

2021 Synod 2023 For a synodal Church

Synod 2021 -2023 in the Diocese of Cheyenne will occur in two phases.

Phase One: In-reach, beginning November 28, 2021, through February 2022

Phase Two: Outreach, beginning January 2022 through February 2022

The Synod at the Parish-Level: Phase One (In-reach)

The Diocese of Cheyenne is organizing Synod 2021 – 2023 using the principle of subsidiarity. Local communities where relationships are formed and nurtured is the setting where the most fruitful conversations occur. The ultimate goal of Synod 2021 – 2023 is to teach communities how to live as companions on the journey, participating in each other’s lives and working together toward the mission of living and sharing the Gospel. One way to achieve this goal is to listen deeply to one another and allow the Holy Spirit to guide the parish as it moves forward.

The fundamental two-part question

How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take to grow in our “journeying together?”

In responding to the question, we are invited to:

1. **Recall our experiences.** What experiences of our local Church does this question call to mind?
2. **Explore these experiences in greater depth.** What joys did they bring? What difficulties and obstacles have they led to? What wounds did they reveal? What insights have they elicited?
3. **Gather the fruits to share.** Where in these experiences does the voice of the Holy Spirit resound? What is the Spirit asking of us? What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? Where do we register a consensus? What paths are opening for our local Church? (Vadamecum n.5.3)

Themes for exploration include (Vadamecum n.5.3):

- **Companions on the Journey:** In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road. In our local Church, who are those who “walk together?” Who are those who seem farther apart? How are we called to grow as companions? What groups or individuals are left on the margins?
- **Listening:** Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice. How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore? How are the laity listened to, especially women and young people? What facilitates or inhibits our listening? How well do we listen to those on the peripheries? How is the contribution of consecrated men and women integrated? What are some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than our own? What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?
- **Speaking out:** All are invited to speak with courage, freedom, truth, and charity. What enables or hinders speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and in society? When and how do we manage to say what is important to us?
- **Celebration:** “Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. How do prayer and liturgical celebrations inspire and

guide our common life and mission in our community? How do they inspire the most important decisions? How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy? What space is given to participating in the ministries of lector and acolyte?

- ***Sharing responsibility for our common mission:*** Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples, how is every baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church? What hinders the baptized from being active in mission? What areas of mission are we neglecting? How does the community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment, etc.)? How does the Church help these members to live out their service to society in a missionary way? How is discernment about missionary choices made and by whom?
- ***Dialogue in Church and society:*** Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also leads to mutual understanding. To what extent do diverse peoples in our community come together for dialogue? What are the places and means of dialogue within our local Church? How do we promote collaboration with neighboring dioceses, religious communities in the area, lay associations and movements, etc.? How are divergences of vision, or conflicts and difficulties addressed? What issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to? What experiences of dialogue and collaboration do we have with believers of other religions and with those who have no religious affiliation? How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society: the spheres of politics, economics, culture, civil society, and people who live in poverty?
- ***Ecumenism:*** The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations? What do we share and how do we journey together? What fruits have we drawn from walking together? What are the difficulties? How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?
- ***Authority and participation:*** A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued, the way to reach them, and the steps to take? How is authority or governance exercised within our local Church? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice? How are evaluations conducted and by whom? How are lay ministries and the responsibility of lay people promoted? Have we had fruitful experiences of synodality on a local level? How do synodal bodies function at the level of the local Church (Pastoral Councils in parishes and dioceses, Presbyteral Council, etc.)? How can we foster a more synodal approach in our participation and leadership?
- ***Discerning and deciding:*** In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community. What methods and processes do we use in decision-making? How can they be improved? How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures? Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God? What is the relationship between consultation and decision-making, and how do we put these into practice? What tools and procedures do we use to promote transparency and accountability? How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment?
- ***Forming ourselves in synodality:*** Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and ongoing learning. How does our church community form people to be more capable of “walking together,” listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue? What formation is offered to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal way?

The Parish Event: First Week of Advent

The Parish Event can take many forms; however, keep in mind that the synodal process is first and foremost a spiritual process. This is not a mechanical data gathering exercise or a series of meetings and debates. Synodal listening is oriented toward discernment.

General Format for Gatherings

No matter the model or tool chosen, all gatherings must begin with praying the *Adsumus Sanctus Spiritus*, followed by a reading and silent reflection of scripture. Suggested readings include: Luke 6:17-36; Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 17:14-20; John 11:17-45 or any reading that the pastor and coordinators believe is appropriate for their community. Coordinators should allow between 45 and 60 minutes for participants to share. Coordinators should allow for at least 30 minutes for “Gathering the Fruits.” Gatherings should not take longer than two hours.

Gathering Models

Family faith formation

Parishes may wish to host several Family Formation Sundays/Evenings. While adults and teens participate in conversations in the large gathering space, children break-out according to age groups to be led in their own exploration of the two-part question and/or themes. Adult conversations can be had in small groups so that people may discuss those themes to which they feel most drawn. [**Note:** The Office of Pastoral Formation has helped several parishes transition to a family-based model of faith formation. If you have interest in this option and would like assistance with developing effective models of ministry, please contact Joe Wotawa at jwotawa@dioceseofcheyenne.org.]

Evening of prayer and reflection

Parishes may wish to hold an evening of prayer and reflection for adults in the worship space.

Incorporating the prayer and reflection model into a gathering of the Parish Council, Finance Council, etc., also is highly recommended.

Suggested Tools for reflecting, sharing, and responding

Using a narrative approach

Recall our experiences: In small groups, invite individuals to tell their personal faith journeys; their view of faith; the way they have sought to take their place in the Church. Some people may be more comfortable writing a joint text. **Explore these experiences in greater depth:** When the large group comes back together, each group will share what they learned, and people may comment based on their own life experiences. (For those who choose to write a group text, the same method may be applied.)

