

Walking Together

SYNOD CIRCLES

Lent 2022
Church of St. Ignatius
Chestnut Hill, MA



Dear parish friends,

In convoking the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis has asked each local church—composed of parishes, together with a variety of communities and organizations—to engage in a process of synodal *listening*, of intentionally *walking together* in order to become deeper companions on the Christian journey. Part of this synodal process includes experiences of prayer and conversation around the ways in which the Holy Spirit is moving within and guiding the Church. One way of envisioning a synodal Church—a Church that *walks together* and *listens* to all its members—is to appreciate the image of a Church that “goes forth,” a Church “whose doors are open,” a Church that “go[es] out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity...” As Pope Francis tells us, becoming a Church that “goes forth...does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world. Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way. At times we have to be like the father of the prodigal son, who always keeps his door open so that when the son returns, he can readily pass through it” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 46).

This little booklet—and the small prayer groups, or Synod Circles, that it envisions—provides one way of pausing for reflection, one way of ceasing to rush out aimlessly, one way of simply slowing down to listen to others and to listen to God. This Lent, you are invited to join a Synod Circle to pray, reflect, converse, and discern. This booklet envisions *five* meetings, corresponding to the five Sundays of Lent, although each circle can decide when during the week to meet. There’s one introductory get-to-know-you meeting and four sessions of prayer. Each of the four prayer experiences is centered on one of the Scriptures highlighted in the Synod preparatory document, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*. Interestingly, these highlighted Scriptures echo—albeit loosely—the Gospel readings for year A, as they include the story of the Samaritan Woman and the story of the Man Born Blind, readings that may be used when a parish welcomes new members in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults.

One of the best ways of forming communities in synodality is simply to take time to pray with Scripture—to *chew* on and *savor* the holy words, to imagine the scene unfolding before one’s mind’s eye, and to let the text and images touch one’s mind and heart—and then to share the fruit of one’s reflection with other Catholics. You will also see that each meeting contains two questions: a general question about what strikes one in each text and a specific question that invites deeper reflection on one of the Synod’s main themes, as outlined in *For a Synodal Church*. After conversation comes to an end, each person will be asked to name in a sentence or two “the **grace**, the insight, or the gift of this conversation.” One can think about *naming the grace* as offering one’s own brief response to one of the following questions:

~How or in what way have I been moved during this prayer/conversation?

~What resonated the most for me?

~What is one joy or consolation—or perhaps even a challenge or an obstacle—that bubbled up for me during prayer?

~What is the take-away for my own life, and more specifically for the life of my parish and for the life of the Church?

This booklet assumes that the Spirit leads the prayer and conversation and waits on God to show the Circles what they ought to take from the experience.

You'll notice that the last page of this booklet is left blank except for a few lines. On this page you are invited to re-record the graces from each of the weeks and to share them with Deacon Matt, who will collate and summarize them and share this summary through Archdiocesan channels. Again, a synodal perspective presumes that *we don't know* what the Spirit is saying to God's people without prayer, without listening, and without honoring the experiences of all people without exception.

Thank you for your willingness to embark on this synodal journey—for your willingness to *walk together*. Come, Holy Spirit, and renew the face of the earth!

Peace,

Deacon Matt Cortese, SJ
and the St. Ignatius Staff

P.S. One final note on procedure: each meeting outlines a fairly simple way of proceeding, which hopefully is self-explanatory. Each Circle will have a **facilitator** who will be responsible for keeping time, for sharing their screen to play the provided instrumental music during moments of silent reflection, for facilitating sharing in two rounds, and for prompting the recording of graces.

A Helpful Ignatian Prelude:

*“Spiritual conversation involves an exchange marked by active and receptive listening and a desire to speak of **that which touches us most deeply**. It tries to take account of spiritual movements, individual and communal, with the objective of choosing the path of consolation that fortifies our **faith, hope and love**. Spiritual conversation creates an atmosphere of trust and welcome for ourselves and others.”*

(Society of Jesus, General Congregation 36, Decree 1, Section 12)

MEETING 1: THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

The structure of this initial meeting is the most loose. It provides a chance simply to get to know one another!

