called a 'Synodal process'. The language may sound a bit technical, but the word 'synod' means quite simply 'journeying together'. The Holy Father is offering us the opportunity to participate in a time of listening and reflecting. He hopes this will help us to discern how God's presence comes into our lives and what the Spirit of God is prompting us to do anew, so that we might be more alive and creative in our response to the call of Jesus, our Way, Truth and Life. (Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Pastoral Letter, 3 October 2021)



"Synodality is the way of being the Church today according to the will of God, in a dynamic of discerning and listening together to the voice of the Holy Spirit." (Pope Francis, 17 October 2015)





## Quiet Reflection

Invite people to reflect quietly for a moment by themselves. Slowly read the following, leaving time for people to reflect on the questions:

Pope Francis is asking all of us to gather together to consider how we journey together in the world today. At the heart of this is the invitation to listen to what God may be saying to us about our journeying. This means listening to the Spirit of God in Scripture, in the life of the Church and also in the hearts of each one of us. Because we believe that we are all temples of and gifted by the Holy Spirit.

- Are you ready to listen to other people gathered here today?
- Are you prepared to encounter the Spirit of God in others?
- What would stop you from being open to listening?
- How might your own agenda stop you from hearing the Spirit in others?

In small groups - share together:

- What is your experience of listening to God? Do you have an awareness of the Holy Spirit within you?
- To what extent are you open to listening deeply to others today? Are you open to being surprised by God today?



### A note about the Spirit

Some people may find the language of 'listening to the Holy Spirit' new and unusual. Be ready to invite people to share understanding of the presence of God in one another. Simply using language like 'hearing God within others' may be more helpful to some people.

## Optional feedback from small groups

Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and turn their chairs back towards the main group. (You do not have to fully reform the circle if it will take too long as the small groups will reform soon. Turning chairs to face one another is usually enough.)

Hold a time of silence. Then explain that we have time to hear from a few people. Invite two or three people to offer just one sentence as a reflection on what they heard in their small group. Stress that it is just one sentence. You may want to begin by modelling it yourself. E.g. "I heard that our group is willing to listen deeply"



## Scripture (15 mins)

Before beginning your main listening conversation, take time to reflect upon Scripture.

The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)

1. Invite someone to read Mark 10:46-52.
2. Allow a time of silence.
3. Now invite someone to read the Gospel passage again, this time very slowly. As it is being read, ask the group to imagine themselves as the different characters in the story.

In small groups – Share together:

- What strikes you about the characters and how they respond to the situation?
- What do their attitude and actions evoke for you about your experience of the Church today?

Optional feedback from small groups

Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and turn their chairs back towards the main group. Ask if one or two of the group facilitators wish to offer a one-minute summary highlighting aspects of what was shared.

## Reflecting on “Journeying Together”

(40 mins plus 30 mins feedback)

“Now that there is greater normality in daily life, we have a unique opportunity to refresh and maybe reshape these patterns of life in the Church. Indeed, Pope Francis is asking us to do so. In starting what can be described as a ‘Church-wide listening process’ he is inviting us to listen again to each other, hearing experiences of faith with all its joys and disappointments, and to find new ways of strengthening each other.”

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Pastoral Letter 3 October 2021


## Reflecting on the Experience of the Pandemic

Begin in the context of your experience during the pandemic. Alongside the pain and challenges of lockdown, for many it has also been a time of reflection and learning about the important aspects of our lives. Consider this in light of your experience of the Church ‘journeying together’

In small groups – share together

- What has been your experience of ‘journeying together’ these last eighteen months – as parish/community?
- o What strengths did I find in my faith and faith community? How was I disappointed or sorrowful? In what ways did the grace of God most clearly touch and uplift me?
- How effectively has your Parish / community ‘journeyed’ with others, including those Catholics who no longer participate in your community, those who are not Catholic, and those experiencing poverty, hardship or exclusion?

Each small group sharing should conclude by deciding the contribution they wish to share back to the large group. NB – each participant will also share thoughts individually using the outline below.



## Feedback from small groups (30 mins including 5 minute break)

Feedback from small groups (30 mins including 5 minute break)

Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and to re-form the main circle. Take a break for 5 minutes to give everyone a leg stretch.

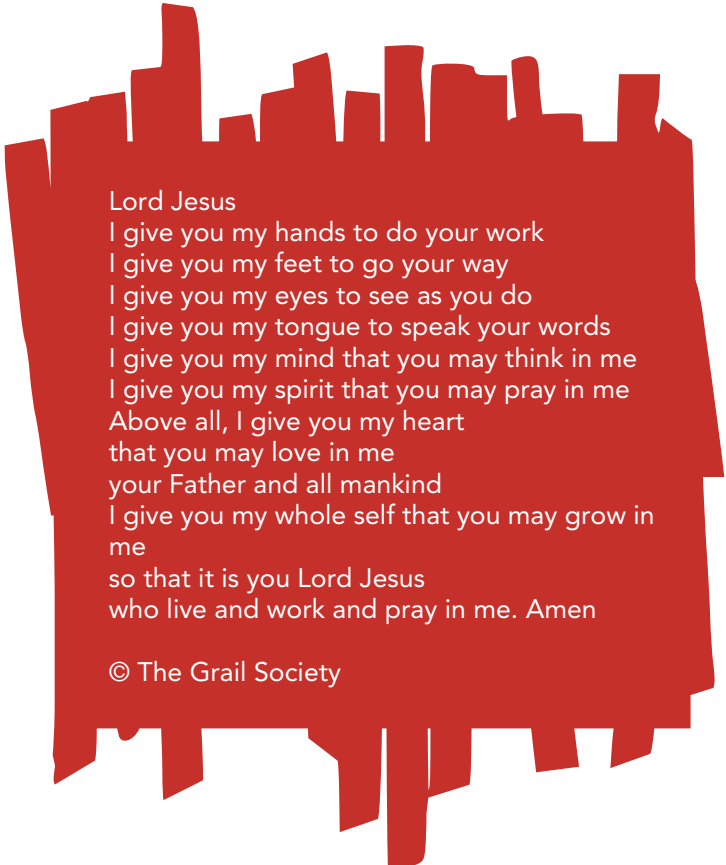
During the break, place sticky notes and pens on people's chairs and stick a pre-prepared large title on the wall 'Journeying Together in the pandemic'. There should be space below the title for people to add sticky notes. If there is no large wall space available use a large notice board, or several smaller wall spaces around the room.

Invite everyone to take 2-3 minutes to write a summary of the contribution they made in the small group. Ask them to add their notes to the wall. Give everyone five minutes to walk around in silence and read some of the notes.

Now invite each small group facilitator to feedback a short summary of their group's sharing.

## Conclusion (10 mins)

- Invite everyone to share one thing that they have appreciated about the sharing. If the group is too large for everyone to share, ask people to share in pairs or in threes with those near to them.
- Assure people that their sharing will help your parish and the wider Church consider how to better 'journey together'. Remind people of the date when you next gather.
- Conclude with a short silence and then a short prayer. You could pray the 'Glory be' or use the Grail prayer:



Lord Jesus  
I give you my hands to do your work  
I give you my feet to go your way  
I give you my eyes to see as you do  
I give you my tongue to speak your words  
I give you my mind that you may think in me  
I give you my spirit that you may pray in me  
Above all, I give you my heart  
that you may love in me  
your Father and all mankind  
I give you my whole self that you may grow in me  
so that it is you Lord Jesus  
who live and work and pray in me. Amen

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# Three session Group Listening:

## Session Two

### Connecting (7 mins)

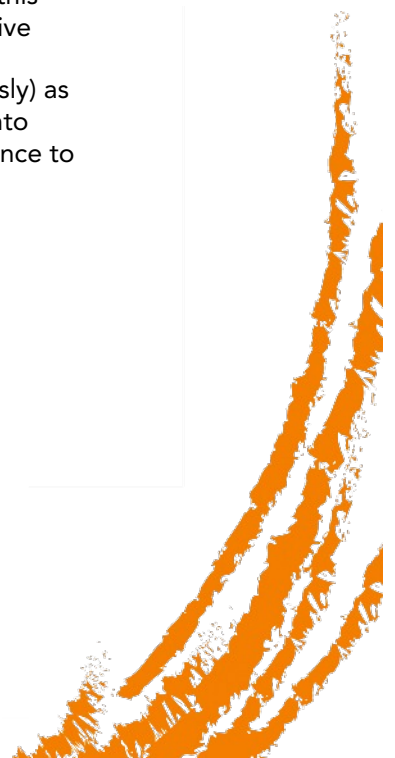
Begin by welcoming everyone. In a small group ask everyone to share for one minute on the two 'connecting' questions below. If there are more than 6-8 people, ask people to discuss the questions in pairs/threes and then simply to introduce themselves by name to the larger group.

- How are you as we begin this conversation?
- What did you appreciate about the last session? How has the experience of listening to one another impacted you since then?

