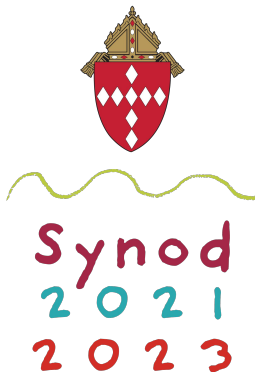




Listening Session Toolkit for Parishes



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission



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Introduction

The entire Catholic Church is called to participate in the upcoming Synod of Bishops! This Synod is entitled: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.”

Pope Francis has called the entire People of God to journey together! This Synod is not just another meeting with oral presentations and written reports. This Synod is a process of journeying together by listening, dialoguing, praying, discerning and making decisions together for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis is asking each local diocese to gather - clergy, religious and laity together- to listen to each other’s joys and hopes, and griefs and anxieties (c.f. *Gaudium et Spes* no. 1). The “goal” of this journeying together is not to create a new vision or pastoral plan with objectives. Rather, the goal of our journeying together is to be present with one another, to listen and learn with each other, and to grow closer to the Lord and His Church.



How to Use This Toolkit

The most important aspect of the 2021-2023 Synod of Bishops is listening. While each diocese is required to submit a report to the episcopal conference based on listening sessions held in the diocese, this report is secondary to the listening sessions where members of the local Church community can gather in order to pray, listen and dialogue together.

This toolkit will help pastors, and parish clergy and staff 1) understand the diocesan Synod plan; 2) host Synod listening sessions in their parishes; and 3) provide resources for hosting parish-based Synod listening sessions.

Purpose of Synod Sessions

It is hoped that this Synod process will provide parishes an opportunity to be together as we slowly emerge from the COVID- 19 pandemic. Many parish communities have been affected by COVID - 19 through illness, deaths, and missed celebrations like First Communions, funerals, weddings, and graduations. COVID- 19 has also affected parishes through the incredible generosity of community members giving their time, talent, and treasure to create parish food pantries, the sacrifice of priests Anointing the Sick in COVID -19 wards, and the steadfast dedication of our Catholic schoolteachers, who ensured our children were able to continue their education throughout the pandemic.

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 parish communities. It is an opportunity to invite people not only back to Sunday Mass but also to parish life. This invitation to parish life starts with listening. 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 is not about changing doctrine or church structures, but rather encountering each other as brothers and sisters in Christ in post-pandemic world.

Since this process is meant to help re-engage parish communities after COVID-19, pastors are encouraged to discern with parish clergy and staff, and the parish Pastoral and Finance councils as to how best to implement the listening session process. For example, some parishes may hold a listening session with their Councils while others may choose to host one listening session for the general parish community. Pastors may need to shorten the number of questions or extend the listening sessions. Pastors may also adapt the process to include Mass or a meal depending on local circumstances.



Parish Toolkit

Diocesan Synod Overview

After the diocesan listening sessions are complete, a 10-page report will be created. Every diocesan report submitted to the USCCB will be summarized to create a national report. This national report will be used during the continental phase of the Synod where episcopal conferences will gather to pray, listen and dialogue together. Continental reports will be submitted to the Synod of Bishops in Rome, which will use the continental reports to create the working report for the 2023 Universal Synod of Bishops.



Parish Toolkit

Resources in this Toolkit

In this toolkit, you will find several resources to help you plan and host your parish listening session.

This toolkit contains the following resources:

- Two options for hosting a parish listening session
- Bulletin Announcements
- Flocknote Announcements
- Homily Helps
- Prayers of the Faithful
- Checklist
- Synod Questions

Additionally, diocese has a *Participant's Guide* and a *Facilitator's Guide* for the parish listening sessions available to download here: www.dioceseofraleigh.org/synod



Option 1: Saturday Half-Day Listening Session (3 hours)

Planning before the Listening Session

Equipment and Materials for Listening Session

Space:

- A room with enough tables and chairs for all participants
- One microphone for the Pastor and MC
- Hospitality table with drinks and snack

At Each Table Place:

- *Participant's Guide* for the number of chairs at the table
- Pens and/or pencils
- Bible open to Acts 2:14-21
- Note taker sheets to record comments



Saturday Half-Day Listening Session Outline

Below is 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

Format: Small Group Discussion

9:00 a.m. - 9:10 a.m.	Hospitality
9:10 a.m. - 9:12 a.m.	Welcome and Introduction
9:12 a.m. - 9:17 a.m.	Opening Prayer for Parish Listening Session
9:17 a.m. - 9:20 a.m.	Participant Ground Rules
9:20 a.m. - 9:35 a.m.	Overview of Synod Process
9:35 a.m. - 10:35 a.m.	Small Group: The Fundamental Question
10:35 a.m. - 10:55 a.m.	Break
10:55 a.m. - 11:55 a.m.	Small Group: The Core Questions
11:55 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	Closing



Option 2: Three - Week Evening Listening Session (90 minutes each evening)

Planning before the Listening Session

Equipment and Materials for Listening Session

Space:

