

The time for our Synod consultations has finally arrived! Our parishioners who have chosen to participate have been using their reflection booklets for the past six weeks. First, they pondered the five synod themes of Evangelization, Catechesis, Spiritual and Liturgical Life, Vocations, and Outreach. Then they used the three summary questions at the end of the booklet to gather and focus their earlier reflections. Now they are poised to meet in small groups to share the fruits of that reflection. Note: These are not *discussion* groups or *faith sharing* groups. A more accurate description would be *listening and discernment* groups. Participants will not engage each other in conversation. Instead, they will *very briefly* share their responses to the summary questions, listen carefully to the responses shared by others, and discern together where the Spirit seems to be leading them. The groups will follow a model called “Conversation in the Spirit,” which proceeds as follows.

Two rounds of sharing are dedicated to each of the three summary questions in the reflection booklet. I offered some thoughts on the summary questions in last week’s bulletin. To refresh your memory, they are:

1. What are the **most pressing needs** of our parish or our diocese at this time?
2. Where is our parish or our diocese **excelling** right now?
3. Where does our parish or our diocese **need to grow** right now?

In the first round for each question, each participant may speak for *a maximum of 1½ minutes*. Hence, everyone needs to come prepared to make one or two points, quickly and succinctly. After everyone has shared their thoughts, then there is a *5-minute pause for prayerful reflection*. This is when the Spirit has a chance to speak to the heart of each participant, as they ponder what they have heard from their brothers and sisters at the table. Then they proceed to the second round, in which each person shares one or two thoughts about what they heard in *someone else’s* response in the first round. This time, each participant has only *1 minute* to speak. So, they must be even more succinct than the first time. After everyone has spoken, there is another *2-minute pause for contemplation*, before taking a short break to shift gears mentally and consider the next question.

This process happens three times, for each of the summary questions. Then, there is one last question to consider: “Where do you see our thoughts **converging**? How is the Spirit speaking to us, and speaking through us to one another?” Each person will have *1 minute* to respond to that question. When the priests did our synod consultations last October, many of us were surprised by how much our thoughts *did* seem to converge, not only at our tables, but among the entire group of priests. The Spirit really seemed to be moving us to see the challenges and the opportunities of the Church from a common perspective. I hope that our parishioners experience something like that this week.