### Introduction (5 mins)

Remind people about the Synod process [see also 'Vision for the Synodal Journey' document]

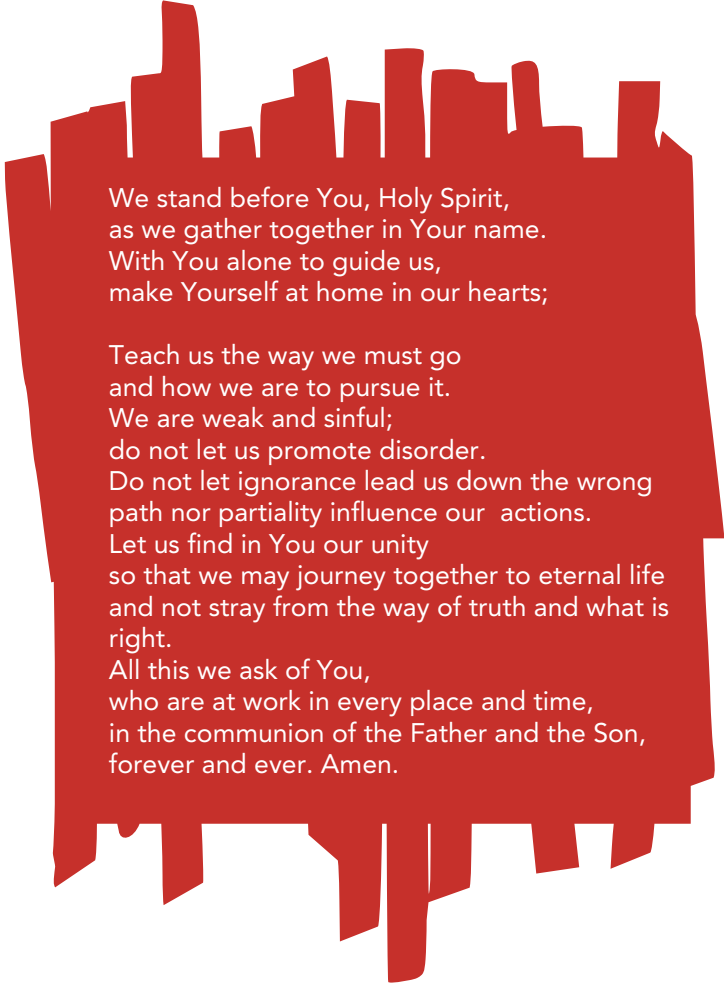
- "The purpose of the synod ... is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission." (Vademecum, #1.3.)
- The synodal pathway is about sharing our experience of journeying together as Church, and discerning steps forward. In this session we begin to explore the three interlinking themes of the Synod – communion, participation and mission. We will do this in light of our experience of journeying together through the pandemic, alongside our broader experience of journeying as Church.
- Invite everyone to speak from the heart and to listen deeply to one another during this conversation. Refer to the 'Participant's Guide'. You may want to read through 'Active Listening' and 'Speaking from the Heart' sections.
- Remind people that you will take some notes and may share a summary (anonymously) as part of your community's participation in the Synodal process. If you need to split into smaller groups, explain how this will work, and that you have invited people in advance to act as group listeners.





## Prayer (3 mins)

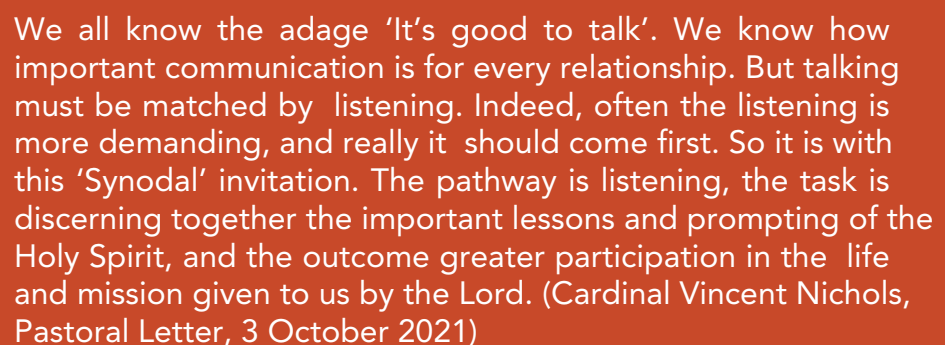
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We stand before You, Holy Spirit,  
as we gather together in Your name.  
With You alone to guide us,  
make Yourself at home in our hearts;

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.

## The Call to Listen to God's Spirit (5 mins)



We all know the adage 'It's good to talk'. We know how important communication is for every relationship. But talking must be matched by listening. Indeed, often the listening is more demanding, and really it should come first. So it is with this 'Synodal' invitation. The pathway is listening, the task is discerning together the important lessons and prompting of the Holy Spirit, and the outcome greater participation in the life and mission given to us by the Lord. (Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Pastoral Letter, 3 October 2021)

## Prayer (3 mins)

In small groups - share together:

- What gets in the way of your listening to others? What gets in the way of you listening to the Spirit of God within you?
- What excited you about taking time in this synodal process to listen to God speaking in you, and in others? What fears might you have?

## Scripture (5 mins)

Before beginning your main listening conversation, take time to reflect upon Scripture.

The Journey of the Synodal Community, Ephesians 4:1-16, 25-32.

1. Invite someone to read Ephesians 4:1-16, 25-32.
2. You may want to read to the group: This part of Ephesians offers us a way into understanding the central dimensions of synodality. St Paul is concerned not only for the quality of individual lives but for the good of the whole community because, for him, the good of the person is inseparable from the good of the community. Paul understands that there will be disagreements and divisions in the community. However, he also sees that unity of the Body of Christ is more than just peaceful co-existence but a real gift that we must all seek. The grace of unity requires that the community comes to better understand itself and its differences. Putting on a 'new self', searching and conversation can lead to a deeper understanding of the truth that we are all called to live and seek. Discerning and seeking will ask us to be patient, generous, open and humble.
3. Allow a few moments of silent reflection.

## Reflecting on "Journeying Together"

(60 mins plus 25 mins feedback)

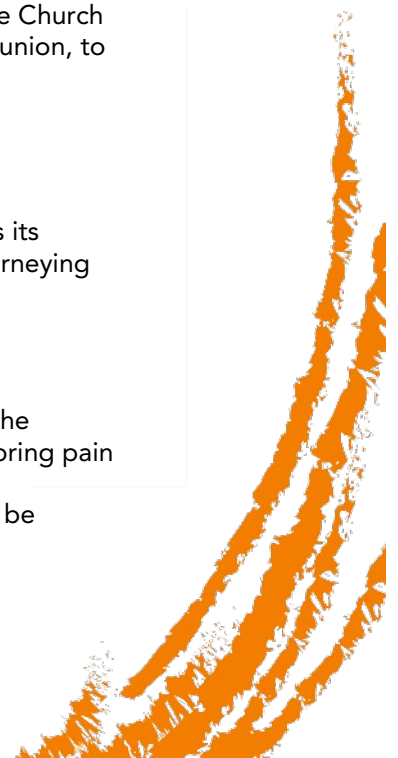
"By journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through her experience which processes can help her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open herself to mission." (Synod Preparatory Document, 1)

## Communion (20 mins)

God gathers us together as diverse peoples of one faith. The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of God - the Trinity. We all have a role to play in journeying together, discerning and living out God's call for his people.

In small groups – share together. (Read all the questions first and then begin to share.)

- Thinking about the pandemic, and perhaps more broadly, how do you experience the Church community journeying together? When does this bring joy? When might it bring pain or sadness?
- What has the experience of 'journeying together' taught us about what it means to be Church? When we say 'our Church', who is part of it?





## Participation (20 mins)

We belong to the People of God – lay people, religious and those who are ordained. Our common participation is based on the fact that we are all qualified and called to serve one another through the gifts we have each received from the Holy Spirit. A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. As we journey together genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded.

In small groups – share together. (Read all the questions first and then begin to share.)

- How does your particular Church community ensure you are part of the 'journey'? How does the community include you? How does it not?
- How does it include others? Who is missing on this journey? Whom do we need to listen to?
- How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued and the way to reach them? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice?

## Mission (20 mins)

The Church exists to share the message of the Gospel with the world. We can never be centred on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political and geographical peripheries of our world.

In small groups – share together. (Read all the questions first and then begin to share.) • What would you wish to celebrate about how your parish/community lives its mission?

- How does your community decide priorities for mission?
- Where do you see people in your parish/community living out the Church's mission in their own lives and work? How does your parish/community support them?
- What areas of mission are we neglecting?
- In what ways is our partnership with people beyond the Church developing?

*Each small group sharing should conclude by deciding the contribution they wish to share back to the large group. NB – each participant will also share thoughts individually using the outline below.*

## Feedback from small groups (25 mins including 5-minute break)

Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and to re-form the main circle.

Take a break for 5 minutes to give everyone a leg stretch.

In advance of the session, prepare three different areas of wall space in the room, sticking up very large sheets of paper. You could use several flip chart pages together, lining paper or a roll of brown paper.

Give each area one of the titles: Communion, Participation, Mission. Provide markers/felt tips for everyone.