- A room with enough tables and chairs for all participants
- One microphone for the Pastor and MC
- Hospitality table with drinks and snack

At Each Table Place:

- *Participant's Guide* for the number of chairs at the table
- Pens and/or pencils
- Bible open to Acts 2:14-21
- Note cards or paper on which people can record comments



Three - Week Evening Session Outline

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

Time Frame: 90 minutes each session

Format: Small Group Discussion

Week One:

6:30 p.m. - 6:40 p.m.	Welcome and Introduction
6:40 p.m. - 6:45 p.m.	Opening Prayer for the Parish Listening Session
6:45 p.m. - 6: 50 p.m.	Participant Ground Rules
6:50 p.m. - 7:10 p.m.	Overview of the Synod Process
7:10 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.	Break
7:15 p.m. - 7:55 p.m.	Small Group: The Fundamental Question
7:55 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Closing

Week Two:

6:30 p.m. -6:35 p.m.	Welcome
6:35 p.m. - 6:40 p.m.	Opening Prayer for the Parish Listening Session
6:40 p.m. - 6: 45 p.m.	Participant Ground Rules
6:45 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	Small Group: Listening
7:00 p.m. - 7:20 p.m.	Small Group: Speaking Out
7:20 p.m. - 7:25 p.m.	Break
7:25 p.m. - 7:50 p.m.	Small Group: Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission and Sharing Authority and Participation
7:50 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Closing



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Week Three:

6:30 p.m. - 6:35 p.m.	Welcome
6:35 p.m. - 6:40 p.m.	Opening Prayer for the Parish Listening Session
6:40 p.m. - 6: 45 p.m.	Participant Ground Rules
6:45 p.m. - 7:05 p.m.	Small Group: Discerning and Deciding
7:05 p.m. - 7:10 p.m.	Break
7:10 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.	Small Group: Celebration
7:30 p.m. - 7:50 p.m.	Small Group: Holy Spirit
7:50 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Closing



Resources for Promoting 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. _____ for a parish listening session on DATE. Invite family, friends, neighbors- we want everyone to participate in this listening session. To RSVP, please email: PARISH EMAIL. If you can't make the parish listening session, share your opinion online at: dioceseofraleigh.org/synodsurvey.

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. _____ for a three-week evening series of parish listening session on DATES. Invite family, friends, neighbors- we want everyone to participate in this listening session. To RSVP, please email: PARISH EMAIL. If you can't make the three-week evening parish listening sessions, share your opinion online at dioceseofraleigh.org/synodsurvey.

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 on the Church's mission. To participate in the Diocese of Raleigh's survey, visit dioceseofraleigh.org/synodsurvey.



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Flocknote

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.”

Please join Fr. for a parish listening session.

Our parish’s Synod listening session is on DATE in the INSERT LOCATION. We want to hear from you on how our parish community can better support you. Please consider joining us!

Invite family, friends, neighbors - we want everyone to participate in this listening session.

If you can’t make the parish listening session, share your opinion online at www.dioceseofraleigh.org/synodsurvey or email at Synod@raldioc.org



Homily Hints

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 manna, 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 from 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 crisis 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 overshadowed by the cross and come to understand them in the light of the Risen Christ. Then we will participate 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 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:** The three central themes of this season are: the teaching, the miracles, and the hidden life of Christ. If the teachings of Christ are the foundation, light, and guide for the Synod discussions, then miracles will be made known through the People of God by their fidelity to the mission of the Church in their day-to-day lives.



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- **Lent:** The Synod can serve as a parish-wide, diocese spanning, Church encompassing examination of consciousness. It is a time to see where we, as a community, have fallen short of the Gospel, repent, be reconciled to God and our neighbor, and make a firm resolution to do what is necessary to answer the Universal Call to Holiness. Lent and the Synod are a journey in a world darkened by sin that the whole Church makes together toward the light of the Risen Christ. It is a journey we must embark on now. For now is the right and acceptable time. Now is the day of Salvation.
- **Easter:** During the time between the Resurrection and the Ascension, Christ appears to many people. He spends the time teaching His disciples about the Kingdom and commissions them to spread the Gospel and baptize the nations. Eastertide is the season to emphasize the evangelical mission of the Synod and encourage all to participate fully in that mission without fear of any kind. For if Christ has conquered death, then His promises are true, and there is nothing to fear. The Synod should be a proclamation of the Risen Christ to the world. Such a gathering of people who genuinely believe that the Crucified God has Risen from the dead will set the world on fire with the Holy Spirit for the glory of God the Father.



Prayers of the Faithful

The following Prayers of the Faithful were developed by the Synod of Bishops and can be used during Mass 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, 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 on 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.



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- 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.

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 to episcopal conferences.



Resources for Listening Sessions

Checklist

Volunteers Checklist:

- Skilled Facilitator
- Hospitality Team
- Parishioner/Parish Staff to consolidate small group notes into parish report and upload to Synod@raldioc.org.

Materials Checklist:

- Facilitator Handbook
- Nametags
- Sign In Sheet
- Copies of *Participant's Guide* (one per person)
- Food/hospitality
- Copies of Note Takers Sheets
- Space set-up for small groups
- Bible open to Acts 2:14-21

Before the Listening Session:

Invite the community by publicizing the Synod using Flocknote, 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 an opportunity for evangelization.

