



Journeying Together: What is Synodality?

Listening Session for Children's Catechesis/Youth Ministry
Suitable for Middle School and High School



FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH
COMMUNION | PARTICIPATION | MISSION

Session Overview

This session is intended to integrate Middle and High School students into the 2023 Synodal process by including a listening session that is an integral part of that process. Along this path, the theme of 'synodality' itself highlights something important for our understanding of the Church and how the Church operates. The Church cannot simply be reduced to its leadership or even just to the clergy. The Church, as the people of God, includes all of her members. This means that it is essential to be a Church that regularly has conversations that cross different groups and segments of the one family of God.

Supplies

Landscape or Scenic Pictures (*not* portraits of persons); choose somewhat distinct scenes and cut into 5-8 pieces [you can also use puzzles made for young children with only a handful of pieces]

Envelopes large enough to fit those pieces

Set-Up

If the size of the overall group permits, plan to have the participants in small groups of 5-8. Cut Landscape or Scenic Pictures into 5-8 pieces and place each piece individually in an envelope [note: base the number of pictures and amount of pieces you make on how many participants there are or that you anticipate].

Session Plan

As Participants Arrive

Hand each participant an envelope with a piece of a picture in it. Instruct them not to open the envelopes until instructed to do so.

Ice Breaker

Allow a few minutes to include an ice breaker of your choice.

Opening Prayer

Leader: Spirit of God, open our minds and hearts this day that we may truly understand your will as we journey together in this Synod. We ask this prayer in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Reader: A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:1-11, 14-19)

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled,
they were all in one place together.
And suddenly there came from the sky
a noise like a strong driving wind,
and it filled the entire house in which they were.
Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire,
which parted and came to rest on each one of them.
And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak in different tongues,

as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.
Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven
staying in Jerusalem.
At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd,
but they were confused
because each one heard them speaking in his own language.
They were astounded, and in amazement they asked,
“Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans?
Then how does each of us hear them in his native language?
We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites,
inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia,
Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,
Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene,
as well as travelers from Rome,
both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs,
yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues
of the mighty acts of God.” **The Word of the Lord.**

What is a synod? What is synodality?

Introduce the ideas of synod/synodality to the group:

The term ‘synod’ is derived from the Greek *syn* (together) and *hodos* (way). Thus, it means ‘journey together’. It is no coincidence that ‘the way’ was the earliest name for Christianity recorded in scripture (see, for instance, Acts 9:2). Therefore, Christians have always seen themselves as journeying together. The term ‘synod’ has been used particularly in the history of the Church to refer to those times and moments where Bishops and other leaders have gathered together to discern the direction the Holy Spirit intends for the Church

However, a life of ‘synodality’ is not limited to the leadership of the Church, nor can it be appropriately experienced if it only remains exercised by a small, elite group. Pope Francis, on the contrary, describes ‘synodality’ as “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* [way of living and operating] of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission” (Pope Francis, *Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*). In short, the idea of ‘journeying together’ is rooted in our very identity as God’s people and it is a fundamental characteristic of the Church.

'Journey Together' Activity

Instruct participants to open their envelopes, but to not let anyone else see what they have. Then, have them place their picture fragment back into the envelope.

Their object is to locate the other pieces of the picture by only describing what they see in their piece of the picture, *without showing it to anyone else*.

Once everyone thinks they are with the proper group, then have them open their envelopes and assemble the pictures.

They may find that some are in the wrong group and need to seek out those whose pieces match.

Reflection questions for each small group (summarized and shared with the larger group):

- What was it like trying to piece together a picture when you couldn't see all the pieces?
- How did the descriptions each person gave help you get a sense of the picture you were trying to assemble?
- How did seeing all of the pieces allow you to make adjustments?
- When you finally had all the pieces together and could see what the picture was, did it match what you thought it was when you only saw your piece?

Group Discussion: What does it mean to journey together?

If numbers permit, remain in small groups for discussion and return to the large group to share and summarize.

Have you ever been on a team or had to complete a group assignment?

Describe that experience. What are the benefits of working as a group/team? What are the challenges? What happens when someone is not included in the group's planning/team's practice? How does a good team/group leader behave?

This discussion is intended to surface the idea of what it means to 'journey together'. As a Church, we are like a team or a workgroup, but in a much deeper way. We are not bound by a single assignment/task, but rather in a lifelong journey leading toward our heavenly calling. However, the benefits and challenges seen in the experience of teamwork/groupwork are much the same as we see in the life of the Church.

Examples of Benefits	Examples of Challenges
The workload is shared	Sometimes not everyone does his/her share of the work
People's individual gifts/abilities can complement each other	Sometimes people argue, especially if there is a feeling of being left out or ignored
The joy of accomplishment and the disappointment of failure can also be shared; this can heighten the joy and soften the disappointment	Both defeat or failure can lead to one or more individuals in the group either taking all the credit or blaming everyone else

Another important facet of this discussion is understanding the role of a leader in the team/group. Leaders ought to strive to make sure that everyone on the team is able to utilize his/her individual gifts effectively. The leader must make sure that everyone has what is needed to succeed. This involves listening and observing. In the Church, we have leaders (the Pope and the other bishops). In order to effectively lead, they need to know the thoughts/experiences/challenges of all those that they are given the responsibility to care for. It is for this reason that this widespread consultation is taking place. It is like trying to find all of the pieces of the picture in our activity.

Video

Share Bishop Guglielmone's Video Introduction to the Synod: <https://youtu.be/AVQFNCEIaXo>

Listening Session

In the same groupings/format as the Group Discussion, use the following discussion questions. The facilitator of each group should take notes. These notes should be compiled, summarized, and shared here: <https://tinyurl.com/synod-table-discussion>. But, remember, much of this feedback will be useful within the parish, so share it also with parish leadership.

In utilizing these questions (it's ok to simplify them when posing them), make sure to ask participants to reflect on their own experience in the parish.

Questions:

1. In our parish, do we have effective means of reaching our parishioners and including them? Are there some additional ways we might need to adopt to communicate with more people and invite their active participation?
2. Do we consciously plan ways to get insights and ideas from people in our parish or local community who at times may seem to be on the fringes? (These might include members of minority groups, young adults, widowed or divorced, singles, elderly, persons with physical or learning disabilities, members of religious communities or various devotional groups, native speakers of a language other than English, those who might be considering becoming Catholic, civic officials, or those of other faiths.) Whose wisdom might we be missing?
3. Liturgical ministries, outreach to the homebound, religious education, and services to the poor always seem to need additional volunteers. Are we challenging people to take on some vital parish ministries and training them for these?
4. Are we an evangelizing parish? Do we reach out to one another and to people who are not members of our Church in ways that makes Jesus real for them and personalizes faith? Are we seeing the fruits of our efforts?

5. Every diocese is being asked by Pope Francis to establish a “Laudato Si’ Action Platform” Do we have people in our parish or local community who can contribute skills when we are considering renovation or building projects and care for our parish properties? Are we aware of environmental issues in areas around us? Are we deliberate about being conscientious about “Care for Our Common Home”?

Session Follow-up

Be sure to share the online survey with participants so they can register individual responses to questions and fully participate in the process. This could also be shared before the session in preparation. The survey can be found here: <https://charlestandiocese.org/synod2023/survey/>

Closing Prayer (Official Prayer of the Synod):

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.