

2021-2023 Synod
Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth
Synod Session Leader Guide



Archdiocese of | Archidiocèse d'
Halifax-Yarmouth



For a synodal Church
communio et participatio et missio

Thank you for offering to be a delegate for this synod process. This is the “Leader Guide” booklet that will help walk you through this process step by step. Your book is the same as the participant guide, except that you also have these text boxes with additional instructions and helpful tips. These are meant as private instructions for you, and do not necessarily need to be read allowed to the group (although they can be where indicated or appropriate).

Please review the agenda with your group.

You may also say or paraphrase the following: “Our two-hour session will consist of two key parts; first we will read and discuss scripture and the Church in general, then we will discuss the specific topic of synodality.”

Let the group know that as you work through the questions, you will be recording the themes of their discussion in a general way so that their feedback will be passed along to the diocese, and eventually to the synod in Rome. You can assure them of anonymity in their submitted responses – there is no requirement to submit participants’ names with your responses.

Agenda

Welcome & Prayer (10 minutes)

Praying with scripture

- Proclaim (5 minutes)

- Personal reflection (10 minutes)

- Group sharing (20 minutes)

- Proclaim (5 minutes)

- Group sharing (20 minutes)

Questions on Journeying Together

- Personal reflection (10 minutes)

- Group sharing (30 minutes)

When you are ready to begin the session, READ ALOUD the following introduction to the group.

Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for joining us for a spiritual conversation for the 2021-2023 Synod!

Sometimes the word “synod” refers to an assembly of the synod of bishops – a time when the Holy Father calls bishops from around the world to meet to pray and discern. But the word “synod” also refers to journeying together – to being a community that is united in purpose and mission, moving together in the same direction in this earthly pilgrimage. In everything we do, the Church is meant to be a “synodal” Church: though the Church is not a democracy, the voice of each person is valuable and their personal contribution is indispensable.

Every three years, bishops from around the world gather in Rome for a synod on a particular topic. In 2023 they will gather to discuss the topic of synodality itself. In preparation for this, Pope Francis has asked all bishops to consult and pray with their own dioceses to help determine how synodality is being lived out in our midst and how we need to grow in our experience of journeying together.

The purpose of this process is twofold: to *pray* and to *listen*. We are gathering communities in the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth in order to *pray* together and to *listen* to the unique contributions of each person. Everything that is shared and recorded in these conversations will not only be communicated with the global Church, but will also help shape the pastoral direction of the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth.

This is not meant to be a series of focus groups – these conversations are an opportunity to journey together as a diocesan Church. With openness to the Holy Spirit and those around us, we will pray, discuss, and discern where and how God is present in our current experience of Church and how He is calling us to grow.

Below is the timeline of the full synod process. This is helpful context, but it is not necessary that you read this out loud.

Timeline

Here's a brief timeline of the synodal process for the local Church of Halifax-Yarmouth:

<i>October 10, 2021</i>	Pope Francis officially opens synod in Rome
<i>October 15, 2021</i>	Archbishop Dunn officially opens synod in Halifax-Yarmouth at the 2021 Assembly of the People of God
<i>October 16, 2021</i>	Parish delegations are trained at the 2021 Assembly to be facilitators for the synod process at their own parishes
<i>October 17, 2021 to January 31, 2022</i>	Parishes host 3-4 synod sessions in their own communities and submit their responses; Archdiocesan staff host synod sessions to engage the broader community and external groups
<i>February 2022 to April 2022</i>	Archdiocesan staff synthesizes parish responses and submits them to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB). A summary of all North American responses is presented to the General Secretariat for Synod of Bishops in Rome
<i>September 2022</i>	General Secretariat releases the first working document for the synod gathering, based in part on diocesan responses
<i>October 2022 to March 2023</i>	North American bishops study working document and send feedback to General Secretariat
<i>June 2023</i>	General Secretariat releases second draft of working document and sends to participants of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops
<i>October 2023</i>	Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome

Now we will begin this process in prayer.