All say together: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

Participants take about ten minutes in silence (while the facilitator plays some instrumental music) and answer the follow questions, noting their answers for later sharing:

- 1. What is your favorite food?**
- 2. What is your favorite TV show or movie?**
- 3. What is your favorite piece of writing—a book, magazine, article, etc. that you have read?**
- 4. What place (city, country, state, etc.) would you most like to visit?**
- 5. Which talent would you most like to have?**
- 6. Which person, living or deceased, do you most admire (other than Jesus!)?**
- 7. Where would you most like to live?**
- 8. What do you most value in your friends?**
- 9. What is your dream of happiness?**
- 10. What is your motto?**

Participants share their answers, engaging in open conversation!

When conversation seems to have come to a close, each participant takes five minutes in silence (while the facilitator plays some instrumental music) to reflect on the following question:

Why did I decide to participate in this Synod Circle? What do I hope to get out of it? Put another way: what is my *desire* for this experience?

Participants share their answers, engaging in a structured conversation as follows:

*Circles should share in two rounds: an **opening round** in which each participant shares once, and a **second round** in which participants share about what moved them during the first round.*

Participants avoid cross-talk (talking over one another, interrupting, offering direct replies). All prioritize “I-statements” (“I feel...;” “In my experience...”) rather than using generalities or making universal claims. All sit for a moment in silence between speakers to honor what was shared. All practice active listening.

*Before closing, in one or two sentences, participants **record one central desire** for this Synod Circle experience. This should be a brief statement of one thing they hope to attain over these meetings.*

*When conversation seems to have come to a close, the meeting concludes by all reciting together the **Our Father**.*

My Desire: _____

_____.

MEETING 2: THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT

All say together: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

Slowly and reverently, one participant reads aloud the Scripture reading, Matthew 15:21–28:

Then Jesus went from that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, “Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon.” But he did not say a word in answer to her. His disciples came and asked him, “Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us.” He said in reply, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But the woman came and did him homage, saying, “Lord, help me.” He said in reply, “It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.” Then Jesus said to her in reply, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed from that hour.

All spend ten minutes in silence (while the facilitator plays some instrumental music) re-reading the Scripture reading, imagining the scene unfold, and paying attention to what moves them.

As participants re-read the reading, they may wish to underline words, phrases, or images that stand out to them.

Following silence, all share around the following questions, engaging in a structured conversation as follows:

- a) What words, phrases, images, ideas stand out for me in the reading? What strikes me, inspires me, moves me?**
- b) Who *speaks out* with courage and boldness in today’s Church and world? Who are the Canaanite women of today who cry out for mercy and are to be commended for their faith? In what ways can we attend to their cry?**

*Circles should share in two rounds: an **opening round** in which each participant shares once, and a **second round** in which participants share about what moved them during the first round.*

Participants avoid cross-talk (talking over one another, interrupting, offering direct replies). All prioritize “I-statements” (“I feel...;” “In my experience...”) rather than using generalities or making universal claims. All sit for a moment in silence between speakers to honor what was shared. All practice active listening.

After sharing seems to have drawn to a close, participants spend a few minutes reflecting on the following question:

In one or two sentences, what has been the grace, the insight, or the gift of this conversation? Put another way: what is one thing I am taking from this time of prayer and sharing?

Participants record their responses below.

*All close by reciting together the **Our Father**.*

Grace: _____

_____.

MEETING 3: THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

All say together: **Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.**

Slowly and reverently, one participant reads aloud the Scripture reading, John 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42:

Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"—For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water. I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking with you."

Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him. When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, “We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.”

All spend ten minutes in silence (while the facilitator plays some instrumental music) re-reading the Scripture reading, imagining the scene unfold, and paying attention to what moves them.