Gather the fruits to share: Explore what the Spirit is asking of us? What concepts and feelings are confirmed? What are the prospects for change? Small groups need to assign a reporter and a speaker.

Recall our experiences: Provide the above themes to the large group and invite participants to break into small discussion groups in which they will focus on the theme that they are interested in exploring.

Explore these experiences in greater depth: When the large group comes back together, each group will share what they learned, and people may comment based on their own life experiences. **Gather the fruits to share:** Explore what the Spirit is asking of us? What concepts and feelings are confirmed? What are the prospects for change? Small groups need to assign a reporter and a speaker.

Recall our experiences: Invite participants to say what the Church evokes in them, or to name the words that designate what it means to “walk together with Jesus,” and then which words are opposed to “walking together.” **Explore these experiences in greater depth:** They can then be invited to explain

why they called to mind a particular concept or word. **Gather the fruits to share:** The participants may choose which words are the most significant and the most apt to convey the group's message and consider what the Spirit is saying and call out other ideas.

Using images and artistic creations

Recall our experiences: Present people with various images (coordinators may use PowerPoint or bring to the session copies of artwork or magazine images) and then invite participants to find those that best capture what "walking together in the Church" or any of the above themes means to them. **Explore these experiences in greater depth:** Participants can then share why they chose those the images they did. Based on these exchanges, a joint text may be written. **Gather the fruits to share:** Explore what the Spirit asking of us? What concepts and feelings are confirmed? What are the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? (Younger people may respond very well to this approach.)

Recall our experiences: Invite people to draw an image of "the Church in which they walk together." **Explore these experiences in greater depth:** Then ask them to explain the elements in their drawing and the feelings they hope to bring out. **Gather the fruits to share:** Explore what the Spirit asking of us? What concepts and feelings are confirmed? What are the prospects for change, the steps to be taken? (Small children likely would enjoy this activity.)

Recall our experiences: A group of people can make an artistic creation together, as a way of visually representing the Church or their place in it. **Explore these experiences in greater depth:** Once the work has been created, participants are invited to share about what they have created. **Gather the fruits to share:** Explore what the Spirit asking of us? What concepts and feelings are confirmed? What are the prospects for change? Comments and creative works may then be transmitted.

Share a vision for the future: Create a dream board or vision board for your parish or organization. Encourage people to bring images that represent what they would like their parish to be (active in service, praying together, helping each other, etc.), and what they envision as the future of the parish. You will need a corkboard or large poster board, glue sticks, scissors, mementoes, photos and other visual art forms, art supplies, and imagination. **Explore these experiences in greater depth:** Once the dream board is finished, people can talk about how they interpret the dream board. **Gather the fruits to share:** Explore what the Spirit is asking of us? What steps need to be taken to make this dream/vision come true?

Recall our experiences: Write and perform skits. Invite a small group of people to write and perform a three-minute skit of how they believe the parish journeys together or how they would like to see the parish journey together or any of the above themes. **Explore these experiences in greater depth:** After the performance, others may reflect on the skit, which may be transmitted into a text. **Gather the fruits to share:** Explore what the Spirit asking of us? What feelings and ideas have been confirmed? What are the prospects for change?

Recall our experiences: Invite those who are musically inclined to consider writing and performing a song about how journeying together looks now or how they wish it would look in the future. **Explore these experiences in greater depth:** After the performance, others may reflect on the song, which can be transmitted into a text. **Gather the fruits to share:** Explore what the Spirit asking of us? What feelings have been confirmed? What are the prospects for change?

Using activities to inspire

Have an Experience: Invite people to participate in a service project (helping at the soup kitchen; cleaning up trash; doing chores for the elderly and homebound, etc.) **Explore these experiences in greater depth:** When the project is complete, come together to talk about how that activity represents

“journeying together.” **Gather the fruits to share:** Encourage participants to express how the activity made them feel, what they learned, and how this translates into the **Phase Two of the Diocese of Cheyenne synod: Outreach.**

These models and tools for reflecting, sharing, and responding are possibilities, and parish coordinators and faith formation leaders and others may have other creative means to do this work. The most important aspect is the three steps: Recall our experiences/share our vision for the future; explore these experiences in greater depth; gather the fruits to share. Questions and ideas that bubble up as fruits of the Holy Spirit will vary and simply should be recorded. Setting goals and strategies is not part of these gatherings.

Parishes should plan more than one opportunity for parishioners to come together. Encourage small groups to continue prayer and reflection focusing on specific themes. Parish Councils should consider reflecting on the *Authority and Participation* theme, as well as other to which they feel drawn.

Duties of Parish Coordinators

Parish Coordinators are responsible for planning and organizing parish gatherings in consultation with the pastor. They are responsible to provide guidance to those persons who wish to form small groups for further exploration.

The parish facilitator:

- Presents a friendly, positive attitude that invites open, honest communication.
- Explains and helps participants to follow communication ground rules.
- Leads participants through the process of prayer, scripture reading and reflection, and sharing.
- Ensures that everyone has an opportunity to share and helps those who ramble to finish thoughts.
- Guides the process of “gathering the fruits” by using the prompts (see above) and looking for shared meaning among participants.

The parish record keeper:

- Keeps track of time during gatherings.
- Takes notes, focusing on main ideas or themes that are revealed during conversations.
- Carefully records the “Gathering of the Fruits.”
- Collects and compiles notes from large gatherings, small groups, and parish council gatherings.
- Is responsible for turning in notes to diocesan leaders.