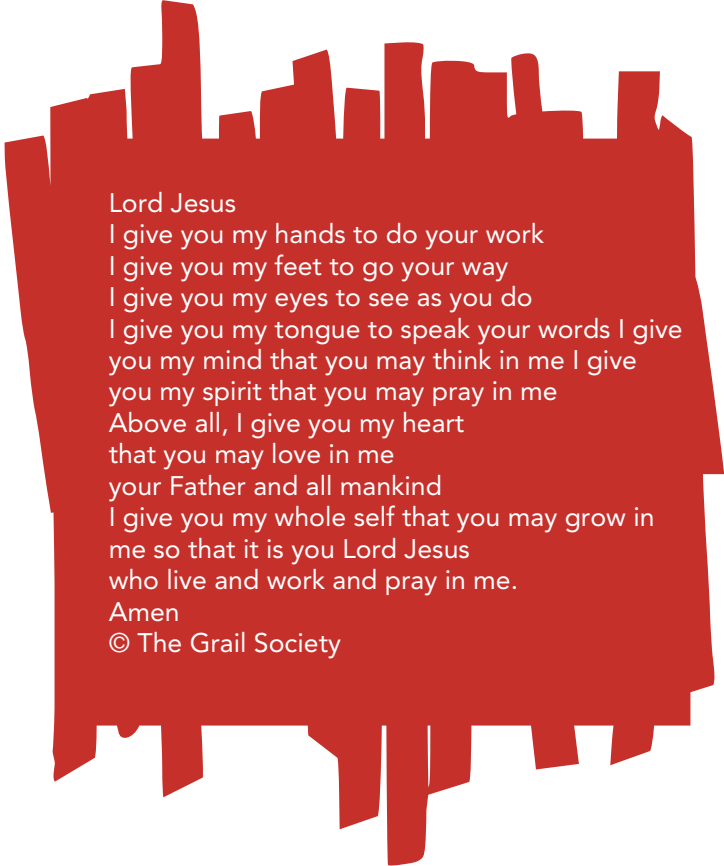
As you re-gather from the break, invite people to begin at any of the three areas. Invite them to add their reflections on the conversation they have just had. They can write directly on the paper or use sticky notes. Over 5-10 minutes people should move around the room adding their reflections to each theme area.

Then give everyone a few minutes to walk around in silence and read some of the notes.

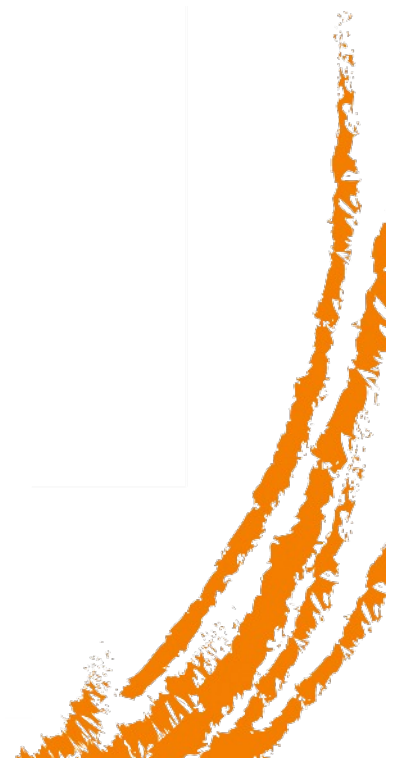
Now invite each small group facilitator to feedback a short summary of their group's sharing.

## Conclusion (10 mins)

- Invite everyone to share one thing that they have appreciated about the sharing. If the group is too large for everyone to share, ask people to share in pairs or in threes with those near to them.
- Assure people that their sharing will help your parish and the wider Church consider how to better 'journey together'. Remind people of the date when you next gather.
- Conclude with a short silence and then a short prayer. You could pray the 'Glory be' or use the Grail prayer:



Lord Jesus  
I give you my hands to do your work  
I give you my feet to go your way  
I give you my eyes to see as you do  
I give you my tongue to speak your words I give  
you my mind that you may think in me I give  
you my spirit that you may pray in me  
Above all, I give you my heart  
that you may love in me  
your Father and all mankind  
I give you my whole self that you may grow in  
me so that it is you Lord Jesus  
who live and work and pray in me.  
Amen  
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# Three Session Group Listening: Session Three

## Connecting (7 mins)

Begin by welcoming everyone. In a small group ask everyone to share for one minute on the two 'connecting' questions below. If there are more than 6-8 people, ask people to discuss the questions in pairs/threes and then simply to introduce themselves by name to the larger group.

- How are you as we begin this conversation?
- What did you appreciate about the last session? How has the experience of listening to one another impacted you since then?

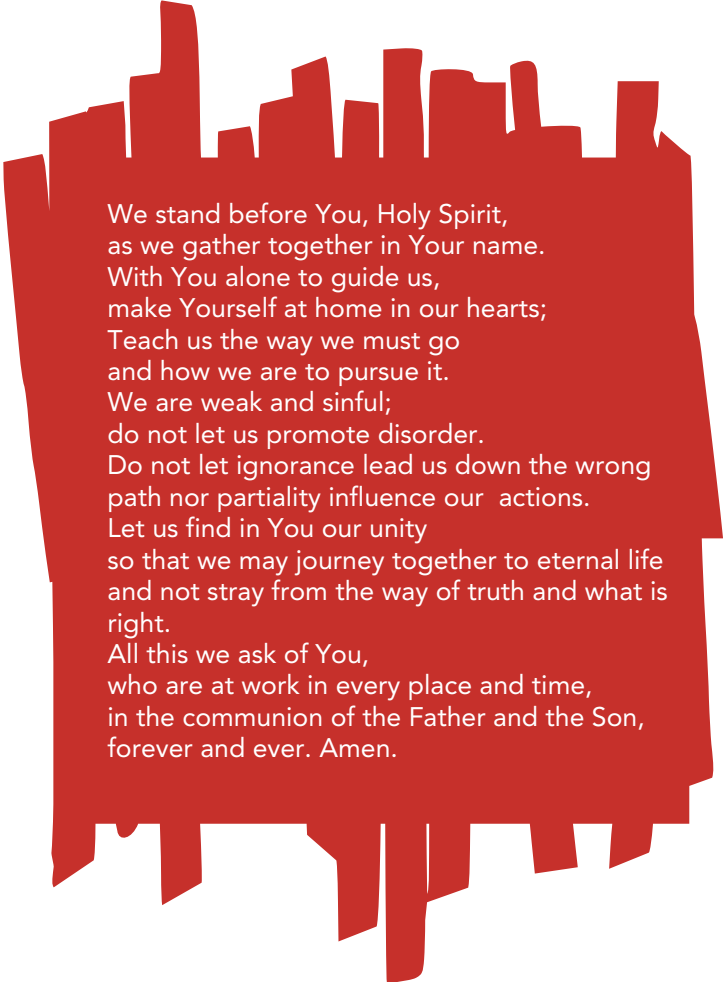
## Introduction (5 mins)

Remind people about the Synod process [see also 'Vision for the Synodal Journey document]

- We come to our third session where we move from sharing and 'rereading' our experiences of journeying together through the pandemic, and more broadly, to 'gather the fruits'. Gathering the fruits means generously reflecting on what we have heard, not just from ourselves but from the hearts of others. We are open to one another and to God. What is God saying to us? In recalling what we have heard over the last sessions, what might we have heard of what steps we are being called to take to deepen our community and participation so that we can strengthen our mission?
- Invite everyone to speak from the heart and to listen deeply to one another during this conversation. Refer to the 'Participant's Guide'. You may want to read through 'Active Listening' and 'Speaking from the Heart' sections.
- Remind people that you will take some notes and may share a summary (anonymously) as part of your community's participation in the Synodal process. If you need to split into smaller groups, explain how this will work, and that you have invited people in advance to act as group listeners.

## Prayer (3 mins)

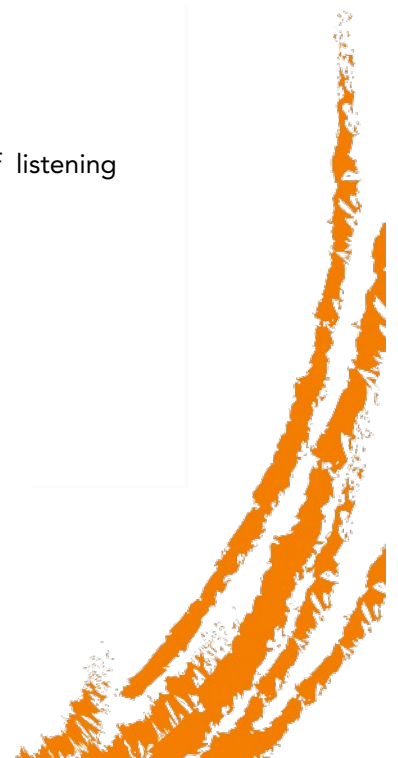
Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, ("We stand before You, Holy Spirit"). It has been used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years. For the Synod 2021-2023, we use this simplified version.




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.

In small groups - share together:

- What are you learning through these synodal conversations about the experience of listening in the Church?





## Optional feedback from small groups

Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and turn their chairs back towards the main group. (You do not have to fully re-form the circle if it will take too long as the small groups will re-form soon. Turning chairs to face one another is usually enough.

Hold a time of silence. Then invite anyone who wishes to offer just one sentence as a reflection on what they heard in their small group. Or, if the group is too large for everyone to speak, explain that we have time to hear from a few people. Stress that it is just one sentence. You may want to begin by modelling it yourself. E.g. "I heard that some of us are learning that listening is hard but rewarding"

## Scripture (5 mins)

Before beginning your main listening conversation, take time to reflect upon Scripture.

