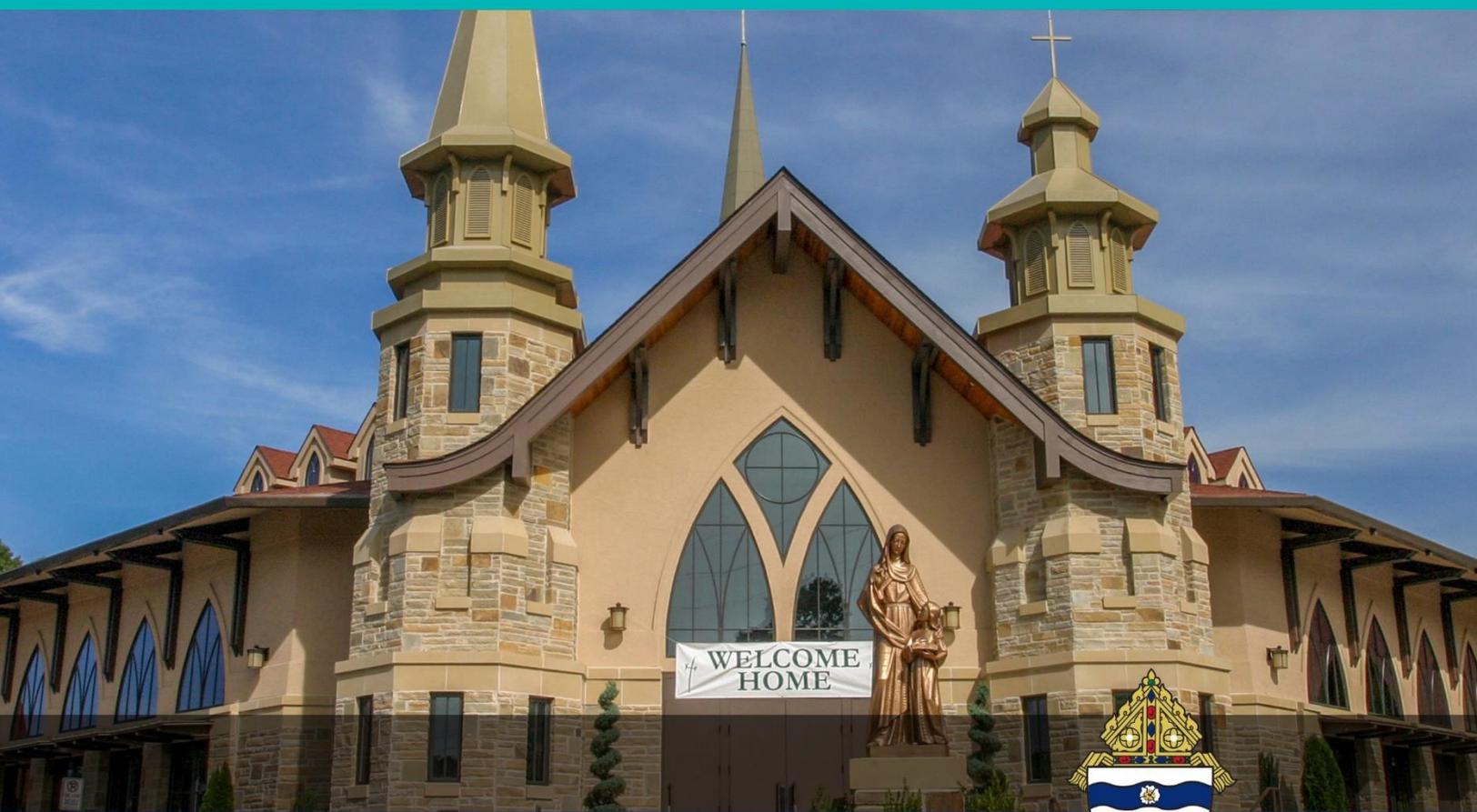




For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission



Parish Toolkit

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC  
ARCHDIOCESE OF  
ATLANTA

# Parish/Group Toolkit

For pastors, clergy, parish staff and other ministry/apostolate leaders and groups\*

## **The Synod on Synodality**

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Mt 18:20)

... We recall that the purpose of the Synod, and therefore of this consultation, is not to produce documents, but “to plant dreams, 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, give strength to our hands...”

Preparatory Document, no. 32 (quote from Pope Francis, Address at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People [October 3, 2018])

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\* Adapted from the Parish Synod Resources developed by the Archdiocese of Washington.

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## Introduction

Archbishop Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv., is asking the Catholic Church of the Archdiocese of Atlanta – clergy, members of consecrated life and laity – to gather with him, in order to draw close to the Lord **together**, so that the Holy Spirit may show us, this local Church, the path to bring the Gospel in a fresh new way to the world. This Synodal process complements our ongoing [Eucharistic Renewal](#) efforts, as we prepare to gather **together** at the Eucharistic Congress on June 17-18, 2022, to launch our participation in the national Eucharistic Revival. At present, we are being called to more intentional and focused prayer, to prepare our hearts to listen to the Lord and to one another and to discern the action of the Holy Spirit.