As participants re-read the reading, they may wish to underline words, phrases, or images that stand out to them.

Following silence, all share around the following questions, engaging in a structured conversation as follows:

a) What words, phrases, images, ideas stand out for me in the reading? What strikes me, inspires me, moves me?

b) In today’s Scripture Reading, Jesus *dialogues* with the Samaritan woman; they engage in a rich conversation, across boundaries of religion and culture, about matters of ultimate importance. Where is dialogue already happening in my parish, in my (arch)diocese, in my community? Where—about what—do we as Church need to engage more deeply in *dialogue*?

*Circles should share in two rounds: an **opening round** in which each participant shares once, and a **second round** in which participants share about what moved them during the first round.*

Participants avoid cross-talk (talking over one another, interrupting, offering direct replies). All prioritize “I-statements” (“I feel...;” “In my experience...”) rather than using generalities or making universal claims. All sit for a moment in silence between speakers to honor what was shared. All practice active listening.

After sharing seems to have drawn to a close, participants spend a few minutes reflecting on the following question:

In one or two sentences, what has been the grace, the insight, or the gift of this conversation? Put another way: what is one thing I am taking from this time of prayer and sharing?

Participants record their responses below.

*All close by reciting together the **Our Father**.*

Grace: _____

_____.

MEETING 4: THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

All say together: **Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.**

Slowly and reverently, one participant reads aloud the Scripture reading, John 9:1–41:

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam” —which means Sent. So he went and washed, and came back able to see.

His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, “Isn’t this the one who used to sit and beg?” Some said, “It is, “but others said, “No, he just looks like him.” He said, “I am.” So they said to him, “How were your eyes opened?” He replied, “The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went there and washed and was able to see.” And they said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I don’t know.”

They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath. So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see.” So some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a sinful man do such signs?” And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, “What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

Now the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and gained his sight until they summoned the parents of the one who had gained his sight. They asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?” His parents answered and said, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself.” His parents said this because they

were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged him as the Christ, he would be expelled from the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, “He is of age; question him.”

So a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give God the praise! We know that this man is a sinner.”

He replied, “If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see.” So they said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?” They ridiculed him and said, “You are that man’s disciple; we are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from.” The man answered and said to them, “This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him. It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything.” They answered and said to him, “You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?” Then they threw him out.

When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered and said, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “I do believe, Lord,” and he worshiped him. Then Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind.” Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not also blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘We see,’ so your sin remains.”

All spend ten minutes in silence (while the facilitator plays some instrumental music) re-reading the Scripture reading, imagining the scene unfold, and paying attention to what moves them.

As participants re-read the reading, they may wish to underline words, phrases, or images that stand out to them.

Following silence, all share around the following questions, engaging in a structured conversation as follows:

a) What words, phrases, images, ideas stand out for me in the reading? What strikes me, inspires me, moves me?

b) This Scripture plays on the senses of sight and hearing, and shows the challenges of authentic *listening*. The religious leaders of the day find it difficult to listen to and to honor the testimony of the Man Born Blind. To whom do we, as the Christian community, find it hard to *listen*? Whom do we fail to *see*? To whom *ought* we listen?

*Circles should share in two rounds: an **opening round** in which each participant shares once, and a **second round** in which participants share about what moved them during the first round.*

Participants avoid cross-talk (talking over one another, interrupting, offering direct replies). All prioritize “I-statements” (“I feel...;” “In my experience...”) rather than using generalities or making universal claims. All sit for a moment in silence between speakers to honor what was shared. All practice active listening.

After sharing seems to have drawn to a close, participants spend a few minutes reflecting on the following question:

In one or two sentences, what has been the grace, the insight, or the gift of this conversation? Put another way: what is one thing I am taking from this time of prayer and sharing?

Participants record their responses below.