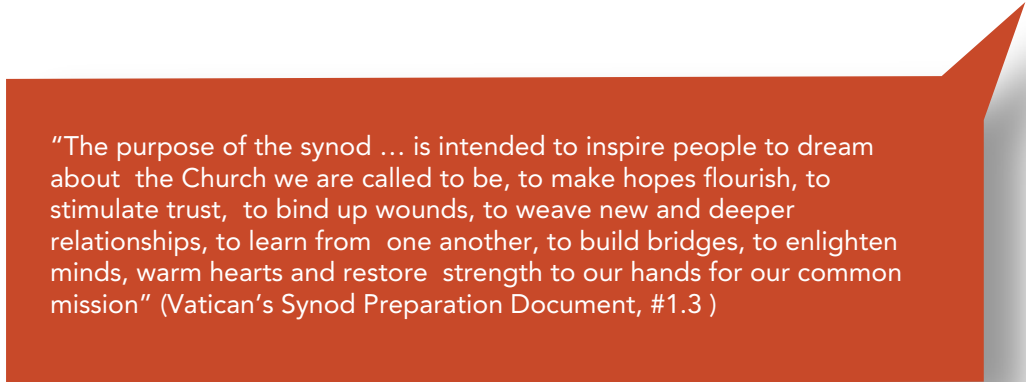
The First Council (Acts 15:1-35)

1. Invite someone to read Acts 15:1-35
2. You may want to read to the group: The Council of Jerusalem is central to the future of the Church and it also offers us important insights into synodality. In a sense, we can regard it as the first 'synod'. It is a watershed moment in the life and history of the Church as the early disciples consider what should be expected of Gentiles in regards to the Jewish law.

The whole narrative presents us with a community that is developing in a dynamic way. It recognises that there will be tensions and conflicts, but it is primarily concerned to follow the path that God is marking out for it, even when that has some unexpected turns. At every point the narrative attends to the different experiences, objections, perceptions and concerns but, above all, it seeks to let God have the initiative and it desires to create and confirm the fellowship/communion which is the work of the Holy Spirit. iii) allow a few moments of silence to reflect.

## Discerning (50 mins)

"Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound?"



"The purpose of the synod ... is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission" (Vatican's Synod Preparation Document, #1.3 )

In small groups – Share together:

- What might the Spirit of God be saying to us through our reflection on the experiences we have shared of journeying together?
- What steps might the Spirit of God be inviting us to take in order to make our communities more welcoming, inclusive and missionary?

- What can the process of Synodality teach your community? What may the Holy Spirit inspire in the community that can remain after a Synod is over?
- Pope Francis writes of the need to ensure the Church's "customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures" are geared towards mission not self preservation. (The Joy of the Gospel / Evangelii Gaudium #27)
- What 'ways of doing things' may the Spirit of God be calling us to change?
- Each small group sharing should conclude by deciding the verbal contribution they wish to share back to the large group.

## Feedback from small groups (30 mins including 5-minute break)

Before each small group comes back to the larger gathering invite them to conclude their time by creating a 'mind map' of their conversation:

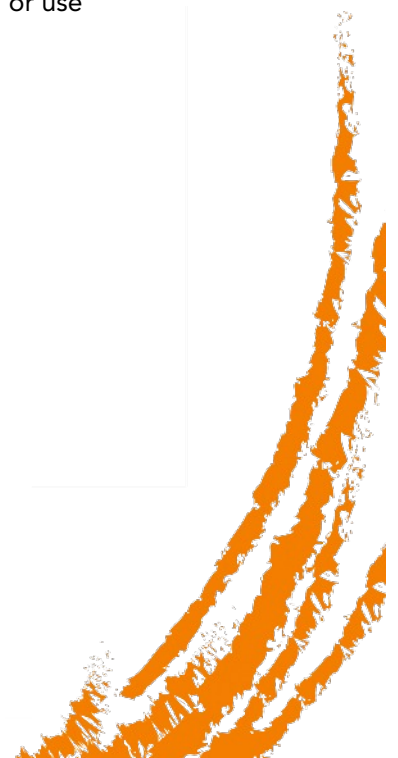
- Provide a large sheet of paper for each group (use several flip chart sheets taped together or a sheet of brown paper) and bold colours of thick tipped felt pens. The paper should be big enough for all the small group to access at once. You can tape the paper on the wall, or place it on a large table.
- Write 'What might the Spirit be saying to us?' in a circle in the middle. Everyone begins in silence. They can write (or draw) anywhere on the paper, as they reflect on what they've shared and listened to, in relation to the question. Explain that they can use lines, arrows, colours to connect ideas. Underline keywords or circle them in a colour.
- There is no 'one right way' to do this. Each mind map will be different. It will simply be a visual representation of their conversation.
- Then invite each group to take time to wander around the room and look at the other mind maps.
- Once you gather in the larger group, invite each small group facilitator to feedback a short summary of their group's sharing.


## Conclusion (10 mins)

- Invite everyone to share one thing that they have appreciated about the three sessions of sharing and listening. If the group is too large for everyone to share, ask people to share in pairs or in threes with those near to them.
- Assure people that their sharing will help your parish and the wider Church consider how to better 'journey together'.
- Conclude with a short silence and then a short prayer. You could pray the 'Glory be' or use the Grail prayer:

Lord Jesus  
 I give you my hands to do your work  
 I give you my feet to go your way  
 I give you my eyes to see as you do  
 I give you my tongue to speak your words  
 I give you my mind that you may think in me  
 I give you my spirit that you may pray in me  
 Above all, I give you my heart  
 that you may love in me  
 your Father and all mankind  
 I give you my whole self that you may grow in me  
 so that it is you Lord Jesus  
 who live and work and pray in me. Amen

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# After Sunday Mass: Three sessions of Group Listening

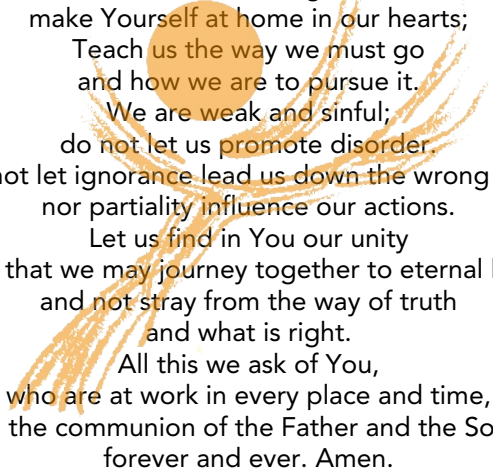
## General

When we gather together in a synodal conversation we begin with prayer and reflection on Scripture. As you will be hosting your conversation after Mass, use the celebration of Mass as an opportunity to open up the vision of the Synod. For example, consider how you can use the proclamation of the Word and the homily. Some priests may also be comfortable to have a short time of sharing in Church, perhaps with a question to discuss in pairs after the homily, or before the final blessing.

Some key things to include during the Mass are:

- Introduce the vision – see the of the 'Vision for the Synodal Journey' document • Explain that this is about listening deeply to one another and to the Holy Spirit in one another. Invite people to pray that they are open to hear the prompting of the Holy Spirit in your conversations. You may want to use the Synod prayer.

## Synod Prayer



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.

# Session one (1 hour)

## Getting started (5 minutes)

Once everyone is settled in the parish hall/meeting space, begin by welcoming everyone. Invite people to start by 'connecting' with someone else in the gathering, ideally with someone they do not know well. Ask people to discuss the two questions in pairs/threes for one minute:

- Who are you and where are you from?
- How are you as we begin this conversation?

Then build on what people will have heard in Sunday Mass. Take a few minutes to remind people about the Vision for the Synodal Journey.

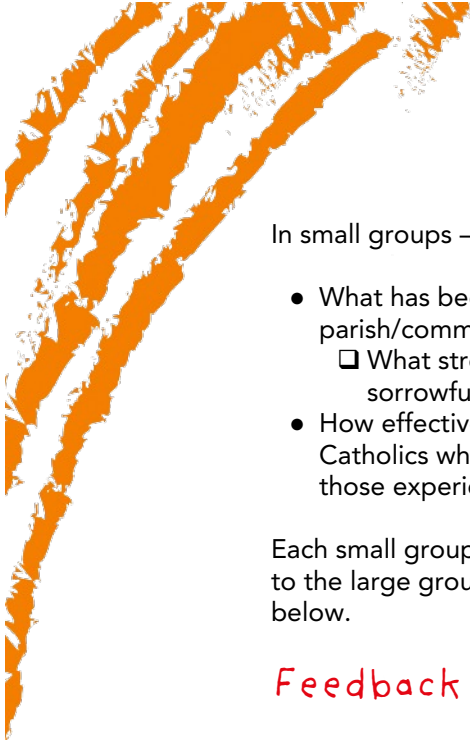
- Synod means 'journeying together'. Pope Francis is calling us to recognise that God is expecting the Church of today to be a Church which 'journeys together'. • "The purpose of the synod ... is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission." Vademecum, #1.3.
- The synodal pathway is about sharing our experience of journeying together as Church, and discerning steps forward. This is different to having debates:
  - Pope Francis says "what is under discussion at synodal gatherings are not the traditional truths of Christian doctrine. The Synod is concerned mainly with how teaching can be lived and applied in the changing contexts of our time." (Let us Dream, 84-85).
- Invite everyone to speak from the heart and to listen deeply to one another during this conversation. Refer to the 'Participant's Guide'. You may want to read through 'Active Listening' and 'Speaking from the Heart' sections.
- Explain that you will take some notes and may share a summary (anonymously) as part of your community's participation in the Synod process. If you need to split into smaller groups, explain how this will work, and that you have invited people in advance to act as group listeners.

