

Pax Christi Synod Small Group Guide

Pope Francis has called a worldwide Synod to discern how the Holy Spirit is calling us in journeying together. The early Church worked through its followers' many differences in a synodal way, but was of course much smaller. In recent history, synods have been called to gather bishops to advise the Pope. During a synod, the bishops seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand how God wishes to lead the Church about a particular topic. This is the first time all of the faithful have been called upon to join in a synod. In it, each of us are called to listen for the Holy Spirit's guidance through our lives and experiences.

The subject of this synod is how we journey together as people of faith. It was launched in October of 2021 and will culminate at the Assembly of Bishops in October of 2023. Even so, what we share today is part of a process of movement that will reach past 2023 as sharing and listening unfolds its fruits.

It's important to know that the synod process is a discernment. We are asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in moving forward together. Approach the questions prayerfully and allow God to lead. Leave behind self-centeredness, division and discord. Speak courageously, share your experiences, your difficulties, your ideas. You're invited to wonder and envision.

Nonviolence, Restoration, Creativity

As participants in a new process, and guided by the Holy Spirit, we are in a very fertile and creative space. Discerning the path of the Church through all voices is a practice of nonviolence, restoration, and justice as each member of the Church's body is held in dignity. Learning how to listen, hold, and honor so many perspectives is a new undertaking for all of humanity, and one that is necessary for humankind to learn in order to welcome peace into our world.

Through listening with care to each other's experiences, we learn how to see and hear each other, to disarm, and dismantle racism, prejudice, and exclusivity in our systems and deep within ourselves. We learn what we really do and do not need in our lives. We heal from trauma and walk with others so that they may also heal. We reconcile our role in harm, and learn to welcome and care for one another. When we discern the Spirit's direction, it leads us to a space of joyful relationship. Your participation in this discussion is an action for peace.

Safe Space Brave Space

As we begin the listening session, please keep these guidelines in mind while sharing:

Listening: The objective of listening is not to change anyone's mind. Sacred listening is active, attentive listening. Hold both joy and pain in relationship. Seek to understand not to challenge. Differences among people are expected and are an opportunity to find unity by creating new ways of working together.

Speaking: You are invited to speak courageously. Speak your truth while respecting that of others. Talk in terms of one's own experiences. Focus on the impact of our words. Others see them differently than we send them. Share opposition in a caring way, for example: "I don't see it that way," or "could you give me more perspective on that." When the going gets tough, turn to wonder. "I wonder what experiences have shaped this viewpoint?"

Remain in the Spirit: Trust and learn from the silence. Be humble – no one has all the answers. Forgive ourselves, and be compassionate with ourselves and each other.

Synod Prayer

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 Creator and the Redeemer, forever and ever. Amen.

Please take some time in silence to center yourself and find a place of inner quiet. As you consider the questions, please hold the idea of Church as inclusive of all people of God.

Questions

1. Imagine the future Church as a healthy thriving body that upholds the peace, justice and love of Christ in our world and supports us in our own deepest spiritual need and work. What are the similarities and differences of the Church at the present moment?
2. In your own experience, what pushes you away from the Church, and what draws you in? For example, have you encountered comfort, support, or needed guidance? Have you encountered harm, indifference, or lack of understanding?
3. What makes you feel seen, heard, and connected to other people of faith? Where do you find this feeling most and why?
4. What does Christ's peace mean to you and are you able to carry out your own calling towards Christ's peace in the world around you? What holds you back and what supports you?

Gratitude

We're grateful for your time and to have your voice included in this transformative work. We will do all we can to work with the Holy Spirit to share the needs and paths for moving forward in peace and justice in our Church and world. If you feel called to this work as well, please help us hear more people. Talk to your facilitator or visit <https://paxchristinorcal.org/synod/> to find out how you can help with outreach, facilitation, and notetaking.

Closing Prayer

Our listening session today has ended. As we part on our continuing paths, let us walk along with our hands, minds and hearts open, ready to receive God and each other. Please join in our prayer:

O Great Love,
Help us to make a container for people to listen, make a space for people to move into,
Make a bowl to hold the grief and joy of each other. When we empty our bowl, God fills it with Love.
Love is the foundation of Justice. - Amen