



Option for Participation in the Synod for Families at Home

The experience of taking part in the Synod on Synodality involves time to pray, reflect, share and listen. It is intended to be experienced in a group setting of being church, and since the family is recognized as the domestic church and the primary place of growing in faith, it is appropriate for this synod experience to be done as a family.

Understanding the Synod

The first step for the family to take will be to understand the term Synod and the goal of the current Synod on Synodality. Take a few moments as a family to explore the following points.

- What is church? It is more than just a parish. Church is a type of family. It is being together and celebrating our faith. We are all connected by church and by God.
- Church is everywhere; it is the people of God
- A Synod is an event in the Church, and is also a way of being a church and the People of God. Synod means walking together, journeying together. As church, we journey together, led by the Holy Spirit. When we are church this way, we are the best church.
- A Synod in the Catholic Church is a type of gathering, or meeting, that began to happen after Vatican II. This gathering happens every few years. A Synod usually has a topic, and it calls together bishops to explore the topic and what it means to the Church. It usually involves gathering a lot of information on the topic from all over the world. We have recently had Synods on the family and on young people.
- A new Synod is now taking place – the Synod on Synodality. Pope Francis decided to have this topic because synodality is walking together and he wanted to ask the People of God how we are walking together as church and how we can do this better. This Synod is asking for input from as many people as possible, of all ages, from all over the world. Everyone's voice matters. God and the Pope want to hear from all people.
- The experience you will now have is your chance to be part of the Synod on Synodality.

Let's Reflect Using the Examen – A Walk with Jesus

Choose an adult in the family to introduce the prayerful experience as follows:

Think about the Bible story of the Magi, or wise men. The Magi walked on a very important journey to find Jesus. And they were changed by seeing the baby Jesus, who was born to save us. Do you think they were different after they walked together and found Jesus? Now we are going to go on a journey together, a walk with Jesus. It can change our hearts, make us closer to Jesus, and can help make our church family stronger, too.

To help us listen better to God's voice, we are going to start to pray in a very special way. It is called the Examen, and it helps us to get closer to Jesus so that we are focused on what he is telling us. This type of prayer is about listening to God's voice in our heads and hearts.

Leader should read the following in a gentle voice, allowing everyone to settle into the prayer time.

Relax. Quiet yourself and your mind. Close your eyes take deep breaths in and out, in and out slowly. Try not to think about anything. We are going to try to listen for God and just be with him. Quiet your mind so you can hear what God is trying to say to you. (Pause for about 15 seconds.)

Imagine you are walking along a path through the woods or somewhere else you like to walk. Look around you and notice what is there. Listen to the sounds, and notice the quiet. How do you feel? Try to relax and enjoy the walk. There is nothing to be afraid of here, only good thoughts and feelings. (Pause for about 15 seconds.)

As you are walking you hear footsteps behind you. You turn and see that Jesus is with you. You let him catch up and begin to walk together. How do you feel walking with Jesus? How does it feel to be with him? (Pause for about 20 seconds.)

Jesus says, "It is a beautiful day and I am happy to be walking together with you. Will you share with me how you are feeling right now? What is making you happy?" Think about this question quietly for a moment. Then answer Jesus. (Pause for about 30 seconds.)

As you walk along, you see all of your favorite flowers and trees, and your favorite animal jumps across the path ahead of you. It stops to look at you and you see that it is smiling at you. Enjoy all of this for a moment. Feel the sun shine on you and a gentle breeze cool you. Let yourself be thankful for all of this that God has given you. Jesus tells you that he wants you and everyone to be happy, and that is why he gave us each other and our church family. He wants us all to be his church and walk together to make a better world. (Pause for about 15 seconds.)

As you continue to walk with Jesus, you come to a flowing stream. There is a big log on the edge of it. Jesus invites you to sit on it with him for a few minutes and let your feet hang in the water. Feel the cool water moving around your feet and ankles. Does it feel good? Your faith journey started with flowing water when you were baptized. Baptism made you part of God's Church. Think about your church, and the people who are your church family, your family of faith. Who are these people? Tell Jesus who your church family is and who you really like to share faith with, pray with, and do good things with. Who in your church family do you see doing things that are good? (Pause for about 30 seconds.)