## Reflecting on "journeying together" during the pandemic (35 mins)

"Now that there is greater normality in daily life, we have a unique opportunity to refresh and maybe reshape these patterns of life in the Church. Indeed, Pope Francis is asking us to do so. In starting what can be described as a 'Church-wide listening process' he is inviting us to listen again to each other, hearing experiences of faith with all its joys and disappointments, and to find new ways of strengthening each other." (Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Pastoral Letter 3 October 2021)

Begin in the context of your experience during the pandemic. Alongside the pain and challenges of lockdown, for many it has also been a time of reflection and learning about the important aspects of our lives. Consider this in light of your experience of the Church 'journeying together'





In small groups – share together

- What has been your experience of 'journeying together' these last eighteen months – as parish/community?
  - What strengths did I find in my faith and faith community? How was I disappointed or sorrowful? In what ways did the grace of God most clearly touch and uplift me?
- How effectively has your Parish / community 'journeyed' with others, including those Catholics who no longer participate in your community, those who are not Catholic, and those experiencing poverty, hardship or exclusion?

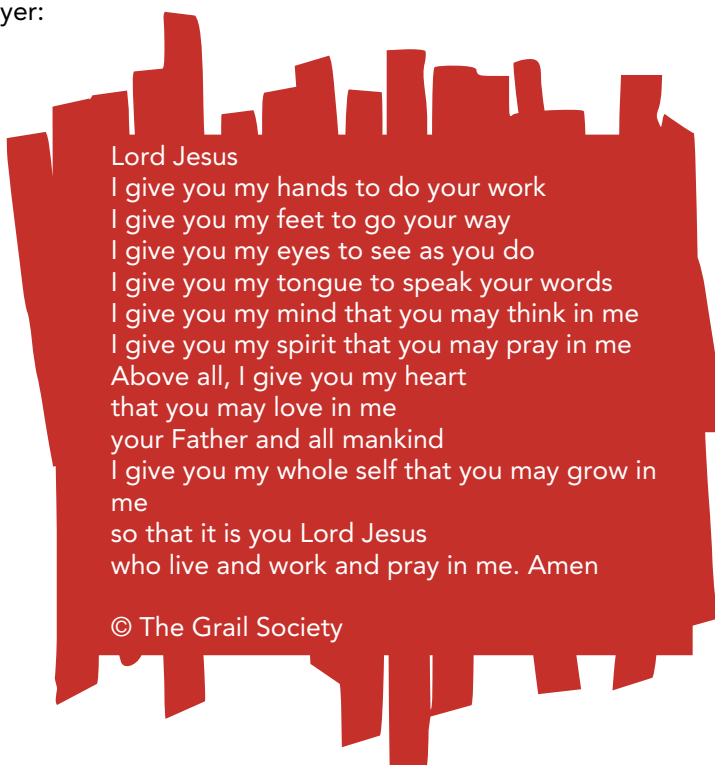
Each small group sharing should conclude by deciding the contribution they wish to share back to the large group. NB – each participant will also share thoughts individually using the outline below.

### Feedback from small groups (15 mins)

1. Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and to re-form the main circle.
2. Before the session prepare a large title on the wall 'Journeying Together in the pandemic'. There should be space below the title for people to add sticky notes. If there is no large wall space available use a large notice board, or several smaller wall spaces around the room. Give people pens and sticky notes. Invite everyone to take a few minutes to write a summary of the contribution they made in the small group.
3. Ask them to add their notes to the wall. Give everyone a few minutes to walk around in silence and read some of the notes.
4. Now invite each small group facilitator to feedback a short summary of their group's sharing.

### Conclusion (5 mins)

- Invite everyone to share one word which says something about what they have appreciated about the sharing.
- Assure people that their sharing will help your parish and the wider Church consider how to better 'journey together'. Remind people of the date when you next gather.
- Conclude with a short silence and then a short prayer. You could pray the 'Glory be' or use the Grail prayer:



Lord Jesus  
I give you my hands to do your work  
I give you my feet to go your way  
I give you my eyes to see as you do  
I give you my tongue to speak your words  
I give you my mind that you may think in me  
I give you my spirit that you may pray in me  
Above all, I give you my heart  
that you may love in me  
your Father and all mankind  
I give you my whole self that you may grow in me  
so that it is you Lord Jesus  
who live and work and pray in me. Amen

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## Session Two (1 hour)

### Getting started (5 minutes)

Once everyone has settled in the parish hall/meeting space, begin by welcoming everyone. Invite people to meet and 'connect' with someone else in the gathering, ideally with someone they do not know well. Ask people to discuss the two questions in pairs/threes for one minute:

- How are you as we begin this conversation?
- What did you appreciate about the last session? How has the experience of listening to one another impacted you since then?

Take a few minutes to remind people about the Vision for the Synodal Journey.

- The synodal pathway is about sharing our experience of journeying together as Church, and discerning steps forward. This session we begin to explore the three interlinking themes of the Synod – communion, participation and mission. We will do this in light of our experience of journeying together through the pandemic, alongside our broader experience of journeying as Church.
- Invite everyone to speak from the heart and to listen deeply to one another during this conversation. Refer to the 'Participant's Guide'. You may want to read through 'Active Listening' and 'Speaking from the Heart' sections.
- Remind people that you will take some notes and may share a summary (anonymously) as part of your community's participation in the Synodal process. If you need to split into smaller groups, explain how this will work, and that you have invited people in advance to act as group listeners.

### Reflecting on "journeying together" during the pandemic (35 mins)

"By journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through her experience which processes can help her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open herself to mission." (Synod Preparatory Document, 1)

### Communion (10 mins)

In small groups – share together

- Thinking about the pandemic, and perhaps more broadly, how do you experience the Church community journeying together? When does this bring joy? When might it bring pain or sadness?
- What has the experience of 'journeying together' taught us about what it means to be Church? When we say 'our Church', who is part of it?



## Participation (10 mins)

In small groups – share together

- How does your particular Church community ensure you are part of the 'journey'? How does the community include you? How does it not?
- Who is missing on this journey? Whom do we need to listen to?

## Mission (10 mins)

In small groups – share together

- What would you wish to celebrate about how your parish/community lives its mission?
- How does your community decide priorities for mission?
- What areas of mission are we neglecting?

In a large gathering each small group sharing should conclude by deciding the contribution they wish to share back to the large group. NB – each participant will also share thoughts individually using the outline below.

## Feedback from small groups (15 mins)

1. Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and to re-form the main circle.
2. In advance of the session, prepare three different areas of wall space in the room, sticking up very large sheets of paper. You could use several flip chart pages together, lining paper or a roll of brown paper. Give each area one of the titles: Communion, Participation, Mission. Provide markers/felt tips for everyone. Invite people to begin at any of the three areas. Invite them to add their reflections on the conversation they have just had. They can write directly on the paper or use sticky notes. Over 5-10 minutes people should move around the room adding their reflections to each theme area.
3. Then give everyone a few minutes to walk around in silence and read some of the notes.
4. If there is time, invite each small group facilitator to feed back a short summary of their group's sharing.

## Conclusion (5 mins)

- Invite everyone to share one thing that they have appreciated about the sharing. If the group is too large for everyone to share, ask people to share in pairs or in threes with those near to them.
- Assure people that their sharing will help your parish and the wider Church consider how to better 'journey together'. Remind people of the date when you next gather.
- Conclude with a short silence and then a short prayer. You could pray the 'Glory be' or use the Grail prayer:



Lord Jesus

I give you my hands to do your work

I give you my feet to go your way

I give you my eyes to see as you do

I give you my tongue to speak your words

I give you my mind that you may think in me

I give you my spirit that you may pray in me

Above all, I give you my heart

that you may love in me

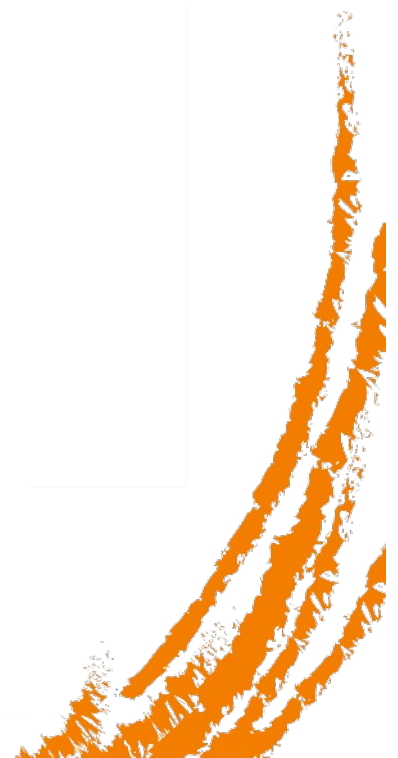
your Father and all mankind

I give you my whole self that you may grow in  
me

so that it is you Lord Jesus

who live and work and pray in me. Amen

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## Session Three (1 hour)

### Getting started (5 minutes)

Once everyone has settled in the parish hall/meeting space, begin by welcoming everyone. Invite people to meet and 'connect' with someone else in the gathering, ideally with someone they do not know well. Ask people to discuss the two questions in pairs/threes for one minute:

- How are you as we begin this conversation?
- What did you appreciate about the last session? How has the experience of listening to one another impacted you since then?

