

The Synod Process

Timeline for the Parish Phase

January 19: Opening Prayer Service

January 25-March 7: 6 weeks of personal prayer and discernment, using the reflection booklets as a guide

March 9-12: Small group consultations

Opening Prayer Service

- Liturgy of the Word
- Homily
- Distribution of reflection booklets
- Quick review of the 5 Synod themes
- Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
- Adoration (about 30 minutes)
- Benediction

Personal Prayer & Discernment Period

The reflection booklets provided by the diocese will guide us through this period.

We will devote one week to each of the 5 Synod themes.

Synod themes:

- **Evangelization:** Sharing the truth and joy of the Gospel
- **Catechesis:** Forming disciples of all ages
- **Spiritual & Liturgical Life:** Living in relationship with the Blessed Trinity
- **Vocations:** Responding to God's loving invitation
- **Outreach:** Serving the poor, suffering, and vulnerable

Stages of reflection for each theme:

- Review the references from Scripture and Church Tradition.
- Reflect on the theme as it pertains to **our parish**.
- Reflect on the theme as it pertains to **your own life**.
- Take notes for later reference. These will not be shared with others. They are only for your personal reflection.

Summary Questions:

The first three questions are intended to bring together your earlier reflections on the 5 Synod themes. Review your notes from the previous 5 weeks before pondering the summary questions. We will devote one additional week to personal prayer and discernment with these summary questions before we gather for our small group consultations.

In the consultations, only these three summary questions will be discussed, not the questions pertaining to the 5 themes.

1. What are the **most pressing needs** of our parish/our diocese at this time?
 - This question is intended to provoke thoughtful analysis, not complaining.

2. Where is our parish/our diocese **excelling** right now?
 - While the first question dealt with our deficiencies, this question reminds us of what we do well already.
3. Where does our parish/our diocese **need to grow** right now?
 - This question focuses our attention on possibilities and opportunities for the future.
 - Responses may suggest concrete actions that can be pursued at the parish or diocesan level.

The fourth question, about ecumenical and interfaith relationships and activities, will not be discussed in the parish consultations. The purpose of this question probably is to ensure that our personal reflections don't focus exclusively on the Church itself, but remain open to relationships with other faith communities.

Small Group Consultations

- Tables with up to 8 people.
- One person will take notes.
- Another person will serve as the facilitator and timekeeper.
- The whole process should take no more than 2 hours.
- The consultations will follow a method called, "Conversations in the Spirit."
- There will be 7 rounds of discussion, with periods of prayerful silence in between.

Round 1: Participants share their responses to the question: "What are the **most pressing needs** of our parish at this time? What are the most pressing needs of the Church in our Diocese?" (1.5 min/person)

Pause for 5 minutes of prayerful silence, reflecting on what was shared.

Round 2: Participants name where they heard the Spirit at work in other people's sharing. (1 min/person)

Pause for 2 minutes of prayerful silence, then take a 3-minute break.

Round 3: Participants share their responses to the question: "Where is our parish **excelling** right now? Where is the Church in our Diocese excelling?" (1.5 min/person)

Pause for 5 minutes of prayerful silence, reflecting on what was shared.

Round 4: Participants name where they heard the Spirit at work in other people's sharing. (1 min/person)

Pause for 2 minutes of prayerful silence, then take a 3-minute break.

Round 5: Participants share their responses to the question: “Where does our parish **need to grow** right now? Where does the Church in our diocese need to grow?” (1.5 min/person)

Pause for 5 minutes of prayerful silence, reflecting on what was shared.

Round 6: Participants name where they heard the Spirit at work in other people’s sharing. (1 min/person)

Pause for 5 minutes of prayerful silence, reflecting on ALL that was shared.

Round 7: Participants name where they heard **convergences** in their sharing. “How is the Spirit speaking to us and through us to one another?” (1 min/person)

In a group of 8, each person will spend:

- 8.5 minutes speaking
- 59.5 minutes listening to others speak
- 24 minutes in silent prayer between rounds

Responsibilities of facilitators:

- Ensure that the process is followed strictly.
- For each round of discussion, introduce the question, remind everyone of how much time will be granted to each speaker, and then carefully monitor the time.
- In each round of discussion, invite each person to take a turn sharing their thoughts.
- Remind everyone of how long the prayerful silences last, and carefully monitor the time for them, as well.

Responsibilities of note takers:

- Bring your own laptop.
- During each round, record brief summaries of the responses.
 - The responses in Rounds 1 & 2 go together, because they pertain to the same question. The same is true for Rounds 3 & 4 and Rounds 5 & 6. The responses in Round 7 could pertain to any of the 3 summary questions.
 - Hence, the note takers will end up with a set of responses to each of the three summary questions from the reflection booklets, plus a set of responses about where the group saw convergences emerging from their conversation.
- After the consultations are finished, use a template provided by the diocese to categorize the responses to each summary question into the 5 Synod themes. The responses from Round 7 will need to be categorized under the appropriate summary question *and* the appropriate theme.
- Share those categorized notes with the Pastor or his delegate.

What happens to all those notes?

The Pastor, or someone delegated by him, will combine the categorized notes from all the small group consultations into a **Parish Master Document** and then synthesize those responses into a

much briefer **Parish Summary Document**. This summary document will be sent to the Diocese and published on our parish website, as well.

The Synodal Secretariat will synthesize all the Summary Documents from the parishes and special groups into one **Consultation Summary Document**. This document will be provided to the Synod delegates.

Synod delegates

- Synod delegates will be selected in November.
 - Each Pastor was allowed to nominate two of his parishioners to be their parish delegate. He had to include some basic demographic information about each delegate (age, race, ethnicity, occupation, education level).
 - The Synodal Secretariat will choose one of the nominated parishioners from each parish, with the goal of creating a diverse group of delegates, who represent the whole diocese.
 - Certain diocesan officials serve as *ex-officio* delegates.
- Some outside observers may also be invited to participate in Synod discussions, but they will not be able to vote on Synod legislation.
- Prior to the first Synod session, delegates will receive the Consultation Summary Document and Educational Documents on each of the 5 synodal themes, prepared by theological experts.
- Delegates will also have a commissioning ceremony and training session sometime next summer.

The Synod sessions (Fall 2026)

- First Synod session: October 31-November 1, in South Bend
 - Delegates will discuss each of the 5 Synod themes, following a similar model as the parish consultations, but dealing with each theme separately.
- Based on the notes from the first session, the Synodal Secretariat will prepare draft documents with recommendations for action to be taken at the diocesan or parish levels.
- Second Synod session: November 20-21, in Fort Wayne
 - Delegates will review, discuss and amend the draft documents.
 - Delegates will vote on each recommendation.
 - Those recommendations which are adopted by the Synod will be presented to Bishop Rhoades for his approval.
- The approved results of the Synod will be shared with the whole diocese.

Sign-ups for Small Group Consultations

There are three time slots reserved for the small group consultations:

- Monday, March 9 at 8:30-10:30 am
- Tuesday, March 10 at 1:30-3:30 pm
- Thursday, March 12 at 7:00-9:00 pm