We are uniting with the universal Church in this important moment of consultation, where Pope Francis is asking us to **journey together**, to be present with one another, to listen and learn with each other and to grow closer to the Lord and his Church. The first phase, Listening and Discernment in Local Churches, is taking place in Dioceses from October 2021 through June 2022. Our Holy Father is calling every diocese to share the inspirations that each of their local churches receive, to be incorporated in the work of the **Synod of Bishops** assembly that will take place in 2023, having as its theme [“For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.”](#)

The purpose of this parish/group toolkit is to help pastors, parish clergy and staff and other ministry/apostolate leaders and groups to understand and implement the archdiocesan Synodal phase. More importantly, by doing so, the hope is that this local Church of the Archdiocese of Atlanta will experience important aspects of synodality, or journeying together, especially through prayer, listening and sharing together. Let us pray that this process bears fruit for our archdiocese and for the Catholic Church around the world.

*Please note: This toolkit can be adapted by various groups interested in participating in the synod process. Groups related to a particular parish/mission (or Catholic school or collegiate campus ministry) are asked to work with their pastor/administrator so that feedback can be submitted to the team responsible for the parish report. Those groups not directly associated with a parish/mission (or Catholic school or collegiate campus ministry) can submit feedback according to the report submission guidance found in this toolkit. All people are also welcome to complete the online survey that will be made available on the archdiocesan webpage for the synod ([archatl.com/synod](http://archatl.com/synod)).*

## How to Use This Toolkit

The most important aspect of the synodal participation of the Archdiocese of Atlanta is to pray, to listen to the Holy Spirit and to one another, and to discern the action of the Holy Spirit. The archdiocese is encouraging prayer-centered listening sessions as a key way to engage the process of the global Synod.

This is an opportunity to be with each other, to invite family, friends and neighbors back to the faith or at least into conversation, to listen to each other and to share our hopes and dreams for our parishes and communities and for the Catholic Church moving forward.

This toolkit will help parish and group leaders:

- 1) Understand the archdiocesan synod consultation process;
- 2) Host synod prayer-centered listening sessions in their parishes (or in other settings); and
- 3) Provide feedback to assist the compilation of the archdiocesan report.

There is no limit to the number of prayer-centered listening sessions a parish or group might wish to conduct, and the options provided in this toolkit can be adapted in various ways. It is indispensable, though, that each parish or group submit one report at the end of its consultation process, summarizing the fruits of the listening session(s). Directions on the report are provided in this toolkit as well as on the website ([archatl.com/synod](http://archatl.com/synod)).

## Purpose of the Global Synod

In this period of Eucharistic Renewal, the timing of the synod process is providential for us. As we seek to come together in prayer, listening and sharing, we are encouraged to spend time together before our Eucharistic Lord, to come together in the Holy Mass, to grow closer to one another in Jesus and to encounter Jesus in every human face.

It is hoped that this synod process will provide parishes/groups with an opportunity to be together as we continue to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. As we know, many parishes and other communities have been greatly affected by COVID-19 through illness, deaths and missed celebrations like first Communions, weddings, graduations and even funerals. Healthcare workers, first responders, and their families, as well as those living in poverty or in conditions of higher risk of illness — whether fellow parishioners, neighbors or those in our surrounding communities — often experienced great sacrifices and hardships during the pandemic. COVID-19 has also

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demonstrated the incredible and heroic generosity of so many community members.

This Synod is a unique gift for our local Church. It is a gift of time — a chance to take a step back and reconnect with our communities. It is an opportunity to invite people not only back to Sunday Mass but also to parish and community life. This invitation to community starts with listening. Listening to the Lord and listening to each other's joys, hopes, sorrows and anxieties. Listening to each other is the basis of dialogue, friendship and community life. This Synod process in the archdiocese is not about changing doctrine or basic Church structures, but rather it is about encountering each other as brothers and sisters in Christ in a post-pandemic world and learning to listen together to the Holy Spirit, so that together we may serve the mission of proclaiming the Gospel with greater joy and confidence.

### Archdiocesan Synod Phase Overview

#### Timeline of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta



### **October 17 – November 28, 2021**

An opening Mass celebrated by Archbishop Hartmayer at the Cathedral of Christ the King introducing the Synod process in his [homily](#). The entire archdiocese is encouraged to prepare in prayer and study, reflecting on the Synod documents. Additionally, pastors and leaders with their teams are encouraged to discern how best to implement the prayer-centered listening session process both to complement the Eucharistic Renewal and to help re-engage parish communities and others as we emerge from COVID-19.

### **November 28, 2021 – March 31, 2022**

Parishes and other communities/groups are invited and encouraged to host prayer-centered listening sessions where the clergy, laity, religious communities who live near the parish and any other community members will be invited to participate. As seen below, the sessions have been designed to include time for communal prayer and personal reflection, before the Blessed Sacrament if possible. Session frameworks and plans can be adapted in various ways. For example, some parishes may hold a prayer-centered listening session with distinct groups (e.g., their councils, ministry groups, cultural families, those on the margins, etc.), while others may choose to host a prayer-centered listening session(s) open to the general parish community. Pastors and leaders may choose to shorten the number of questions, adapt the questions or extend the sessions. Pastors and leaders may also adapt the process to include Mass or a meal depending on local circumstances. Groups outside of a parish or ministry setting may choose to adapt sessions in ways that make sense for their circumstances. Other consultation methods may be utilized as well, including using virtual formats, though in-person experiences are recommended where possible.

Parishes, Catholic schools, campus ministries and groups distinct from parish life that choose to participate are asked to submit a summary of their listening session(s) to the archdiocesan Synod Team (see Summary Report instructions in this toolkit and [www.archatl.com/synod](http://www.archatl.com/synod)). Each parish/group is asked to submit only one (1) report.