Take a few minutes to remind people about the Vision for the Synodal Journey.

- We come to our third session where we move from sharing and 'rereading' our experiences of journeying together through the pandemic, and more broadly, to 'gather the fruits'. Gathering the fruits means generously reflecting on what we have heard, not just from ourselves but from the hearts of others. We are open to one another and to God. What is God saying to us? In recalling what we have heard over the last sessions, what might we have heard of what steps we are being called to take to deepen our community and participation so that we can strengthen our mission?
- Invite everyone to speak from the heart and to listen deeply to one another during this conversation. Refer to the 'Participant's Guide'. You may want to read through 'Active Listening' and 'Speaking from the Heart' sections.
- Remind people that you will take some notes and may share a summary (anonymously) as part of your community's participation in the Synodal process. If you need to split into smaller groups, explain how this will work, and that you have invited people in advance to act as group listeners.

### Discerning (30 mins)

"Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound?"

"The purpose of the synod ... is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission" (Vatican's Synod Preparation Document, #1.3)

In small groups – Share together:

- What might the Spirit of God be saying to us through our reflection on these experiences of journeying together?
- What steps might the Spirit of God be inviting us to take in order to make our communities more welcoming, inclusive and missionary?
- What can the process of Synodality teach your community? What may the Holy Spirit inspire in the community that can remain after a Synod is over?

Pope Francis writes of the need to ensure the Church's "customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures" are geared towards mission not self preservation. (The Joy of the Gospel / Evangelii Gaudium #27)

- What 'ways of doing things' may the Spirit of God be calling us to change?

Each small group sharing should conclude by deciding the verbal contribution they wish to share back to the large group.

## Feedback from small groups (15 mins)

- Once you gather in the larger group, invite each small group facilitator to feedback a short summary of their group's sharing.
- Then invite anyone who wishes to share something of what they have heard through other people about what the Spirit of God might be saying to us.

## Conclusion (5 mins)

- Invite everyone to share one thing that they have appreciated about the three sessions. If the group is too large for everyone to share, ask people to share in pairs or in threes with those near to them.
- Assure people that their sharing will help your parish and the wider Church consider how to better 'journey together'.
- Conclude with a short silence and then a short prayer. You could pray the 'Glory be' or use the Grail prayer:

Lord Jesus  
I give you my hands to do your work  
I give you my feet to go your way  
I give you my eyes to see as you do  
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I give you my mind that you may think in me  
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Above all, I give you my heart  
that you may love in me  
your Father and all mankind  
I give you my whole self that you may grow in  
me so that it is you Lord Jesus  
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# Parish/Community Listening Day

## General

This session guide is offered for a community which wishes to gather together for a day to listen to one another as part of their synodal pathway. We encourage you to adapt the material below to work for you around suitable breaks and refreshments.

## Session one (1 hour)

### Getting started (7 minutes)

Once everyone has settled in a circle of chairs around the parish hall/meeting space, begin by welcoming everyone. Invite people to start by 'connecting' with someone else in the gathering, ideally with someone they do not know well. Ask people to discuss the two questions in pairs/threes for a few minutes:

- Who are you and where are you from?
- How are you as we begin this conversation?

Then invite people to introduce themselves by name.

### Introduction (5 mins)

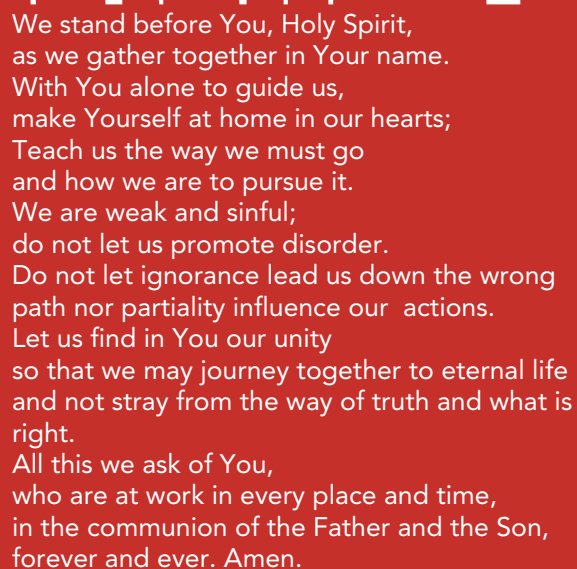
Explain a little bit about the Synod process [see also 'Vision for the Synodal Journey' document]

- Synod means 'journeying together'. Pope Francis is calling us to recognise that God is expecting the Church of today to be a Church which 'journeys together' – a Synodal Church – as it announces the Gospel to the world. Pope Francis is asking the whole Church to listen to God and one another to address a fundamental question:
  - How is this 'journeying together' happening in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our 'journeying together'?
- "The purpose of the synod ... is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission." (Vademecum, #1.3.)
- The synodal pathway is about sharing our experience of journeying together as Church, and discerning steps forward. This is different to having debates about Church doctrine:
  - Pope Francis says "what is under discussion at synodal gatherings are not the traditional truths of Christian doctrine. The Synod is concerned mainly with how teaching can be lived and applied in the changing contexts of our time." (Let us Dream, 84-85).

- Invite everyone to speak from the heart and to listen deeply to one another during this conversation. In this gathering we are not here to debate, to develop strategies or 'solve problems', but to listen and share experience. Refer to the 'Participant's Guide'. You may want to read through 'Active Listening' and 'Speaking from the Heart' sections.
- Explain that you will take some notes and may share a summary (anonymously) as part of your community's participation in the Synod process. If you need to split into smaller groups, explain how this will work, and that you have invited people in advance to act as group listeners.

## Prayer (3 mins)

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, ("We stand before You, Holy Spirit"). It has been used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years. For the Synod 2021-2023, we use this simplified version.




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.

## The Call to Listen to God's Spirit (15 mins)

Pope Francis envisages what is called a 'Synodal process'. The language may sound a bit technical, but the word 'synod' means quite simply 'journeying together'. The Holy Father is offering us the opportunity to participate in a time of listening and reflecting. He hopes this will help us to discern how God's presence comes into our lives and what the Spirit of God is prompting us to do anew, so that we might be more alive and creative in our response to the call of Jesus, our Way, Truth and Life. (Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Pastoral Letter, 3 October 2021)





"Synodality is the way of being the Church today according to the will of God, in a dynamic of discerning and listening together to the voice of the Holy Spirit." (Pope Francis, 17 October 2015)

### Quiet reflection:

Invite people to reflect quietly for a moment by themselves. Slowly read the following, leaving time for people to reflect on the questions:

Pope Francis is asking all of us to gather together to consider how we journey together in the world today. At the heart of this is the invitation to listen to what God may be saying to us about our journeying. This means listening to the Spirit of God in Scripture, in the life of the Church and also in the hearts of each one of us. Because we believe that we are all temples of and gifted by the Holy Spirit.

- Are you ready to listen to other people gathered here today?
- Are you prepared to encounter the Spirit of God in others?
- What would stop you from being open to listening?
- How might your own agenda stop you from hearing the Spirit in others?

In small groups - share together:

- What is your experience of listening to God? Do you have an awareness of the Holy Spirit within you?
- To what extent are you open to listening deeply to others today? Are you open to being surprised by God today?

A note about language of the Spirit

Some people may find the language of 'listening to the Holy Spirit' new and unusual. Be ready to invite people to share understanding of the presence of God in one another. Simply using language like 'hearing God within others' may be more helpful to some people.

### Feedback from small groups (10 mins)

- Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and turn their chairs back towards the main group. (You do not have to fully reform the circle if it will take too long as the small groups will reform soon. Turning chairs to face one another is usually enough)
- Hold a time of silence. Then explain that we have time to hear from a few people. Invite two or three people to offer just one sentence as a reflection on what they heard in their small group. Stress that it is just one sentence. You may want to begin by modelling it yourself. E.g. "I heard that our group is willing to listen deeply"

## Scripture (15 mins)

Before beginning your main listening conversation, take time to reflect upon Scripture.

The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)

1. Invite someone to read Mark 10:46-52.
2. Allow a time of silence.
3. Now invite someone to read the Gospel passage again, this time very slowly. As it is being read, ask the group to imagine themselves as the different characters in the story.