READ ALOUD the paragraph introducing the Synod Prayer, then begin in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Invite everybody to read this printed prayer aloud together.

Synod Prayer

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, meaning, “We stand before You, Holy Spirit.” This prayer has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years, being attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560-4 April 636). As we are called to embrace this synodal path of the Synod 2021-2023, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to operate within us so that we may be a community and a people of grace. For the Synod 2021-2023, we propose to use this simplified version, so that any group or liturgical assembly can pray more easily.

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.

Now we will move on to our scripture passage.

Say or paraphrase the following: “Let us begin with the scripture. I will read the passage out loud, and then we will have a short time of personal reflection where you will have a chance to re-read the scripture to yourself, read the reflection questions, and begin to write responses to those questions in your handbook. After ten minutes we will begin a group discussion about the questions.”

If you prefer, you can invite a participant to read the scripture instead.

Praying with Scripture

Scripture Passage

Acts of the Apostles 2: 1-8, 11b

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ¹¹ In our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

Say or paraphrase the following: “Now let’s take ten minutes to read the questions and write down your responses in the space provided. I will give you a two-minute warning when the time comes.”

Personal Reflection (10 minutes)

Take some time to pray and reflect on the scripture. Write down notes or responses to the following reflection questions to share with your group after.

Reflection Questions

The story we just read is often referred to as the “birthday of the Church” – the time when the followers of Jesus first began their mission of evangelizing, which remains our central mission in the Church today. We know much has changed in our Church since then.

1. What struck you from this depiction of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles?
2. Where is the Church today? What are we doing? What are our strengths and weaknesses?
3. Where and what would you like our Church to be?

When ten minutes has elapsed, it is time to begin to share our reflections with the rest of the group at the table. Each person should have chance to share their responses to all three questions before moving on to the next person

Say or paraphrase the following: “For this first stage of our discussion, we invite each person to have an opportunity to share their responses to the questions provided. At this time, we will give everybody a chance one at a time, and we ask that there be no interruptions, and no responses to another person’s sharing. You will have a chance later to respond to what you’ve heard.”

Sharing (20 minutes)

Take some time to discuss the three reflection questions with the group around you.

*Now we re-visit the scripture and have another round of discussion based on everything that we’ve heard. This discussion can either be the same “one at a time” format as the last discussion, or you may also choose to engage in a more open dialogue/discussion. Please be aware of the time, and **leave at least 45 minutes for the next round of discussion, entitled “Journeying Together.”***

Reread Scripture

Read through the same scripture passage aloud again. Consider whether you are struck by different things now than you were last time, or whether your perspective has changed at all.

Sharing (20 minutes)

Share with your group any new insights from this passage you have, or anything that struck you from what you heard from other people.

After your general discussion is complete, now we move on to the discussion specifically on the theme of “synodality,” or “journeying together.”

This format will be similar to the first round of scripture. When instructed, you will

- 1) Read the following introductory paragraph aloud*
- 2) Take time for personal reflection and writing responses*
- 3) Share with the group*

Please READ the following paragraph on the theme of “Journeying Together” out loud to the group.

Journeying Together

Personal Reflection (10 minutes)

The passage from Acts 1 tells the story of Pentecost and the beginnings of the Church. In the early Church, Christians “were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (Acts 4:32). They lived, journeyed, shared their faith, and learned together. For important decisions, such as selection of Matthias as replacement for Judas (Acts 1:12-26), the people were consulted and asked for input. They were not asked to vote – the final decision was discerned through prayer, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But their voices were heard. In this way, early Christians experienced a powerful feeling of community and inclusion – or what we might call “journeying together,” or “synodality.” Synodality is still meant to be a central theme and principle of our Church, but we know it is not always lived out perfectly. This synodal process that we are undertaking asks us to reflect on whether we feel that, in our own *personal experience to date*, our voices have been heard and valued, and whether we feel that we are a part of a larger community that is “of one heart and soul.”