*All close by reciting together the **Our Father**.*

Grace: _____

_____.

MEETING 5: THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

All say together: **Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.**

Slowly and reverently, one participant reads aloud the Scripture reading, Acts 10:3–34, 44–49.

Now in Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Cohort called the Italica, devout and God-fearing along with his whole household, who used to give alms generously to the Jewish people and pray to God constantly. One afternoon about three o'clock, he saw plainly in a vision an angel of God come in to him and say to him, "Cornelius." He looked intently at him and, seized with fear, said, "What is it, sir?" He said to him, "Your prayers and almsgiving have ascended as a memorial offering before God. Now send some men to Joppa and summon one Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with another Simon, a tanner, who has a house by the sea." When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from his staff, explained everything to them, and sent them to Joppa.

The next day, while they were on their way and nearing the city, Peter went up to the roof terrace to pray at about noontime. He was hungry and wished to eat, and while they were making preparations he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something resembling a large sheet coming down, lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all the earth's four-legged animals and reptiles and the birds of the sky. A voice said to him, "Get up, Peter. Slaughter and eat." But Peter said, "Certainly not, sir. For never have I eaten anything profane and unclean." The voice spoke to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you are not to call profane." This happened three times, and then the object was taken up into the sky.

While Peter was in doubt about the meaning of the vision he had seen, the men sent by Cornelius asked for Simon's house and arrived at the entrance. They called out inquiring whether Simon, who is called Peter, was staying there. As Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said [to him], "There are three men here looking for you. So get up, go downstairs, and accompany them without hesitation, because I have sent them." Then Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your being here?"

They answered, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, respected by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear what you have to say.” So he invited them in and showed them hospitality. The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went with him.

On the following day he entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and, falling at his feet, paid him homage. Peter, however, raised him up, saying, “Get up. I myself am also a human being.” While he conversed with him, he went in and found many people gathered together and said to them, “You know that it is unlawful for a Jewish man to associate with, or visit, a Gentile, but God has shown me that I should not call any person profane or unclean. And that is why I came without objection when sent for. May I ask, then, why you summoned me?” Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this hour, three o’clock in the afternoon, I was at prayer in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling robes stood before me and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your almsgiving remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter. He is a guest in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ So I sent for you immediately, and you were kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to listen to all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, “In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him...” While Peter was still speaking...the holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word. The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were astounded that the gift of the holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles also, for they could hear them speaking in tongues and glorifying God. Then Peter responded, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, who have received the holy Spirit even as we have?” He ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for a few days.

All spend ten minutes in silence (while the facilitator plays some instrumental music) re-reading the Scripture reading, imagining the scene unfold, and paying attention to what moves them.

As participants re-read the reading, they may wish to underline words, phrases, or images that stand out to them.

Following silence, all share around the following questions, engaging in a structured conversation as follows:

a) What words, phrases, images, ideas stand out for me in the reading? What strikes me, inspires me, moves me?

b) Peter's religious experience in this reading leads him to an insight: "What God has made clean, you are not to call profane... In truth, I see that God shows no partiality." He *discerns*, with the help of his own experience and the experience of Cornelius, and *decides* that God was welcoming Gentiles as well as Jews to join the early Church. As Christians, with whom do we *journey*? How do we as Church make decisions, and—informed by today's reading—how do you think we as Church could make *better* decisions?

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After sharing seems to have drawn to a close, participants spend a few minutes reflecting on the following question:

In one or two sentences, what has been the grace, the insight, or the gift of this conversation? Put another way: what is one thing I am taking from this time of prayer and sharing?

Participants record their responses below.

*All close by reciting together the **Our Father**.*

Grace: _____

_____.

GRACES:

Note: Participants share this sheet with Deacon Matt by the Second Sunday of Easter. Graces will be (anonymously!) collated and shared through Archdiocesan channels.

Meeting 1 (My Desire): _____
_____.

Meeting 2: _____
_____.

Meeting 3: _____
_____.

Meeting 4: _____
_____.

Meeting 5: _____
_____.