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 Listening Session.

Identify someone to serve as secretary to type up small group notes into one parish report

At the Listening Session:

Provide hospitality such as food and greeters to create a welcoming environment for all who come.



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___ **Bring nametags** to encourage conversation, especially for those who are new.

___ **Ask participants to sign-in** collecting participant name, email, and if they are interested in learning more about the parish community.

___ **Gather participants in small groups** of 5-6 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.** Since the goal of the Listening Session is to consider how they can continue to invite the participants into deeper participation and leadership in the life of the parish, send an email thanking them for coming and consider asking parishioners to follow up with them one-on-one to encourage their involvement in your parish.

___ **Submit your parish feedback.** It is the responsibility of the parish to identify who will aggregate the feedback and submit the online form for your parish.



Synod Questions

The Fundamental Question

Scripture and Principle Reflection

Our Synod journey takes place in the midst of where the Church ordinarily lives and work in the day to day lives of the faithful. The Synodal process invites each one of us - the People of God - to recall that we journey together. Moreover, in that journey of faith we are called to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. (c.f. Preparatory Document no. 27)

Word of God: Acts 2: 14-21

Then Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them ...
"These people are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

'It will come to pass in the last days,' God says 'that I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams' Indeed, upon my servants and my handmaids I will pour out a portion of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. And, I will work wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: blood, fire, and a cloud of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and splendid day of the Lord, and it shall be that everyone shall be saved who calls on the name of the Lord.'

In small groups, people begin reflecting on the following core principle and question:

A Synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together."

- *How is this "journeying together" happening today in your parish?*
- *How is the Holy Spirit inviting your parish community to grow in "journeying together"?*
(Preparatory Document no. 26)

People are asked to take a moment to write down their personal thoughts and reflections on "journeying together" thinking about:

- What experiences, in your local parish, does this question bring to mind? What are the joys of your parish life?
- What are the difficulties and obstacles to active parish life that you have encountered?



Group sharing occurs and in light of the discussion, the following question is posed to the group to discuss:

- Where in these experiences do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit?

Small Group Process: Core Questions

Listening

*"Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice."
(Preparatory Document no. 30)*

"The meaning of the journey to which we are all called is above all that of discovering the face and form of a Synodal Church, in which "everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit." (Preparatory Document no. 15)

- How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst?
- How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore, including those on the peripheries?
- What space is there to listen to the voices on the peripheries, especially cultural groups, women, the disabled, those who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?

Speaking Out

*"All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity."
(Preparatory Document no. 30)*

*"The Pastors, established by God as 'authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church' should not be afraid to listen to the flock entrusted to them. The consultation of the People of God does not imply the assumption within the Church of the dynamics of democracy based on the principle of majority because there is, at the basis of participation in every Synodal process, a shared passion for the common mission of evangelization and not the representation of conflicting interests.
(Preparatory Document no. 14)*



- What enables or hinders you from speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in your parish and society?
- What space is there in your parish for the voice of people including active and inactive members of our faith?

Sharing Responsibility For Our Common Mission and Sharing Authority and Participation

“Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate. A Synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church.” (Preparatory Document no. 30)

The members of the People of God are united by Baptism, and “if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispenser of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to dignity and to the activity common to all the Faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ.” (Lumen Gentium, no. 32)

- How are the baptized members of your parish able to participate in the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel?
- What hinders people from being active in your parish?
- How is authority or governance exercised in your local parish?
- How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice in your local parish?

Discerning and Deciding

In a Synodal style, we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community. Synodal style of decision-making is to listen first, dialogue, pray, discern, and then the pastor makes a decision on behalf of community. A Synodal Church does not make decisions to accomplish pre-identified priorities. “In a Synodal Church, the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God’s will.” (Vademecum no. 1.4)

- How does your parish use the methods of listening and speaking (consultation) to make decisions?
- How does your parish promote participation in decision-making within the hierarchical structures of the Church?



- Does the decision-making methods of your parish help you to listen to all members of the community, including those who are on the peripheries of parish life?

Celebration:

“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.” (Acts 2:42-43)

“Journeying together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. (*Preparatory Document no. 30*)

- How does prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially Sunday Mass, inspire and guide your parish?
- How does your prayer life and celebration of the Mass inspire and inform your personal decisions and decisions in the parish community?
- How does the parish invite all baptized Catholics, including our ethnic communities, youth, families and persons with disabilities and their families, into the active life of the parish, especially Sunday Mass?

Final Question on the Holy Spirit:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13) The Holy Spirit sent by Christ and received in our Baptism and Confirmation guides our efforts, breathes life and vitality into the Church, and leads us into a deeper relationship with Jesus and deeper communion with the Church in order to proclaim the Gospel. This Synodal journey is guided by the Holy Spirit (c.f. *Vademecum 1.2*)

- From your small group sharing, name one insight where you heard the voice of the Holy Spirit today?



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