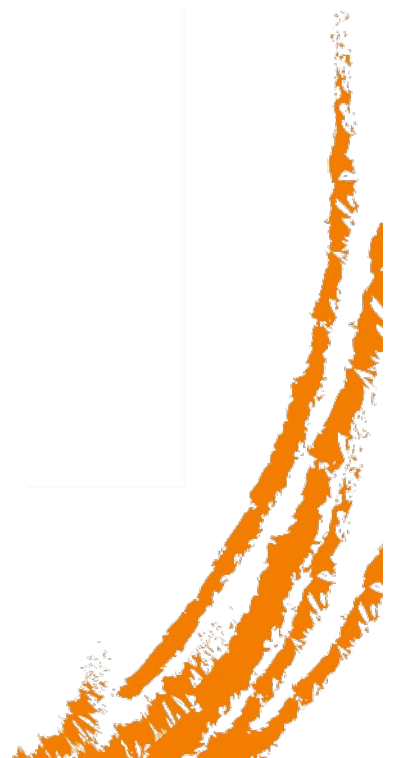
In small groups – Share together:

- What strikes you about the characters and how they respond to the situation?
- What do their attitude and actions evoke for you about your experience of the Church today?

## Feedback from small groups (5 mins)

Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and turn their chairs back towards the main group. Ask if one or two of the group facilitators wish to offer a one-minute summary highlighting aspects of what was shared.

*Break*





## Session Two (1 hour)

### Reflecting on 'journeying together' during the pandemic (40 mins)

"Now that there is greater normality in daily life, we have a unique opportunity to refresh and maybe reshape these patterns of life in the Church. Indeed, Pope Francis is asking us to do so. In starting what can be described as a 'Church-wide listening process' he is inviting us to listen again to each other, hearing experiences of faith with all its joys and disappointments, and to find new ways of strengthening each other." (Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Pastoral Letter 3 October 2021)

Begin in the context of your experience during the pandemic. Alongside the pain and challenges of lockdown, for many it has also been a time of reflection and learning about the important aspects of our lives. Consider this in light of your experience of the Church 'journeying together'

In small groups – share together

- What has been your experience of 'journeying together' these last eighteen months – as parish/community?
  - What strengths did I find in my faith and faith community? How was I disappointed or sorrowful? In what ways did the grace of God most clearly touch and uplift me?
- How effectively has your Parish / community 'journeyed' with others, including those Catholics who no longer participate in your community, those who are not Catholic, and those experiencing poverty, hardship or exclusion?

In a large gathering each small group sharing should conclude by deciding the contribution they wish to share back to the large group. NB – each participant will also share thoughts individually using the outline below.

### Feedback from small groups (20 mins)

1. Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and to reform the main circle.
2. Before the session prepare a large title on the wall 'Journeying Together in the pandemic'. There should be space below the title for people to add sticky notes. If there is no large wall space available, use a large notice board, or several smaller wall spaces around the room. Give people pens and sticky notes. Invite everyone to take a few minutes to write a summary of the contribution they made in the small group.
3. Ask them to add their notes to the wall. Give everyone a few minutes to walk around in silence and read some of the notes.
4. Now invite each small group facilitator to feedback a short summary of their group's sharing.

*Break*

## Session Three (90 minutes)

### Reflecting on 'journeying together' – Communion, Participation and Mission (60 mins)

"By journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through her experience which processes can help her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open herself to mission." (Synod Preparatory Document, 1)

#### Communion (20 mins)

God gathers us together as diverse peoples of one faith. The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of God - the Trinity. We all have a role to play in journeying together, discerning and living out God's call for his people.

In small groups – share together. (Read all the questions first and then begin to share.)


- Thinking about the pandemic, and perhaps more broadly, how do you experience the Church community journeying together? When does this bring joy? When might it bring pain or sadness?
- What has the experience of 'journeying together' taught us about what it means to be Church? When we say 'our Church', who is part of it?

#### Participation (20 mins)

We belong to the People of God – lay people, religious and those who are ordained. Our common participation is based on the fact that we are all qualified and called to serve one another through the gifts we have each received from the Holy Spirit. A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. As we journey together genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded.

In small groups – share together. (Read all the questions first and then begin to share.)

- How does your particular Church community ensure you are part of the 'journey'? How does the community include you? How does it not?
- How does it include others? Who is missing on this journey? Whom do we need to listen to?
- How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued and the way to reach them? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice?



## Mission (20 mins)

The Church exists to share the message of the Gospel with the world. We can never be centred on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political and geographical peripheries of our world.

In small groups – share together. (Read all the questions first and then begin to share.)

- What would you wish to celebrate about how your parish/community lives its mission?
- How does your community decide priorities for mission?
- Where do you see people in your parish/community living out the Church's mission in their own lives and work? How does your parish/community support them?
- What areas of mission are we neglecting?
- In what ways is our partnership with people beyond the Church developing?

Each small group sharing should conclude by deciding the contribution they wish to share back to the large group. NB – each participant will also share thoughts individually using the outline below.

## Feedback from small groups (30 mins)

1. Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and to reform the main circle. ii) In advance of the session, prepare three different areas of wall space in the room, sticking up very large sheets of paper. You could use several flip chart pages together, lining paper or a roll of brown paper. Give each area one of the titles: Communion, Participation, Mission. Provide markers/felt tips for everyone. Invite people to begin at any of the three areas. Invite them to add their reflections on the conversation they have just had. They can write directly on the paper or use sticky notes. Over 5-10 minutes people should move around the room adding their reflections to each theme area.
2. Then give everyone a few minutes to walk around in silence and read some of the notes.
3. Now invite each small group facilitator to feedback a short summary of their group's sharing.

*Break*

# Discerning (1hr 15 mins)

## Gathering the fruits (50 mins)

"Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound?"

"The purpose of the synod ... is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from

one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission" (Vatican's

In small groups – Share together:

- What might the Spirit of God be saying to us through our reflection on these experiences of journeying together?
- What steps might the Spirit of God be inviting us to take in order to make our communities more welcoming, inclusive and missionary?
- What can the process of Synodality teach your community? What may the Holy Spirit inspire in the community that can remain after a Synod is over?
- Pope Francis writes of the need to ensure the Church's "customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures" are geared towards mission not self preservation. (The Joy of the Gospel / Evangelii Gaudium #27)
- What 'ways of doing things' may the Spirit of God be calling us to change?

## Feedback from small groups (30 mins)

Before each small group comes back to the larger gathering invite them to conclude their time by creating a 'mind map' of their conversation:

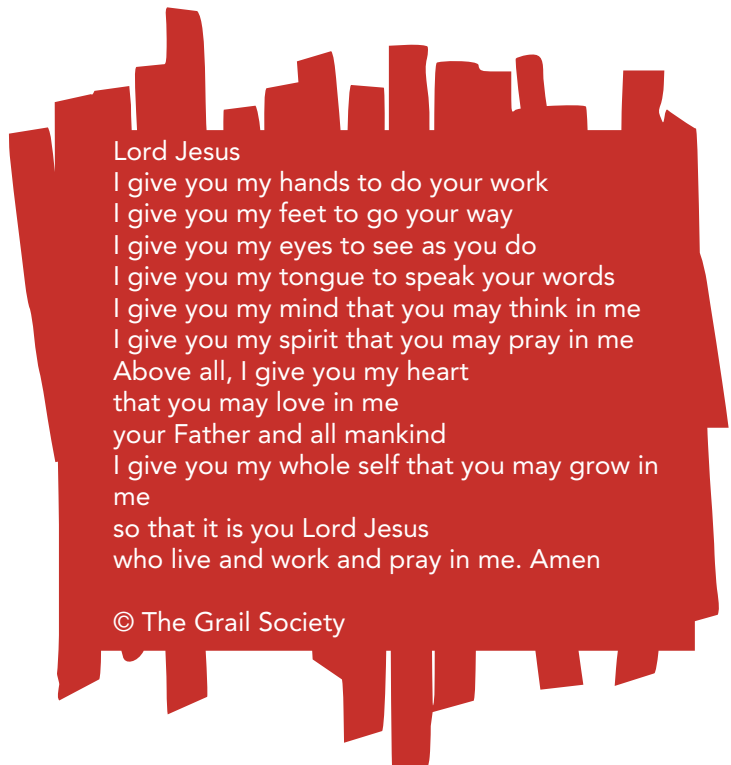
- Provide a large sheet of paper for each group (use several flip chart sheets taped together or a sheet of brown paper) and bold colours of thick tipped felt pens. The paper should be big enough for all the small group to access at once. You can tape the paper on the wall, or place it on a large table.
- Write 'What might the Spirit be saying to us?' in a circle in the middle. Everyone begins in silence. They can write (or draw) anywhere on the paper, as they reflect on what they've shared and listened to, in relation to the question. Explain that they can use lines, arrows, colours to connect ideas. Underline keywords or circle them in a colour.
- There is no 'one right way' to do this. Each mind map will be different. It will simply be a visual representation of their conversation.
- Then invite each group to take time to wander around the room and look at the other mind maps.

Once you gather in the larger group, invite each small group facilitator to feedback a short summary of their group's sharing.



## Conclusion (10 minutes)

- Invite everyone to share one thing that they have appreciated about the day. If the group is too large for everyone to share, ask people to share in pairs or in threes with those near to them.
- Assure people that their sharing will help your parish and the wider Church consider how to better 'journey together'.
- Conclude with a short silence and then a short prayer. You could pray the 'Glory be' or use the Grail prayer:



Lord Jesus  
I give you my hands to do your work  
I give you my feet to go your way  
I give you my eyes to see as you do  
I give you my tongue to speak your words  
I give you my mind that you may think in me  
I give you my spirit that you may pray in me  
Above all, I give you my heart  
that you may love in me  
your Father and all mankind  
I give you my whole self that you may grow in  
me  
so that it is you Lord Jesus  
who live and work and pray in me. Amen

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# Simple parish/community session (2 hours)

## Connecting (5 mins)

Begin by welcoming everyone. In a small group ask everyone to share for one minute on the two 'connecting' questions below. If there are more than 6-8 people, ask people to discuss the questions in pairs/threes and then simply to introduce themselves by name to the larger group.

