 **PARISH AND COMMUNITY GUIDELINES**

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**INTRODUCTION**

***“Where two or three are gathered, there am I in the midst of them.”***

One of the foundations of the Catholic Faith is a belief that God is alive in each and every human person.

Throughout her history, the Church values the art of listening. From the earliest days of Christianity, the Church has used the model of a *Synod*, or the concept of *Synodality*, as a means of listening to the voice of Christ alive in the Church’s members.

**What is a *Synod*?**

Like many of the words that we use in our tradition, *Synod* is an ancient Greek word that means assembling to determine the path forward. A *Synod* is a *Process* that gathers Christ’s disciples so that their voices can be heard. It is the Church’s belief that each and everyone’s voice is that of Christ. And when two or three of Christ’s Faithful are gathered, he is present and alive in their midst.

The history of the Church also shows us that the model of Synodality was a critical tool at times of crisis and challenge. A particular ‘synod’ was called to address various crises in the life of the Church and history tells us that, in those moments, the presence of the Holy Spirit was alive in their midst, leading the Church forward. The model of a Synod allows the presence of Christ to be given voice at this moment in our history.

**The 2021-2023 Synod**

Pope Francisis inviting the Church to *gather* and to *listen* to each and every Catholic to find the Church’s path forward at this time in our history. This is a moment for the voice of God’s people to be heard to give voice to the direction of the Church. Pope Francis is providing the opportunity for this ancient and tested model to find relevance in light of today’s challenges and opportunities.

A voice has no power unless it is listened to. *Listening* is one of the most powerful and deeply human experiences that we can have because the act of listening respects and validates the voice that is being heard. Being listened to satisfies the deepest longings of the human heart. In short, we affirm one another’s dignity and inherent creativity through the process of listening. For better or worse, words are powerful. And when the spoken word expresses something authentic, if not heard, cannot bear fruit in the world. *Authentic listening is an act of love.*

**YOUR COMMUNITY’S ROLE**

The Holy Father seeks to hear every voice. Our prayer is that you will use these guidelines in order to gather and listen to the voices within your community. We have striven to offer a step-by-step pathway by which your community can contribute to this Synod process. (Each of the offered resources is available in Spanish as requested.)

**What is your task?**

Bishop Bambera strongly recommends that you invite your community members to gather, and to prayerfully discern a response to a set of provided prompts. He then asks that you share those responses with our Diocesan Synod Team. Your community’s responses will be gathered with other responses from across the eleven counties of our Scranton Diocese, to be synthesized and submitted to the episcopal conference.

Form and educate your community about this Synod process through your regular liturgical celebrations, parish bulletin, website, and social media accounts. (*Click* [*here*](https://www.dioceseofscranton.org/synod-on-synodality/synod-resources-for-parish-leaders/resources-for-formation-information/) *for resources.)*

**What is the timeline?**

**Whom should be invited to participate?**

As stated above, Pope Francis seeks to hear every voice and asks us to take particular care in including those often marginalized or left out. Your community leaders likely know best which marginalized persons could be sought out and particularly invited to your listening process to gather responses that can be fruitful for your community, for our local Church, and for our Church Universal. Some of those persons may be:

* Those who struggle with poverty
* Those who have disabilities
* Those who have chronic illnesses or addictions
* Those who identify with a marginalized race, gender, or sexual orientation
* For parish communities:
	+ unmarried young people
	+ those who have fallen away from the church
	+ young families who have not returned to the community after their wedding or after their child’s Baptism, First Communion, or Confirmation
	+ those who have not returned to community worship since the pandemic began
* Click [here](https://www.dioceseofscranton.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Synod-on-Synodality-Reaching-the-Marginalized.docx) for ideas on how to reach out to these groups

**How will you accomplish this task?**

These [Parish and Community Guidelines](https://www.dioceseofscranton.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021-Synod-Parish-Guidelines-JH.docx) offer options for various levels of involvement at each step of the process. We ask the leaders in your community to prayerfully discern about of the options will achieve the most fruitful response, tailored to the needs and resources of your community.

 Some questions to consider:

* Which person(s) will serve as your community’s Synod Delegate(s)?
	+ The Delegate(s) will be the main contact person(s) for interactions with the Diocesan Synod Team
	+ The Delegate(s) will spearhead the process in your community
* Will you gather in-person (strongly recommended) or virtually?
* What is the optimal time, date, or space for this process?
	+ *Click* [*here*](https://www.dioceseofscranton.org/synod-on-synodality/synod-resources-for-parish-leaders/prayer-and-worship-resources/) *for options to undertake this process aligned with the seasons of Advent or Lent*
* Which resources can you call upon for facilitators, response reporters, and hospitality ministers?
* How will you alert, educate, and form your community around this process?
	+ *Click* [*here*](https://www.dioceseofscranton.org/synod-on-synodality/synod-resources-for-parish-leaders/resources-for-formation-information/) *for options and resources.*

**PRACTICAL STEPS FOR THE LISTENING PROCESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

 **If you are able to gather in-person:**

* **Optional:** Begin your gathering with a meal, service project or other similar opportunity. Some less formal time spent together may help everyone to feel more comfortable with and trusting of one another when the time for prayer and listening begins.
* *Click* [*here*](https://www.dioceseofscranton.org/synod-on-synodality/synod-resources-for-parish-leaders/prayer-and-worship-resources/) *for Gathering Event Templates*

 **Include prayer in the process:**

* *Click* [*here*](https://www.dioceseofscranton.org/synod-on-synodality/synod-resources-for-parish-leaders/prayer-and-worship-resources/) *for Prayer and Worship Resources*

 **Invite responses to the prompts:**

* *Click* [*here*](https://www.dioceseofscranton.org/synod-on-synodality/synod-resources-for-parish-leaders/resources-for-the-listening-process/) *for gathered listening guidelines and options*

**Report your community’s responses to the Diocesan Team by April 1, 2022.**

* *Click* [*here*](https://www.dioceseofscranton.org/synod-on-synodality/synod-resources-for-parish-leaders/completing-the-report/) *for more details on compiling and submitting this report*

The Office for Parish Life is poised to support your community. Please contact us if you have questions, if you need assistance or training, or if you would like one of our staff to be present and assist with your gathering. We are glad to provide help with resources and parish gathering plans through webinars or in-person trainings throughout our eleven counties.

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