

Pax Christi Synod Small Group Guide for Alternative Questions

Background

Pope Francis has called a worldwide Synod to ask how we move forward in journeying together. The early Church worked through its followers' many differences in a synodal way, in other words through meeting, talking, and praying together. In recent history, synods have been called to gather bishops to understand how God wishes to lead the Church about a particular topic. This is the first time in modern history that all of us have been called upon to join in a synod. In it, we're asked to reflect on and share our experiences.

This synod was launched in October of 2021 and will culminate at the Assembly of Bishops in October of 2023. What we share today is part of a process of movement that will reach past 2023 as the fruits of sharing and listening grow and ripen.

The synod is conducted through a practice of discernment. In this, the Church asks for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in bringing to light what the leadership needs to learn or do. You're invited to speak courageously, and share your experiences, difficulties, and ideas. However, please try not to engage in discord or division. You're welcome to wonder and envision.

Nonviolence, Restoration, Creativity

As participants in a new process, we are in a very fertile and creative space. Listening to all voices about how to walk forward together is a practice of nonviolence, restoration, and justice as each person is held in dignity. Learning how to listen, hold, and honor so many perspectives is a new undertaking for all of humanity, and one that is necessary for humankind to learn in order to welcome peace into our world.

Through listening with care to each other's experiences, we learn how to see and hear each other, to disarm, and dismantle racism, prejudice, and exclusivity in our systems and deep within ourselves. We learn what we really do and do not need in our lives. We heal from trauma and walk with others so that they may also heal. We reconcile our role in harm, and learn to welcome and care for one another. Your participation in this discussion is an action for peace.

Safe Space Brave Space

As we begin the listening session, please keep these guidelines in mind while sharing:

Listening: The objective of listening is not to change anyone's mind. Sacred listening is active, attentive listening. Hold both joy and pain in relationship. Seek to understand not to challenge. Differences among people are expected and are an opportunity to find unity by creating new ways of working together.

Speaking: You are invited to speak courageously. Speak your truth while respecting that of others. Talk in terms of one's own experiences. Focus on the impact of our words. Others see them differently than we send them. Share opposition in a caring way, for example: "I don't see it that way," or "could you give me more perspective on that." When the going gets tough, turn to wonder. "I wonder what experiences have shaped this viewpoint?"

Remain in Peace: Trust and learn from the silence. Be humble – no one has all the answers. Forgive ourselves, and be compassionate with ourselves and each other.

Moment of Silence

Please take some time in silence to center yourself and find a place of inner quiet.

Questions

1. Imagine a healthy thriving body of people that upholds peace, justice, and love in our world and supports us in our own deepest spiritual need and work. What would this look like?
2. In your own experience, what pushes you away from spiritual groups or organizations, and what draws you in? For example, have you encountered comfort, support, or needed guidance? Have you encountered harm, indifference, or lack of understanding?
3. What makes you feel seen, heard, and connected to other people? Where do you find this feeling most and why?
4. What does peace mean to you and are you able to carry out your own calling towards peace in the world around you? What holds you back and what supports you?

Gratitude

We're grateful for your time and to have your voice included in this transformative work. We will do all we can to share the needs and paths for moving forward in peace and justice in our Church and world. If you feel called to this work as well, please help us hear more people. Talk to your facilitator or visit <https://paxchristinorcal.org/synod/> to find out how you can help with outreach, facilitation, and notetaking.

Closing Poem

Our listening session today has ended. As we part on our continuing paths, let us walk along with our hands, minds and hearts open.

Make a container for people to listen,
make a space for people to move into,
Make a bowl to hold the grief and joy of each other.
When we empty our bowl, God fills it with Love.
Love is the foundation of Justice.