Pastors, in consultation with their staff teams and parish councils, will be asked to name two parish synod delegates to attend an archdiocesan regional gathering. Schools and campus ministries will be invited to send at least one delegate to attend regional gatherings as well, and other groups and individuals will also be invited. Separate information will be shared about delegates and about the regional gatherings.

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During this consultation phase, an archdiocesan online survey will be available for the widest distribution possible. All are encouraged to complete the survey, whether or not one was able to participate in a listening session. Parishes and other communities/groups should seek to invite as many people as possible to complete the survey (e.g., Christmas Masses, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe or other well-attended gatherings are a fortuitous time to promote the survey broadly) as well as to participate in listening sessions. All should keep in mind that the experience of prayerful listening to the Lord and to each other is at the heart of this Synodal process. So, while the survey will complement our efforts, in-person experiences and gatherings are essential.

Beginning early 2022, a series of archdiocesan regional gatherings will take place, complementing the parish/group listening sessions. These regional gatherings will be attended by the parish Synod delegates, clergy delegates, delegates from men's and women's religious communities and others. These archdiocesan sessions will provide opportunities for communities to pray together, share with each other, and accompany and journey with one another. Separate information will be shared about the regional gatherings.

### **April 1- June 30, 2022 and beyond**

After the parish/group sessions and regional gatherings are complete, a final archdiocesan Pre-Synodal Meeting will take place (date TBD). A 10-page synthesis report, due to the USCCB by June 30, will be drafted and finalized in the months of April and May by Archbishop Hartmayer with the help of the archdiocesan Synod Team. Every diocesan report submitted to the USCCB will assist in the creation of a national report submitted to the Holy See (the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops). These national reports will serve as the basis for the first working document or *Instrumentum Laboris* that will be used during the continental phase of the Synod where episcopal conferences will gather to pray, listen and dialogue together. Continental reports will then be submitted to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in Rome, helping create the second working document for use in the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2023. Implementation will continue beyond 2023.

### Resources in this Toolkit

In this toolkit, you will find several resources to help you plan and host your parish or group listening session. This toolkit contains the following resources:

- Resources for Promoting the Synod and Listening Sessions
  - Bulletin Inserts
  - Homily Helps
  - Prayers of the Faithful
- Resources for Listening Sessions
  - Two Options for Hosting a prayer-centered listening session (please note: these sessions can be adapted to virtual or hybrid settings if need be)
  - Planning before a listening session
  - Checklist
  - Best practices for small group management
  - Synod Discussion Questions
- Instructions for Parish/Group Summary Report

The archdiocese has prepared a Participant's Guide and a Facilitator's Guide for the prayer-centered listening sessions. In addition, a resource for the small-group note taker is also available for printing. These additional resources can be found on the archdiocese's Synod [website](#).

Before the listening sessions occur, leaders are encouraged to share the Participant's Guide with all those who plan to attend. Parishes are also encouraged to publicize the archdiocesan Synod [website](#), to encourage their parish community to read the documents and become familiar with the process, and to pray that the Synod will bear much fruit for this local Church and for the universal Church.

## Resources for Promoting Synod & Listening Sessions

### Bulletin Inserts

#### Synod Listening Session

The entire Catholic Church is called to participate in the upcoming Synod of Bishops. In preparation for the international Synod of Bishops in 2023, Pope Francis wants your input on the topic of “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” You are invited to join Fr. [REDACTED] for a parish prayer-centered listening session on [DATE]. Invite family, friends, neighbors- we want everyone to participate in this prayer-centered listening session. To RSVP, please email: [PARISH EMAIL].

Whether or not you can make the parish prayer-centered listening session, share your considerations online at [archatl.com/synod/](https://archatl.com/synod/).

**OR**

The entire Catholic Church is called to participate in the upcoming Synod of Bishops. In preparation for the international Synod of Bishops in 2023, Pope Francis wants your input on the topic of “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” You are invited to join Fr. [REDACTED] for a three-week evening series of parish prayer-centered listening sessions on [DATES]. Invite family, friends, neighbors- we want everyone to participate in this prayer-centered listening session. To RSVP, please email: [PARISH EMAIL].

Whether or not you can make the parish prayer-centered listening session, share your considerations online at [archatl.com/synod/](https://archatl.com/synod/).

#### Online Survey for the Synod

The entire Catholic Church is called to participate in the upcoming Synod of Bishops. In preparation for the international Synod of Bishops in 2023, Pope Francis wants your input on the topic of “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” People of all ages, Catholics and non-Catholics, are invited to give their feedback. To participate in the survey, visit [archatl.com/synod/](https://archatl.com/synod/).

### Homily Helps

#### Modern Analogies

- **Family Dinner:** The Synod is like a big family dinner. Everyone attends: the rebellious teenagers, the grumpy uncle, the cousin who struggles with sobriety, the divorced aunt, your favorite uncle, mom and dad. The whole family talks before, during and after. There might be laughter, joy, old stories and nostalgia. There might be tensions, arguments and frustrations. There might be a big elephant in the room that no one talks about. Yet, at the end of the day – no matter what, they are all one family. Such is the Church during the Synod process, but bonded more intimately, for the waters of baptism unite more than the waters of the womb.
- **A Road Trip:** The Synod process might seem like a lengthy family road trip. Different members of the family might take turns driving and navigating. There might be good and deep conversations. There might be some conversations that serve only to pass the time. There might be long periods of silence. There could be a detour, a roadblock, a pit-stop or a much-needed bathroom break. Yet, despite it all, everyone arrives safely home. The Church is like a car in which all family members are traveling to reach their destination. Christ is the map, and the Holy Spirit is the motor. Each member of the family has distinctive roles and importance. Dad is Dad. Mom is Mom—no matter who is driving or who is navigating. In the Church, everyone shares the responsibility to accompany each other on the journey towards the heavenly homeland of the Father's House. The Synod process is one way we accompany each other on the journey home.

