



Encountering Christ through the Synodal Process in the Archdiocese of Baltimore

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SYNODAL CONSULTATIONS

Preparation

An organizing/facilitation team can be formed to plan and carry out the gathering/consultation process, including how to reach out to people and the most suitable methods for fostering dialogue and participation. These could include members of the Pastoral Council to serve as organizers, facilitators and note-takers.

The goal of preparing the People of God prior to the start of the consultations is to invigorate a spirit of dialogue, collaboration, and synodality within the Archdiocese as a crucial part of the synodal process, which is focused upon all the baptized. No one—no matter their religious affiliation—should be excluded from sharing their perspectives and experiences.

Prior to the gathering, participants should be referred to the Archdiocesan Synod website (archbalt.org/synod) for prayers and background reading on synodality and the main reflection question, as well as the writings of Archbishop Lori.

Ensure there are enough facilitators for the chosen method and format of the consultation gathering. It is highly recommended that multiple smaller groups meet to foster better, more productive engagement and feedback.

Communicating about the Synodal Process

Speak about the Synodal Process at Mass, in the classroom, and religious education classes. Frequent communication about the synodal process can encourage the “journeying together” that is necessary for synodality.

Make use of Parish Resources found on the Archdiocesan Synod Website (archbalt.org/synod), including social media posts, liturgical resources, and video messages, as well as Archbishop Lori’s pastoral letters and other writings that relate to ongoing synodality in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

People should be referred to the Archdiocesan Synod website for updates on the Synodal Process in the Archdiocese.

Inviting participation

Set a date(s) for the consultations, then invite invite parishioners to participate through pulpit announcements, notices in the parish bulletin, website, email/Flocknote, and social media platforms. Sign-up opportunities should be offered (tables in the narthex/outside after Mass, online, MyParish App, etc.).

It is important to extend invitations for consultations, especially with intentionality toward those on the margins and the poor. Create a team/process to identify the groups most often on the margins and make use of existing Church structures (hospitals, universities, social service programs) to reach those who may not be coming to Mass. Care should be taken to involve those who are excluded or whose voices are often not take into account.

Participants should ideally include people from a diversity of communities, experiences, cultures, ages, and walks of life. The total group size may depend on the size of the venue, number of facilitators, etc.

If people are unable to attend a meeting in person or online, efforts should be made to reach out to them through text messaging, Flocknote/email, phone calls, etc. It is important that every effort is made to listen to the voices of everyone, especially those who are marginalized.

The Gathering/Consultation

At the gathering, communal prayer will play a vital role. Listening to one another is grounded in listening to the Word of God and to the Holy Spirit. Meaningful forms of prayer can be used to ask God's guidance and inspiration and let Him deepen our communion with one another. The liturgy and meditating together on Scripture can be very helpful in this regard.

Each consultation gathering can be structured according to the discretion of the Pastor/presider. A suitable method for group dialogue which resonates with the principles of synodality can be used.

For example, dividing participants at multiple tables, each with a facilitator and note-taker, can lead to productive conversations and greater involvement of those present.

Formats may vary. For instance, the Spiritual Conversation method promotes active participation, attentive listening, reflective speaking, and spiritual discernment. Participants form small groups of about 6-7 persons from diverse backgrounds. This method takes about at least an hour and comprises three rounds.

- In the first round, everyone takes equal turns to share the fruit of his or her prayer, in relation to the reflection questions circulated beforehand. There is no discussion in this round and all participants simply listen deeply to each person and attend to how the Holy Spirit is moving within oneself, within the person speaking, and in the group as a whole. This is followed by a time of silence to note one's interior movements.
- In the second round, participants share what struck them most in the first round and what moved them during the time of silence. Some dialogue can also occur, and the same spiritual attentiveness is maintained. Once again this is followed by a time of silence.
- Finally, in the third round participants reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation and what moved them most deeply. New insights and even unresolved questions are also noted. Spontaneous prayers of gratitude can conclude the conversation.

Once the group dialogue has taken place, participants should review and share about their experience of the process within their small group. How was their experience? What were the ups and downs? What new and refreshing insights might they have discovered? What have they learned about the synodal way of proceeding? How was God present and at work during their time together?