What is the best thing you can think of that happened for you in your church family? It could be something that happened at Church or at PSR/School or something else. Try to picture it in your mind. Then thank Jesus for this. (Pause for about 20 seconds.)

Jesus asks you to continue walking with him. You get up and walk together. Jesus asks you about what you like to do with your church family. Tell him what makes you feel happy and part of the family of faith. (Pause for about 30 seconds.)

As you continue your walk with Jesus, some dark clouds come and it looks like it might rain. Jesus reminds you that even though life is meant to be good, sometimes things happen that we don't like or don't mean. Has your church family ever made you feel sad? Angry? Tell Jesus about this. (Pause for about 30 seconds.)

Do you wish you could do better at walking with your church family? Ask Jesus to help you do the things you want to do better. Listen to the advice he gives you. (Pause for about 30 seconds.)

Jesus says that he must go very soon. He asks if there is anything else you want to tell him now. Tell Jesus whatever you want to tell him about his church. What are your hopes and dreams for the church? Then listen as he talks to you about what he wants. (Pause for about 30 seconds.)

As you finish talking, you notice a beautiful white bird flying above you. It is so white it seems to glow. You have never seen a bird like this. You ask Jesus what it is, and he tells you that it is the Holy Spirit, who is with you always to guide you. He tells you that you usually can't see it, but he showed it to you so you would know the Spirit is there with you. Jesus tells you he wants you to always try to listen to the Spirit and go where he leads you. The Holy Spirit is going to help you see how you are a good follower of Jesus and how you can do that better. (Pause for about 15 seconds.)

Jesus gives you a hug and leaves you on the path. You continue to walk, and the Holy Spirit flies above you, journeying with you. You ask the Holy Spirit if there is anything Jesus is asking you to do right now. And you listen to what he tells you. (Pause for about 20 seconds.)

Take a few deep breaths now, and think about how you feel after walking with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. (Pause for about 15 seconds.)

Breathe and relax again. Come back and open your eyes. Take a minute to stretch.

Take a few minutes to talk about how this way of praying made everyone feel. Then begin the Sharing and Listening time that will allow family members to share a bit about what they heard in their hearts during this prayer time.

Let's Share & Listen (Spiritual Conversations)

The family will now consider a few questions that will lead to a family report to be sent to the parish and Diocese/Bishop. Designate someone in the family to be the note taker who will write down the responses and important points of discussion.

Begin by asking the Holy Spirit to be the guide for everyone as you listen and answer.

Explain that this is the time to share thoughts, including some of what they heard and thought during the Examen prayer. Ask the questions one at a time, allowing each person to answer each question if they wish. Respect and attentive listening to each voice are very important for this experience.

What are the questions?

- What do you think church is? What does it look like?
- The church is meant to be like a family. Who is your church family and who do you really like to share faith with, pray with, and do good things with?
- What makes you feel happy and part of the church family of faith? What makes you feel like you belong?
- Has your church family ever made you feel sad? Angry? What was it that made you feel that way?
- What are your hopes and dreams for the church? What do you wish it was like? Is anything missing on your journey of faith?
- Is there anything Jesus is asking you to do right now? Is there anything he is asking the church family to do?

After all of the questions have been addressed, discuss the following questions as a family.

- What did you hear in your conversations that seems really important to share?
- What actions can take place or what do you think needs to be done?

Pray together to close using the Holy Spirit prayer of St. Augustine.

Holy Spirit Prayer of Saint Augustine

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
That my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
That my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
That I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
To defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
That I always may be holy.

Let's Respond: Reporting

The family is asked to consider their thoughts and responses from the experience and complete a Report Form to share your input so that it can be included in the Synod.

The information gathered should be given to your Parish Catechetical Leader or School, who will then share it with the Diocese of Cleveland.



FAMILY LISTENING SESSION REPORT FORM

Based on the responses from your family during the share and listen time, what was particularly significant, surprising or unexpected from the reflections? Which stories or experiences were especially moving and why? What new perspectives opened up? What tensions or disagreements emerged?

What are the 2 or 3 emerging actions your family felt called to take to grow as a church family (grow in synodality)?

Demographic Information

Family Name: _____

Number of Adults: _____ Number of children: _____

Grades or Ages of Each Child: _____

Age Range of Adults: _____

Gender - Number of Males: _____ Number of Females: _____

Cultural self-identification of family: _____

Name of Parish: _____