#### Scriptural Analogies

- **The Exodus:** A touchstone story for the people of God is their birth as a nation from another nation through their redemption from slavery. They have seen the mighty works of God, know his providence in the mana and have been given his law. Yet, they continue to complain and murmur. Amid difficulties in the community, Moses gathers others to help him listen to the people, and Moses says: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" Through all the difficulties, ups and downs, they journey together toward the promised land.

The Synodal process is similar in that the people of God have been redeemed by sin by the new Moses. The Church has seen the mighty works of God, knows his providence in the Eucharist and has been given the Holy Spirit. Moses's words are fulfilled on Pentecost and applied to us at our baptism. We are a prophetic people, and the Synodal process asks us to listen to one another as we journey together toward the last day on which every tear will be wiped away.

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- The Road to Emmaus: Two disciples are journeying toward Emmaus talking about the death of Christ, and a stranger approaches them, who seemingly does not know the latest news. The two readily share it with him, and he begins to explain to them the more profound significance of what has happened in the context of salvation history. The disciples listen to the stranger amongst them intently and invite him to join them for a meal. When he breaks the bread, they realize he is Christ risen from the dead in their midst. Their hearts are burning within them, and they run to tell the Apostles that Christ is risen from the dead.

The faithful disciples journeying are like the Church during this time of Synod. They welcome the stranger, share with him the latest news and look at the crises of today in the light of the saving action of God throughout history. They gather around a feast, see Christ and the Holy Spirit moves them to engage in the Church's mission: the proclamation of the Risen Christ. An aim of the Synod is to walk together and listen to one another as we look at the signs of the times in the light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as the disciples on the journey to Emmaus, we pray for a deeper conversion and participation in the mission of the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit burning in our hearts.

### **Relevant Themes of the Liturgical Seasons**

- Advent: The themes of a Church in anxious waiting, eager anticipation and penitential preparations for the fulfillment of God's promises can highlight the importance of prayerfully listening for the Holy Spirit's guidance in the Synod and donning the humble disposition of our Lady's words to the angel: "May it be done to me according to your word."
- Christmas: The details of the nativity story are illuminative. The rejection by the innkeeper, the angelic song, the adoration of the shepherds, the Magi's gifts and Herod's malice all depict the different reactions and dispositions that might arise throughout the Synodal process. The Word of God made known through human flesh might be rejected by the world, sung about by the contemplatives, adored by those on the margins, given gifts by those on the peripheries and despised by institutional powers. Regardless of others' reactions to Christ, he remains always our model – even in his infancy. For he humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant. Humility and service to our fellow man are essential to a fruitful Synod.
- Ordinary Time: Three central themes of this season include the teaching, the miracles and the hidden life of Christ. If the words and deeds of Christ, handed on in the inspired word of Sacred Scripture and set aflame in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, are the foundation, light and guide for the Synod discussions, then we can expect the Lord to be more visible in and through the people of God by their fidelity to the mission of the Church in their day-to-day lives.

### Prayers of the Faithful

The following Prayers of the Faithful were developed by the Synod of Bishops office and can be used during Mass or at other occasions of prayer (e.g., Holy Hours) to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit during this Synodal process.

- For the Church. That we may journey as companions, side by side one another on the same road. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For listening ears. That our hearts and minds be open to listening to others without prejudice. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For the gift of speaking out. That we be encouraged in this Synod journey to speak with courage and parrhesia (boldness), integrating freedom, truth and love. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For a Church that celebrates. That our journey together in the coming months will be based on listening together to the Word of God and the celebration of the Eucharist in the communion of the People of God. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For our participation in the Mission of Christ. That through our Synodal journey together, we may grow in our shared responsibility of the mission that is entrusted to us. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For true dialogue in the Church and in society. That, through a path of perseverance, patience and mutual understanding, we may be attentive to the experience of persons and peoples. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For the unity of Christians. That dialogue between Christians of different denominations, united by one baptism, may radiate with new brightness on this Synodal journey. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For the exercise of authority and participation in the people of God. That the Synodal roots of the Church will bear fruit in new ways of being at the service of one another at all levels of the Body of Christ. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For our discernment to be led by the Holy Spirit. That all decisions made on this Synodal path may be discerned through a consensus that flows from our common obedience to the Holy Spirit. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For a spirituality of journeying together. That we may be formed as disciples of Christ, as families, as communities and as human beings, through our experience of this Synodal journey. We pray to the Lord.  
R/. Lord, hear our prayer.
- For the ongoing conversion of our hearts and for all in need of conversion, mercy and healing. That this Synod will advance the call to holiness and



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help the Church reach all people with the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. We pray to the Lord.

R/. Lord, hear our prayer.

**From:** Suggestions for the Liturgy to Celebrate the Opening of the Synod in local Churches by the Synod of Bishops. This resource was distributed by the Synod of Bishops office to episcopal conferences, with slight adaptations included here.

## Resources for Prayer-Centered Listening Sessions

**Please note:** The listening session frameworks suggested below are for an in-person gathering. For communities/groups that prefer a virtual or hybrid approach, the frameworks can be adapted accordingly. In addition, the proposed schedules can be adapted according to context and circumstances. With any adaptations, parishes and other groups are encouraged to preserve sufficient time for prayer and personal reflection, as well as adequate time for sharing, as indicated below.