- Who are you and where are you from?
- How are you as we begin this conversation?

## Introduction (5 mins)

Explain a little bit about the Synod process [see also 'Vision for the Synodal Journey' document]

- Synod means 'journeying together'. Pope Francis is calling us to recognise that God is expecting the Church of today to be a Church which 'journeys together' – a Synodal Church – as it announces the Gospel to the world. Pope Francis is asking the whole Church to listen to God and one another to address a fundamental question:
  - How is this 'journeying together' happening in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our 'journeying together'?
- "The purpose of the synod ... is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission." (Vademecum, #1.3.)
- The synodal pathway is about sharing our experience of journeying together as Church, and discerning steps forward. This is different to having debates about Church doctrine:
  - Pope Francis says "what is under discussion at synodal gatherings are not the traditional truths of Christian doctrine. The Synod is concerned mainly with how teaching can be lived and applied in the changing contexts of our time." (Let us Dream, 84-85).
- Invite everyone to speak from the heart and to listen deeply to one another during this conversation. In this gathering we are not here to debate, to develop strategies or 'solve problems', but to listen and share experience. Refer to the 'Participant's Guide'. You may want to read through 'Active Listening' and 'Speaking from the Heart' sections.
- Explain that you will take some notes and may share a summary (anonymously) as part of your community's participation in the Synod process. If you need to split into smaller groups, explain how this will work, and that you have invited people in advance to act as group listeners.

## Prayer and Scripture (5 mins)

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, ("We stand before You, Holy Spirit"). It has been used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years. For the Synod 2021-2023, we use this simplified version.



# Synod Prayer

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.


## The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)

1. Invite someone to read Mark 10:46-52.
2. Allow a time of silence.
3. Now invite someone to read the Gospel passage again, this time very slowly. As it is being read, ask the group to imagine themselves as the different characters in the story.

Reflect individually in a moment of silence:

- What strikes you about the characters and how they respond to the situation?
- What do their attitude and actions evoke for you about your experience of the Church today?

## The Call to Listen to God's Spirit (15 mins)



"Synodality is the way of being the Church today according to the will of God, in a dynamic of discerning and listening together to the voice of the Holy Spirit." (Pope Francis, 17 October 2015)

## Quiet reflection:

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, Invite people to reflect quietly for a moment by themselves. Slowly read the following leaving time for people to reflect on the questions:

Pope Francis is asking all of us to gather together to consider how we journey together in the world today. At the heart of this is the invitation to listen to what God may be saying to us about our journeying. This means listening to the Spirit of God in Scripture, in the life of the Church and also in the hearts of each one of us. Because we believe that we are all temples of and gifted by the Holy Spirit.

- Are you ready to listen to other people gathered here today?
- Are you prepared to encounter the Spirit of God in others?
- What would stop you from being open to listen?
- How might your own agenda stop you from hearing the Spirit in others?

Share in pairs/threes with those near to you:

- To what extent are you open to listening deeply to others today? Are you open to being surprised by God today?

## Reflecting on “journeying together” (1 hour)

“Now that there is greater normality in daily life, we have a unique opportunity to refresh and maybe reshape these patterns of life in the Church. Indeed, Pope Francis is asking us to do so. In starting what can be described as a ‘Church-wide listening process’ he is inviting us to listen again to each other, hearing experiences of faith with all its joys and disappointments, and to find new ways of strengthening each other.” (Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Pastoral Letter 3 October 2021 )

## Reflecting on the experience of the pandemic (20 mins)

Begin in the context of your experience during the pandemic. Alongside the pain and challenges of lockdown, for many it has also been a time of reflection and learning about the important aspects of our lives. Consider this in light of your experience of the Church ‘journeying together’

In small groups – share together

- What has been your experience of ‘journeying together’ these last eighteen months – as parish/community?
  - o What strengths did I find in my faith and faith community? How was I disappointed or sorrowful? In what ways did the grace of God most clearly touch and uplift me?

## Feedback from small groups (5 mins)

1. Invite the groups to bring their sharing to an end and turn their chairs back towards the main group. (You do not have to fully reform the circle if it will take too long as the small groups will reform soon. Turning chairs to face one another is usually enough)
2. Then explain that we have time to hear from a few people. Invite two or three people to offer just one sentence as a reflection on what they heard in their small group. Stress that it is just one sentence. You may want to begin by modelling it yourself. E.g. “I heard that our group found strength in unexpected places”

## Communion, Participation, Mission (30 mins)

In small groups – share together. Take each ‘pair’ of questions together. Read them first and then begin to share. Spend about 10 minutes on each pair of questions.

## Communion

- Thinking about the pandemic, and perhaps more broadly, when does journeying together in the Church bring joy? When might it bring pain or sadness? • What has the experience of ‘journeying together’ taught us about what it means to be Church?



## Participation

- When we say 'our Church', who is part of it?
- Who is missing on this journey? Whom do we need to listen to?

## Mission

- What would you wish to celebrate about how your parish/community lives its mission?
- How does your community decide priorities for mission? What areas of mission are we neglecting?

## Break with Feedback Task (15 mins)

Introduce a 15 minute break/leg stretch during which everyone has a task. In advance of the session, prepare four different areas of wall space in the room, sticking up very large sheets of paper. You could use several flip chart pages together, lining paper or a roll of brown paper. Give each area one of the titles: Journey through the Pandemic, Communion, Participation, Mission. Provide markers/felt tips for everyone.

1. Invite people to begin at any of the four areas. Invite them to add their reflections on the conversation they have just had. They can write directly on the paper or use sticky notes. Over 10 minutes people should move around the room adding their reflections to each theme area.
2. Invite everyone to then take a few minutes to walk around and read some of the notes.

## Discerning (25 mins)

"Where, in these experiences, does the voice of the Spirit resound?"

"The purpose of the synod ... is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission" (Vatican's Synod Preparatory Document, #1.3)

In small groups – Share together (15 mins):

- What might the Spirit of God be saying to us through our reflection on these experiences of journeying together?
- Pope Francis writes of the need to ensure the Church's "customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures" are geared towards mission not self preservation. (The Joy of the Gospel / Evangelii Gaudium #27)
- What 'ways of doing things' may the Spirit of God be calling us to change?

## Feedback from small groups (10 mins)


Once you gather in the larger group, invite each small group facilitator to feedback a short summary of their group's sharing.

## Conclusion (5 mins)

- Invite everyone to share one thing that they have appreciated about the day. If the group is too large for everyone to share, ask people to share in pairs or in threes with those near to them.
- Assure people that their sharing will help your parish and the wider Church consider how to better 'journey together'.
- Conclude with a short silence and then a short prayer. You could pray the 'Glory be' or use the Grail prayer:

Lord Jesus  
I give you my hands to do your work  
I give you my feet to go your way  
I give you my eyes to see as you do  
I give you my tongue to speak your words  
I give you my mind that you may think in me  
I give you my spirit that you may pray in me  
Above all, I give you my heart  
that you may love in me  
your Father and all mankind  
I give you my whole self that you may grow in me  
so that it is you Lord Jesus  
who live and work and pray in me. Amen

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Appendix (see the [www.rcdow.org.uk/synod](http://www.rcdow.org.uk/synod) for Word version of this form)

## Group Session Record Form

After the session take time to record your reflections shared by the group. If the session consisted of smaller groups, invite each 'group listener' to gather with you to record their reflections, or encourage them to complete their own feedback.

Name of Parish Community:

Date of Listening:

How Many People?

How would the participant(s) present describe themselves – tick all that apply:

☐

Committed to Faith, Regular attendance at Mass and participates in community life e.g. Member of pastoral council/ attends prayer group/reader/volunteer

☐

Committed to Faith, Regular attendance at Mass

☐

Faith & Church have some relevance. E.g. Occasional Attendance at Mass

☐

Culturally Catholic but Church has little relevance

☐

From a different Christian tradition

☐

From a different faith community

☐

Person of no faith

1. Optional: How did members of the group reflect on the 'listening' and 'Scripture' sections? (You only need to include elements when people shared things about their own experience of the Church journeying together)

2. What experiences of 'journeying together' during the pandemic were shared? What insights did this reveal?

3. What experiences of 'journeying together' were shared? What brought joy? What caused pain or sadness?







4. Did the group share anything in particular about the Church's experience of journeying with and including others, particularly those beyond the visible Church community?

--

5. What experiences were shared about the Church's priorities for mission?

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6. Were there any particular issues shared that the people felt the Spirit was inviting the Church

--

7. Is there anything else you'd like to share?



If you are able please also type up any flip chart notes / post-its. This will greatly help our small team process all of the feedback. However, if you can't type up the notes, please take high resolution photographs of any walls of post-its / flip charts and ensure that the writing is 'in focus'.



