

Join Our Synodal Listening This New Year: *How can I hear the Spirit's call in my life?*



In 2023, the Synod of Bishops will be meeting, but in an unprecedented move, Pope Francis is asking every diocese, parish, and Catholic group to participate. They are to listen to “*the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties*” (Gaudium et Spes 1) of the people and the planet, and then ask where the Spirit is calling the Church locally and universally.

A Synod is a meeting, but it means more, it comes from the Greek for “*journey together on the way.*” The Pope has coined a new word, *Synodal*, for heart to heart listening to the Spirit’s call in the voices of the people. This is not about arguing, persuading, but exploring people’s lived reality and prayerfully asking the Spirit how the Church should respond. This Synodal listening and discerning the Spirit’s call isn’t just for the 2023 Synod of Bishops, but should shape how every parish, diocese, and group proceeds in the future. We are called to be a Spirit-led people.

Synodal Listening at the *Catholic Community at Stanford*

First Step: Have a conversation with family and friends, be they Catholic, lapsed Catholics, non-Catholics or non-Christians. Ask them how the Church could better respond.

Some suggested discussion questions:

- a) *What is your experience of the Church?*
- b) *How has it blessed you? How could it have been better?*
- c) *How can the Church better respond to the crying need of the people?*
- d) *What might the Holy Spirit be asking of us, our parish and the Church?*

Second Step: Report the topics or suggestions from your conversations on the form found on website, www.stanfordcatholic.org under *Synod on Synodality*. Add any story or names of someone with an expertise that you believe should be heard. This information will help us guide our small group conversations.

See <https://web.stanfordcatholic.org/synod-on-synodality> for more information, the Handbook for the Synod, tips, and YouTube talks.

What happens when you listen?

What happens when you really listen to people? You are changed and they are changed. It forms a circle of mutual understanding and support that ripples out and creates new responses. The process will surface prophetic voices within our community who moves us to new ways of serving.

Discern The Spirit's Call

The scriptures offer us some guiding signs for discerning the Spirit's presence. Jesus told us, "*You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?*" (Matthew 7:16). St. Paul reminds us that "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*" (Galatians 5:22-23) He also names signs of warning that may indicate a group is going down the wrath path, i.e., "*enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions.*" (Galatians 5:20)

It is tempting to tell others what *you* think God wants them to do! Practice instead listening for the Spirit's presence in *your* daily life. Make St. Ignatius' Examen a daily reflection. Ten to fifteen minutes won't ruin you day; over time, it will make your day and bless your life.

Preparation for Examen

1. Set aside 12 minutes. Use a timer so that you can focus on the prayer alone.
2. Let God know that you are ready to focus on Him alone through the goodness of His grace and the freedom of your will.
3. Breathe slowly and deeply for six repetitions.

Steps of Examen proper

1. Give thanks to God for one specific, concrete event which has occurred during the day. The more precise the event and who or what is involved in it the better.
2. Ask for the grace (loving gift of God) to see as God does how you were loved and responded to love throughout the day.
3. Allow your imagination the freedom to move through the day which has passed, stopping where feelings hint that something of value would do well to be held before you (the event or events, thoughts, ideas, etc. are not necessarily good or bad; they simply carry some emotional significance). These I might note in my journal.
4. I speak with God directly, expressing what is occurring inside of me as I look at the day. (I may feel joy, regret, etc. which I hold up to my Creator as my offering).
5. I ask God that I may attend more carefully to His grace in the day to come so that I may serve him ever more faithfully.

Highly Recommended Book & smart phone app: *Reimagining the Examen*.

May Christ Be Born In You Anew This Christmas Season!

A Merry & Blessed Christmas!