### Option 1: Saturday Half-Day Prayer-Centered Listening Session

Below is a general outline for a Saturday morning half-day listening session. The Facilitator's Guide provides details on how to conduct this listening session, including a sample facilitator's script, opening and closing prayers and a detailed overview of the session.

**Time Frame:** 3 hours & 15 minutes

**Format:** Prayer and Small Group Discussion

8:30 a.m. optional hospitality & fellowship and check-in

9:00 a.m. – 9:10 a.m. Welcome, introduction and opening prayer

9:10 a.m. – 9:20 a.m. Overview of the Synod process and Participant Ground Rules

9:25 a.m. – 9:50 a.m. Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection  
Participants should have in-hand the questions selected by the parish/group to ponder during this prayer time; they could write down any words or inspirations that they receive to share with their small groups. Where possible, prayer and reflection before the Blessed Sacrament is encouraged.

9:55 a.m. – 12:10 p.m. Small Group sharing and dialogue  
(See Synod Questions at the end of this kit.)

- Fundamental Question(s) [25-30 min.]
- Supporting Questions [90 min.]
- Prayer & Concluding Question [15-20 min.]

Refreshments and break – to be determined by the parish/group

12:10 p.m. – 12:15 p.m. Conclusion and closing prayer

## Option 2: Three-Week Evening Prayer-Centered Listening Session

Below is a general outline for a three-week evening prayer-centered listening session. The Facilitator's Guide provides details on how to conduct these sessions, including a sample facilitator's script, opening and closing prayers and a detailed overview of the sessions.

*\*\*For sessions involving multiple meetings, it is highly encouraged to have participants committed to attending all the meetings, to foster trust and consistent sharing and feedback.*

**Time Frame:** 90 minutes to 2 hours each session

**Format:** Prayer and Small Group Discussion

### Week One:

6:00 p.m. *optional hospitality, fellowship and check-in*

6:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Welcome, introduction and opening prayer (*Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*); Overview of the synod process and Participant Ground Rules

7:00 p.m. – 7:20 p.m. Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection  
Participants should have a copy of the questions selected by the parish/group to ponder during this prayer time; they could write down any words or inspirations that they receive to share with their small groups. Where possible, prayer and reflection before the Blessed Sacrament is encouraged.

7:20 p.m. – 7:55 p.m. Small group sharing and dialogue: The **Fundamental Question(s)** (*See Synod Questions at the end of this kit*)

7:55 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Conclusion and closing prayer

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### Week Two:

- 6:30 p.m. – 6:40 p.m. Welcome and prayer (*Adsumus*); Introduction and overview of the evening
- 6:45 p.m. – 7:10 p.m. Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection  
Participants should have a copy of the questions selected by the parish/group to ponder during this prayer time; they could write down any words or inspirations that they receive to share with their small groups. Where possible, prayer and reflection before the Blessed Sacrament is encouraged.
- 7:15 p.m. – 7:55 p.m. Small group sharing and dialogue: Supporting Questions: **Listening & Discernment / Co-Responsibility & Participation**
- 7:55 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Conclusion and closing prayer

### Week Three:

- 6:30 p.m. – 6:40 p.m. Welcome and prayer (*Adsumus*); Introduction and overview of the evening
- 6:45 p.m. – 7:10 p.m. Opportunity for prayer and personal reflection  
Participants should have a copy of the questions selected by the parish/group to ponder during this prayer time; they could write down any words or inspirations that they receive to share with their small groups. Where possible, prayer and reflection before the Blessed Sacrament is encouraged.
- 7:15 p.m. – 7:55 p.m. Small group sharing and dialogue – **Supporting Questions: Prayer & Celebration, and Prayer & Concluding Question**
- 7:55 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Conclusion and closing prayer

## Planning before the Session

### Facilitator, Table Moderators & Note Takers

- Identify who will serve as the facilitator for the session, and share the **Facilitator's Guide** well in advance of the session.
- Decide if you will have pre-appointed table moderators to assist the hospitality and process in each small group and offer information/training in advance.
- Note takers in each small group can be volunteers or can be pre-appointed as well.

### Discernment Questions

- The parish or group should email the **Participant's Guide** to each participant, encourage them to read it ahead of time and distribute copies of the questions at the start of the session.

### Opportunity for Prayer and Personal Reflection

- Parishes/groups are asked to offer an opportunity for prayer and personal reflection, before the Blessed Sacrament if possible. Participants are encouraged to ponder the themes and questions under consideration in the light of the Holy Spirit. The [Holy Hour prayer resource](#), developed for the archdiocesan Eucharistic Renewal, could be made available. In addition, the Gospel from the Mass of the day or another passage from Sacred Scripture could be utilized for prayer and meditation.
- Parishes can consider inviting intercessors/guardians to allow Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel while the listening session is ongoing in the parish hall.
- Parishes/groups can choose instead to offer individual time for prayer and reflection (e.g., around the parish grounds, outside the meeting room, etc.), always encouraging participants to discern questions or themes in the light of the Holy Spirit.