Participants should then decide on the feedback they wish to communicate to the organizing/facilitation team. The guiding questions can be used as a basis for the feedback provided. (In the *Preparatory Document* found on the synod webpage of the Archdiocese, 10 themes are highlighted for use when discussing the fundamental question the synod uses to elicit feedback. These can be used by facilitators at the pastor's discretion.)

All participants can then come together to conclude the gathering. One representative from each small group can briefly share about the experience of the group. The participants should be informed about the next stage of the Synodal Process (regional consultations in Jan/Feb '22), so that they know their input will contribute to the whole Church. It is recommended that the gathering conclude with a prayer or song of thanksgiving.

After the gathering, the organizing/facilitation team members can meet to review the whole experience and to prepare the synthesis based on the feedback submitted by the small groups. This can be forwarded to the Archdiocese using the online reporting process found on the Archdiocesan synod website.

Tips for an effective gathering/consultation

Ensure each conversation incorporates prayer, reflection and exchange

Focus on the fundamental question

Allow room for questions that emerge within the process

Open each consultation with the Synod Prayer

Each consultation should have one facilitator and one note-taker

Encourage young people to be involved (especially in virtual meetings)

Larger consultations can be broken up into smaller groups

Incorporate moments of silence and prayer

Encourage informal conversations as a way of embodying the Spirit

Suggested Tools for reflecting, sharing, and responding to the questions of the Synod

The following are some tools for reflecting, sharing, and responding to the questions of the Synod. Some of these tools are particularly suitable for children, youth, and people who prefer approaches that are simple and easy to relate to.

Narrative approach


Telling or writing one's own faith story and journey with the Church One's life story. People can be invited to tell their story, their view of faith, the way they have sought to take their place in the Church.

A text that drives exchanges. We can invite a small group of people to write a joint text; then other groups of people react to this text and comment on it from their own daily lives. This way of doing things can be applied to hearing one another's life stories, which can be shared with groups of other people. All these words can also open the eyes of other Christians on the mission of the Church and its capacity to "reach everyone."

Finding the right words. Participants can be invited to say what the Church evokes in them, or to name the words that designate what it takes to "walk together with Jesus" (a possible translation of synodality), and then which words are opposed to "walking together"; they can then be invited to explain why they evoked this or that word. The participants can then choose which words are the most significant and the most apt to convey the group's message.

Using images and artistic creation

Communicating through images. Presented with various images, people are invited to find those that best capture what walking together in the Church means to them. Participants can then share why they chose that particular image. On the basis of these exchanges, a joint text can be written.



An individual or shared artistic creation. People are invited to draw an image of the Church in which they walk together, and they are asked to comment on their drawing. People can also make an artistic creation together, as a way of visually representing the Church or their place in it. In any case, once the work has been created, participants are invited to share about what they have created; their comments can then be transmitted as well as their creative works.

Writing together. Participants are invited to write a story, a poem, a prayer, a psalm, or a song on the theme of “walking together with Jesus” or “walking together in the Church.” This piece of writing may be intended to update selected passages from the Gospels or the Acts of the Apostles. What they write can be passed on as it is. It can also be proclaimed during synodal celebrations (for example, if it is a song, it can become a dance for the synodal celebration).

Acting it out. A group of participants can write a short play that expresses what it means to “walk together” in the Church, why it is important, why it is difficult, etc. This story can then be acted out and performed at a Synodal assembly.

Scriptural approach

Gospel sharing. The Word of God inspires and enlightens our journey together, giving us food to share with one another on the way. Participants are invited to comment on the attitudes of the characters and to react to them; they may be asked if a particular gesture or word of Jesus reminds them of, or sheds light on, something in their daily lives. We can then look for how a particular Gospel passage renews our way of living in the Church. For example, we can read Mk 10:46-52, observing the attitude of the different characters, what it evokes of the Church as we know it, and then how Jesus allows the excluded Bartimaeus to walk forward with everyone. We can likewise pray over Luke 24:13-35, seeing Jesus transform the disciples’ disappointment into missionary joy and dynamism on the road to Emmaus, as he made their hearts burn within them, walking with them on the way. (Cf. Note of the Centre Sèvres on the Voice of the Poor)

