



KEY SYNODAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE ARCHDIOCESE OF OTTAWA-CORNWALL

1) The importance of the Holy Spirit, discernment, and conversion in our synodal process

The Pope has invited the whole People of God to take part in a synod which is on the topic of synodality itself. In this process, and in the divided times in which we find ourselves, we are being inspired to be synodal in our ways in order to discern with the Holy Spirit, how we move along the path towards a more synodal, listening Church. The consultation begins by having people share their genuine thoughts and feelings based on their lived experiences with the Church – their joys and sufferings, their dreams and grievances, openly and without limitation. After sharing these experiences of Church, it is important to allow for some quiet time and prayer in order to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to us about our Church right now? How can a loving Church be more present to people in their pain and struggle? How can we, as members of our Church, serve others during these times? It is then important for a synthesis of these proceedings to also arise from prayerful discernment and faithfully include points of convergence as well as points of view that seem original and strike a chord, without concern for how this may be perceived or received by others in the Church.

It is important to remember that this is not a political process involving debate, but a spiritual one. What becomes most essential for us in our local Church is creating the necessary conditions for this kind of deep listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit. These conditions allow for a conversion of heart, which then makes more difficult conversations possible over time.

Small group facilitators play a special role in fostering the necessary attitudes for spiritual discernment and encouraging open and honest dialogue. It is important that they also lead with no agenda except to encourage honest dialogue and remain open to the promptings of the Spirit.

The archbishop's deepest desire for these processes within our Archdiocese is that they lead to a more listening, loving, and unified Church on the ground – where all can feel welcome.

2) This synod is for us, first and foremost

We are far less concerned with a report for the Vatican, though this remains important, than we are with cultivating the conditions needed for a longer-term process of parish and Church renewal. Therefore, we are not as concerned with perfect consultations or levels of engagement before a May deadline, as we are with new beginnings, widening and deepening relationships, and learning to listen well to one another. For us, the priority is to listen and build community in Christ over the long-term.

3) Our engagement strategy reaches well beyond the parish

While a central priority has been to engage the parishes, we have also placed a special emphasis on engaging with the children and youth in our schools through our relationships with the various school boards in our diocese. We're so grateful for the support we've received in this area. School principals, religion teachers, and students are being encouraged to take part in synodal processes at different levels. In addition to this, we have directly invited more than 110 faith, social justice and social service organizations, as well as ecumenical organizations within our diocese. We've also provided an online survey for individuals who find it difficult to join a group, though we remain hopeful that most participants can enter into the spirituality of a communal discernment process. Anyone who is wishing for the good of the Church is welcomed and encouraged to join us in this process.

Finally, we have tried to encourage further engagement and communication on the synod through our parish newsletters, our website, including a new web-portal called Ruah, and a newly created Mission newsletter via Flocknote, which now reaches almost 17,000 people. We are so hopeful that both Ruah and Mission will help us celebrate the living out of our faith and the joy of the Gospel, attract others, and cultivate a sense of communion within our diocese.

4) The crucial role of coordinators and small group leaders in our synodal process

Coordinators and small group leaders play a crucial role in cultivating the necessary conditions for these spiritual processes involving deep listening and discernment. For this reason, we have provided numerous training sessions and opportunities to come together to over 300 leaders within our diocese. We are already seeing the fruits of these gatherings in terms of fostering the greater connection and coordination of lay leaders within our diocese.

In practical terms, coordinators and small group leaders play a special role in preparing participants in advance for why they are coming together, grounding consultations in the key components as shared in our Facilitator's Guide, opening with prayer and a scriptural passage, humble listening, and periods of silence and prayer. This spiritual dimension involves a number of important spiritual attitudes which we also include in our Guide. Our hope is that we come together as a community to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church through our experiences and interpret this through the eyes of faith.

5) Supporting the collaboration between laity and clergy

While this synodal process seeks to engage with as many lay people as possible, it is important to understand the integral role of our beloved clergy as our spiritual shepherds in this process and for the future of the Church. Clergy are encouraged to become involved in their parish synodal processes. Additionally, synod coordinators have been encouraged to share the fruits of synodal consultations with their Pastors so that these processes are incorporated into parish renewal efforts.