### **Space needs**

- A room with enough tables and chairs for all participants to sit in small groups
- One microphone for the pastor/leader and facilitator/MC
- Hospitality table with drinks and snacks
- Projector and large screen, if possible

### **At each table place:**

- Copy of the questions
- Pens and/or pencils
- Small Group Notes Sheets to record comments
- Optional: Prayerful Communication Guidelines
- Consider placing a Bible open to a suitable passage (e.g., from the Psalms, etc.)
- Optional: Holy Hour prayer resource or other guides for participants

## Checklist

### **Before the Prayer-Centered Listening Session:**

- \_\_\_ Discern approach for consultation in your community, perhaps by considering the following questions. Who will be involved in coordinating the local consultation process? How many sessions will occur? Who will be invited to sessions? What session format will work best? When will the sessions be?
- \_\_\_ Invite the community by publicizing the Synod using email or any other method of parish/group communication, at Masses, in your bulletin, as well as by asking all parishioners to let their voices be heard and to listen to the voice of their brothers and sisters by attending the parish session or by completing the online survey. Be sure to invite those who do not regularly attend Mass. This Synod is for everyone and is an opportunity for encounter and evangelization.
- \_\_\_ Encourage attendees to visit <https://archatl.com/synod> and to download the Participant's Handbook.
- \_\_\_ Identify a skilled facilitator who can guide the conversation. Priests are encouraged to find a religious or lay leader from the community, or an outside facilitator, for the prayer-centered listening session.
- \_\_\_ Identify someone to serve as report drafter to type up small group notes into one parish report.
- \_\_\_ Invite intercessors/guardians to allow Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel while the sharing and dialogue parts are underway in the parish hall.

### **Volunteers Checklist:**

- \_\_\_ Skilled Facilitator
- \_\_\_ Hospitality Team
- \_\_\_ Intercessors/guardians to remain praying while the listening and sharing sessions are undergoing
- \_\_\_ Note Takers and/or Table Moderators if preassigned
- \_\_\_ Report Drafter: Pastor/leader with selected individual/team to consolidate small group notes into single parish report and upload to <https://archatl.com/synod/>. See instructions at the end of this toolkit.

### **Materials Checklist:**

- \_\_\_ Facilitator Handbook
- \_\_\_ Name Tags
- \_\_\_ Sign-in Sheet
- \_\_\_ Copies of the discernment questions (one per person)
  
- \_\_\_ Food/hospitality
- \_\_\_ [Holy Hour prayer resource](#)
- \_\_\_ Small Group Notes Sheets
- \_\_\_ Prayerful Communication Guidelines
- \_\_\_ Pens or pencils
- \_\_\_ Space set-up for small groups

### **At the Prayer-Centered Listening Session:**

- \_\_\_ Parishes are invited to consider offering an opportunity for prayer and personal reflection before the Blessed Sacrament. Participants are encouraged to ponder the themes and questions under consideration in the light of the Holy Spirit. The [Holy Hour prayer resource](#), developed for the archdiocesan Eucharistic Renewal could be made available. The Gospel from the Mass of the day or another suitable passage from Sacred Scripture could be considered to encourage prayer and meditation on God's word.
- \_\_\_ Intercessors/guardians – parishes can consider inviting intercessors/guardians to allow Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel while the listening session is ongoing in the parish hall.
- \_\_\_ Parishes/groups could choose instead to offer personal time for reflection, encouraging participants to discern under the light of the Holy Spirit.
- \_\_\_ Provide hospitality such as greeters and food and refreshments to create a welcoming environment for all who come.
- \_\_\_ Bring nametags to encourage conversation, especially for those who are new.
- \_\_\_ Ask participants to sign-in collecting participant's name and email, and asking them if they are interested in learning more about the parish/community.
- \_\_\_ Gather participants in small groups of five-six people so that everyone has an opportunity to share and to listen. If you have multiple small groups, ensure that there is a note-taker for each group. You may also encourage the small groups to share with the whole group after they discuss.

### **After the Listening Session:**

- \_\_\_\_ Follow up with the participants. Another fruit of the prayer-centered listening session is to consider how the faithful can continue to invite the participants into deeper participation and leadership in the life of the parish. Parishes are encouraged to follow up with participants even on a one-on-one basis to encourage their involvement in-the parish/community.
- \_\_\_\_ Submit your parish/group feedback online by March 31, 2022. It is the responsibility of the parish/group to identify who will aggregate the feedback and submit the online form for your parish/group. Parishes that have multiple listening sessions with various audiences are asked to consolidate all the feedback into one report (see instructions below).

## Best Practices for Small Group Management

### Hospitality

The Synodal process is offering an opportunity to display intentional hospitality to all participants. Many parishes or other communities might be welcoming people back from the pandemic into a large event for the first time. Consider the “first 10 minutes,” where the team can anticipate the experience visitors and returning parishioners might have, including clear signage and greeters equipped with nametags and big smiles.

Hospitality doesn't necessarily mean to provide food and beverage, or to do it in any costly way. Parishes and other communities, depending on their context, can choose to offer a meal or snacks to accommodate their guests; nevertheless, it is not strictly necessary. Almost 1,500 years ago, St. Benedict wrote in his rule for monastic life: "Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ, for he is going to say, 'I came as a guest, and you received me'" (Mt 25:35).

### Table Moderators

It is recommended to invite table moderators to manage the conversation and sharing at the appropriate times, especially if the parish/community is planning to offer a large prayer-centered listening session. The moderators should have a copy of the Facilitator's Guide as well as of the Participant's Guide, ensuring they understand and are enthusiastic supporters of the consultation process. A training meeting (virtual or in person) is recommended so they are familiar with the methodology and the order of the day. Encourage them to pray for whoever the fellow guests will be at their table, for their hearts to listen, both to the Holy Spirit and to others. Moderators should display particular interest and respect for guests, trying to maintain a flow in the discussion and making sure that participants observe the one to two-minute participation rule. Moderators can always say something like: “[name of the person] thank you so much for sharing, let's give others the opportunity to also share; if we still have time, we can come back to you.” The intention is not to abruptly interrupt a guest, but to kindly manage the time and opportunity for all.