Say or paraphrase the following: Now let’s take ten minutes to read the reflection questions and write down your responses in the space provided.

Reflection Questions

1. Can you think of an example of when you felt that you were “*journeying together*” with a group or community in your local Church?
 - a. **If so**, how did that make you feel? Were there specific processes, people, or circumstances that helped you to feel united and valued in the group?
 - b. **If not**, why do you think that is? What would have to happen for you, personally, to feel part of a community that is genuinely united in mission and purpose? What would make you feel that you, your voice, and your contributions were welcomed and valued?

2. Call to mind a time when a major decision was made at your parish.
 - a. How were these decisions communicated? How did you personally learn of it?
 - b. Did you feel that your voice was heard and acknowledged in that decision/discernment process?
 - c. Which voices were most influential in that process? Which voices tend to go unheard?

3. Bearing in mind these experiences and reflections, where do you think God is calling our Church right now to grow and progress?

After ten minutes, invite the group to gather again and invite them to each share their responses to the reflection questions. Each person should have a chance to share their responses to all three questions before moving on to the next person

Say or paraphrase the following: “At this time, we will once again go around the circle and give everybody a chance to share their responses. As before, we will make sure everybody has a few minutes to share without jumping in and responding to what somebody else has said.”

Share (30 minutes)

Share your responses with your group. Your notetaker will be taking notes on key *themes* in your responses. Your group does not necessarily need to produce a response to each question or arrive at any official consensus or “statement.” Rather, your notetaker will compile the general direction and sense of your conversation, and any key ideas that come up.

After everybody has shared, feel free to have a more open dialogue/discussion around the responses as you see fit, where people can discuss each other's sharing, etc.

At the end of the session, you may say something like this:

Thank you so much for being part of this process. We want you to know how much we appreciate you taking the time to be here, and that all the feedback you provided is going to be passed along not only to our local bishop, but also the bishops in Rome when they gather for their synod in 2023. Your feedback is critical for our own bishop, Archbishop Dunn, as he continues to set the vision for our local Church, so please know that we value your input, feedback, thoughts, and experiences.

Synod Session Submission Guide

Here is the guide that you need as leaders to submit the feedback/responses from your session. Please keep notes throughout your discussion on a separate piece of paper or notebook. After the session, responses should be submitted online through our website, www.halifaxyarmouth.org/synod.

Parish Name: _____

Date of Session: _____

Group Category: _____

e.g. Pastoral Council, youth, or members of a particular group/committee. If there is no specific category or umbrella term for parishioners, write "General Public."

Number of Participants: _____

Table Leader Name: _____

Please try to capture themes and commonalities of participant responses as opposed to a full transcript or specific individual responses. The final responses should be submitted electronically through our website, www.halifaxyarmouth.org/synod.

Scripture Reflection Questions:

4. What struck you from this depiction of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles?
5. Where is the Church today? What are we doing? What are our strengths and weaknesses?
6. Where and what would you like our Church to be?

Journeying Together Reflection Questions:

1. Can you think of an example of when you felt that you were "journeying together" with a group or community in your local Church?
 - a. **If so**, how did that make you feel? Were there specific processes, people, or circumstances that helped you to feel united and valued in the group?
 - b. **If not**, why do you think that is? What would have to happen for you, personally, to feel part of a community that is genuinely united in mission and purpose? What would make you feel that you, your voice, and your contributions were welcomed and valued?
2. Call to mind a time when a major decision was made at your parish.
 - a. How were these decisions communicated? How did you personally learn of it?
 - b. Did you feel that your voice was heard and acknowledged in that decision/discernment process?
 - c. Which voices were most influential in that process? Which voices tend to go unheard?
3. Bearing in mind these experiences and reflections, where do you think God is calling our Church right now to grow and progress?