### **Prayerful Communication Guidelines / Participant Ground Rules<sup>†</sup>**

(Consider providing copies of the below for every participant/small group.)

**P** – PRAY and PONDER before and after you speak. Ask our Lord to be in your heart and mind and on your lips as you begin to speak. Also, ponder what has been shared and what the Lord is putting on your heart.

**R** – Take RESPONSIBILITY for your own thoughts and feelings, avoiding the temptation to lay blame on others. Likewise, keep in mind that you are not responsible for the thoughts and feelings of others in your group. In a context of listening and sharing, it is okay for varying thoughts and feelings to be shared.

**A** – ALLOW others to speak and to share without correction or criticism. If you are more outgoing and assertive in conversation, it may be helpful to listen more and to allow those who typically do not speak to be heard first. We hope to hear from everyone during this Synodal process, especially those on the margins.

**Y** – YOU – Be attentive to your own thoughts, feelings, opinions or even prejudices. Ask yourself, “Why do I feel or think this way?”

**E** – Use EMPATHETIC listening, and be attentive not just to words but also to feelings being expressed. Try placing yourself in the speaker’s situation to help yourself truly feel what he or she is feeling.

**R** – RESPECT every person as Jesus taught us: love one another. Avoid minimizing or dismissing other people’s thoughts or experiences. Always seek to control your emotions while speaking and listening, showing kindness and generosity towards others.

### **Note Taker Roles**

Guests will be informed that there will be a note taker/secretary at each table taking notes (this can be a volunteer from the guests, or a parish/group might choose to designate note takers in advance). The notes will be anonymous. The notes from all of the small groups at your prayer-centered listening session will help in the creation of a parish/group summary report (one report per parish/group, summarizing the prayer and listening experiences and sharing highlights). This parish/group summary report will be sent to the archdiocesan Synod Team who will create an archdiocesan report based on the parish/group reports, regional gatherings and feedback from the online survey and other meetings.

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<sup>†</sup> For more extensive Communication Guidelines, consult *Intercultural Communication: The Mutual Invitation Process* found in: USCCB, *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers: Bilingual edition* (Washington, D.C., 2014), accessible at: <https://www.usccb.org/committees/cultural-diversity-church/bicm-appendices>.

## Questions for the Listening Sessions

The following questions are offered as the leading questions to guide the parish/community prayer-centered listening sessions in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. They can be adapted or modified by parishes or other groups according to time, circumstances and needs. If adaptations occur, communities are encouraged to follow the suggested themes and questions in the Synod Preparatory Document and *Vademecum* as a guide (see also optional questions suggested below). An online survey will complement the feedback gained from the parish/community prayer-centered listening sessions and regional gatherings.

### The Fundamental Question

**A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in our parish/community?  
How is the Holy Spirit inviting our parish/community to grow in “journeying together?”**

- What does “journeying together” mean to you? What experiences come to mind?
- What joys have you experienced in our parish/community? What difficulties and obstacles to journeying together, or to active and vibrant participation in the life of the parish/community, have you encountered?
- Where in these experiences do you hear the Holy Spirit inviting growth?

### Key Themes and Supporting Questions

#### Listening & Discernment

*Listening is a first step that requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice. Discernment in a synodal style, which requires attentiveness to the Holy Spirit through the prayer and sharing of the whole community, depends first on listening.*

- How do you listen to God’s voice every day?
- How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst, including those on the peripheries (the poor, marginalized, socially excluded, disaffiliated, etc.)? How do we hear the voices from the peripheries without prejudice?

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- What space(s) does our parish/community provide for listening and sharing (speaking freely) among all the members as well as those not regularly connected to our community?
- How do we together discern God's will in our parish/community, and what role does consultation play?

### **Co-Responsibility & Participation**

*Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate. All the baptized are co-responsible for the mission of the Church—to proclaim the Gospel and make disciples of Jesus Christ.*

- What enables or hinders you from witnessing and speaking up courageously and responsibly in our parish/community and in society?
- How are all the members of our parish/community called and empowered to participate in the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel?
- What obstacles to active discipleship and participation do you see?
- How are teamwork and co-responsibility for mission put into practice in our parish/community?

### **Prayer and Celebration**

*Central to "walking together" is the communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.*

- How do prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially Sunday Mass, inspire and guide our parish/community in our shared life and mission?
- How does listening to the Word of God together (e.g., Holy Mass, Scripture study groups, Holy Hours, etc.) inspire our parish/community's most important decisions?
- What does the Eucharist mean to you? How does the Eucharist inspire your life and actions?
- How do we encourage the active participation of all the faithful in prayer, the liturgy and the sacraments?

## Concluding Question – Listening to the Holy Spirit

Take 5-10 minutes to pray in silence with your small group, after invoking the Holy Spirit again through a “Come Holy Spirit” prayer or impromptu prayer. Then, from your small group sharing, **name one insight where you heard the voice of the Holy Spirit today, or share one insight that is on your heart after your time of prayer.**

**Optional Additional Questions** – These could be integrated into the framework above or adapted for groups outside of parish life or ministry settings:

### On God and the Catholic Church

- What thoughts and experiences come to mind when you hear mention of “God?”
- What does a relationship with God mean to you?
- What thoughts and experiences come to mind when you hear mention of “Jesus Christ?”
- What does a relationship with Jesus mean to you?
- What thoughts and experiences come to mind when you hear mention of the “Catholic Church” or “being Catholic?”

### Dialogue and Relationship with Others

- Are you aware of the ways the Catholic Church promotes dialogue and is in dialogue with others? How can this be strengthened?
- Are you aware of the ways the Catholic Church walks together with other Christians? How can this be strengthened?

### Other Topics Related to Synodality

- What does authority mean to you?
- What does listening mean to you?
- What does discernment mean to you?
- How can we better communicate how decisions and actions are taken in the Catholic Church?
- Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation and ongoing learning. How do you live synodality in your daily life?

*Please note: As a reminder, the Synod Preparatory Document and Vademecum provide further possible questions that can be adapted by groups.*

## Instructions for Parish/Group Summary Report

For parishes and other communities/groups (e.g., college campus ministries, Catholic schools, movements/apostolates, other groups not attached to one parish, etc.) who engage the Synod consultation process in the archdiocese with listening sessions, **one summary report** from each entity (parish/group) is requested to be submitted to the archdiocese. Please keep in mind the following:

- Even if each parish/group has multiple listening sessions, only one summary report is requested from each entity.
- Reports from parishes should have the approval of the pastor, and reports from other communities/groups should have the approval of the appropriate lead (e.g., chaplains, principals, local lead/director of movement/apostolate, etc.).
- Please be mindful that, as helpful and important as these reports will be for the archdiocesan report, vital to this whole process is the experience of prayer, listening and lived synodality being encouraged.

Below is the requested framework to follow when compiling your summary report. Reports should be entered and submitted electronically on the archdiocese's Synod [website](http://archatl.com/synod) (archatl.com/synod). Please contact Jenny Miles (jmiles@archatl.com) if you have any questions or encounter any problems. If necessary, a hard-copy report can be mailed or scanned as an alternative, c/o Jenny Miles in the archdiocese.

### Section A: Basic Information

- 1) Name of parish, Catholic school, campus ministry or community/group
- 2) Address of parish, Catholic school, campus ministry or community/group
- 3) Name of pastor/leader
- 4) Name of person filling out this report/form; phone number; email address

## **Section B: Assessing the Synod Process within Your Parish/Community**

- 1) Please describe the process(es) you chose to consult your community. Please check all that apply:
  - a. Option 1: One-day Prayer-Centered Listening Sessions (in-person, virtual, hybrid)
  - b. Option 2: Three-day Prayer-Centered Listening Sessions (in-person, virtual, hybrid)
  - c. Online Survey
  - d. Other Meetings
  - e. Phone Calls
  - f. Something else? [Please describe.]
  
- 2) Whom did you consult? Please check all that apply:
  - a. Parish/community members
  - b. Parish/community leadership, staff & volunteers
  - c. Parish councils (pastoral and finance)
  - d. Inactive Catholics
  - e. Other Christians
  - f. Those of other religions
  - g. Unaffiliated
  - h. Other
  
- 3) What was the best part of the process? What were the high points?
  
- 4) What was the most challenging aspect of the consultation process? What are some lessons learned?
  
- 5) Are there any fruits or steps that your community will be implementing as a result of this process?

## Section C: Discerning Synod Feedback for the Archdiocese

**1) Insights:** Please share four or five of the most important insights from your local synodal experience. In order to discern these fruits, we ask that you invoke the Holy Spirit for guidance. As an aid, consider the following points in your discernment:

- Consider not only reporting common trends and points of convergence, but also highlighting those points that strike a chord, inspire an original point of view or open a new horizon.
- Pay special attention to the voices of those who are not often heard or perhaps less frequently affirmed, keeping in mind the insights that can come from a minority of voices.
- Consider not only underlining positive experiences, but also bringing to light challenging and negative experiences in order to reflect the reality of what has been listened to.
- Keep in mind the experience of the local gathering: the attitudes of the participants and the joys and challenges of engaging together in prayer, listening and discernment.

### Insight 1: The Fundamental Question:

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeystogether.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in our parish/community? How is the Holy Spirit inviting our parish/community to grow in “journeying together?”

**OR alternate theme:**

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### Insight 2: Listening & Discernment

**OR alternate theme:**

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**Insight 3: Co-Responsibility & Participation**  
**OR alternate theme:**

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**Insight 4: Prayer and Celebration**  
**OR alternate theme:**

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**Insight 5: Listening to the Holy Spirit (any additional insight or experience to share) OR alternate theme:**

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**2) Final Question:** In what ways do you (pastor/leader in consultation with your team) see the Holy Spirit inviting the local Church here in the Archdiocese of Atlanta to grow in synodality?

## Prayer for the Synod: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*

### *Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus* *We stand before You, Holy Spirit*

Prayer of invocation to the Holy Spirit for an ecclesial assembly  
of governance or discernment (thus synodal)

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.



SYNOD OF BISHOPS

*1 Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer Adsumus Sancte Spiritus, the first word of the original Latin, meaning, "We stand before You, Holy Spirit," which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years and is attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 4 April 636). As we embrace this Synodal Process, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to be at work in us so that we may be a community and a people of grace. For the Synodal journey from 2021 to 2023, we propose to the following simplified version<sup>1</sup> so that any group or liturgical assembly can pray it more easily. The original version of the Adsumus Sancte Spiritus can be found on the Synod website.*