

Families and the Synod: Let's get involved!



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1-INTRODUCTION

Did you know that Pope Francis has invited you and your family to enter into a time of prayer, listening and sharing called a “**synod**”? Yes, it's true! Will your family respond to his invitation? We hope so!

What does the word “synod” mean? Simply put, it means **listening** to how God is working in our hearts and in the Church and **sharing** it with each other. What are our joys and sorrows? What are our hopes for our family and for the Church? Each person, young and old, has something important to contribute!

“When families participate in the synod, they share something unique, a reality that is not experienced anywhere else. The contribution of families to the synod is essential and of great value,” said Archbishop Lépine during a recent synod session with couples.

How can families participate? We have prepared a very simple guide that can be adapted to any family situation. It includes 4 themes to spark meaningful and prayerful conversations and an invitation to adopt a small gesture to grow together (“a call to action”).

We invite you to share the comments, ideas and questions that emerge from these conversations with the Diocese of Montreal. This will help us to better understand the realities and needs of the families around us, and to discern, through your experiences, how our church can become more synodal. *

This questionnaire and the accompanying resources are intended for **all those involved in family life**: parents, grandparents, catechists, RSEs, PCLs, people involved in youth and family ministry, priests, deacons, etc.

For more information on family life and the Synod, please see Appendix A: **Families and the Synod, prepared by the Vatican.*

This guide has been prepared by the Diocesan Centre for Marriage, Life and Family, ODEF (Office for Faith Education) and Mission Jeunesse/Youth Ministry of the Archdiocese of Montreal.

2- THE METHOD SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION ADAPTED TO FAMILY LIFE

Let's be honest, in family life, it's not easy to find time for having a quiet conversation! To help you create this atmosphere, we are proposing the method of “**spiritual conversation**”. This is a method of community discernment specific to the Jesuits and the Ignatian family. We hope this adapted version helps to create the ideal conditions for **listening to the Holy Spirit together** and for a gentle, authentic, Christ-centered exchange where everyone’s voice can be heard.

Whether on a walk, in the living room or over dessert, this approach will help young and old alike to first **listen to God** and then **share from the heart**.

Please see Appendix B: Guide to Family Spiritual Conversation to go further!

Before you begin, familiarize yourself with the themes in part III. If you have young children, you may need to adapt the questions to their age. Depending on the time and attention span of the children, **feel free to choose as many themes as you wish**. Also, feel free to do the exercise in one or two sessions. The important thing is that **to live this experience together!**

Important recommendations (the quality of the exchange will depend on their respect):

- Create an atmosphere of prayer (candle, Bible, crucifix, icons, etc.)
- Everyone gets involved! Why not assign roles, such as the preparation of the room, the facilitator, a time keeper, leader of prayer, etc.?
- Try to get rid of distractions (eliminate TV, phones, noisy toys, etc.)
- Each person is important and has equal time for speaking
- Everyone speaks in the “first person”: “*I* feel that, what *I* like the most, *I* see that...”
- **Try to listen well to each other**
- **Do not comment on or react to what the others say** (Phew! Not easy!)
- And lastly, do not cut others off when they are speaking! 😊



Calling all young artists! Parents of young or more creative children, please adapt the themes and encourage your children to express themselves artistically (drawings, etc).

3- FOUR THEMES AND A SUMMARY/CALL TO ACTION



1. Recognizing the gifts of my family

- What are the unique gifts of each family member?
- What do you love about your family?
- What are your best family memories?



“The Triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection.”
Pope Francis

2. Recognizing the limits of my family

- What would we like to improve or change in our family?
- How are we called to grow?
- Is there a concrete action we could take to grow in the short term, in the long term?



“I give thanks to God that many families, who are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfil their vocation and move forward, even if they often fall along the way.” Pope Francis

3. The family as a witness of synodality

- How do we listen to each other and make decisions as a family?
- In what concrete ways can our family life be a witness of synodality for the Church?
- How can the Church help families become aware of their particular mission to be a “leaven” in the Church and in the world? How can she support them in living this call?



“The love lived in families is a constant force. The beauty of the reciprocal and gratuitous gift, the joy for the life that is born and the loving care of all members, from the smallest to the oldest, are some of the fruits that give the choice of the family vocation its unique and irreplaceable character, both for the Church and for the whole of society.”
Pope Francis



4. Families and the Church

- Have we ever thought of our family as an intimate expression of the Church, as a “domestic church”? Yes, you have this vocation by virtue of your baptism!
- What are the greatest joys and cries of the families we know, those near and far from the Church?
- How can families help the Church be closer to other families on the peripheries? How can the Church better reach out to these families?



“It is in the family, “which could be called the domestic Church,” that the first ecclesial experience of communion among persons matures.” Pope Francis

5. Synthesis and call to action

- What surprised me most about this sharing as a family?
- In what ways would our family like to be more supported by the church?
What do we want most from the church?
- What is your dream for the church?
- Choose one small step, one small practice, that your family could adopt to grow together and to be ‘leaven’ in the world and in the church.



Your synod experience as a family is valuable and we would love to hear from you! What ideas has the Holy Spirit inspired in your family? Please send your summaries, drawings, or photos to the Diocesan Centre for Marriage, Life and Family (centreDMVF@diocesemontreal.org) by **May 23**. Your feedback will contribute to the diocesan synodal reflection.



“It is in the family that the ability to embrace, to support, to accompany, to decipher glances and silences, to laugh and cry together, between people who have not chosen each other and yet are so important to each other, is primarily developed; this makes us understand what communication really is as discovery and building up of intimacy.” Pope Francis

4- THE FAMILY METHOD: THREE EASY STEPS (like preparing a meal)!



1-PREPARATION (setting the table!) (±10min)

- Together review the recommendations, light a candle, prepare the space as well as your heart.
- Round 1: How am I feeling? How do I arrive? What am I carrying in my heart right now?
- Prayer: Turn together to the Holy Spirit. For inspiration, see our prayer suggestions (Appendix C: Prayers).



2-PERSONAL REFLECTION AND SHARING (enjoying the meal!)

- Choose your first theme. The facilitator reads the questions and together the family identifies the question(s) that most resonates with them.
- Take a few minutes of silence for prayer and individual reflection (±5min).
- Round 2: Share your thoughts and reflections in a respectful way (±3min per person).
- Round 3: From what I have heard, what touches me, speaks to me the most? (±2min per person).
- *Would you like a visual aid to help you with this process? See Appendix E*
- OTHER THEMES: Repeat step 2 for the other themes, if time permits. *Are you living this with young children? Please see our special guide for kids in Appendix D.*



3- SUMMARY AND CALL TO ACTION (tidying up after the meal!)

- Repeat the method of second step for the final theme of synthesis.
- Your synod experience is valuable and we would love to have you share it with us.

- Living the synod in your family is a chance to reflect on the presence of God, today and tomorrow, in your family and in the Church. **What ideas has the Holy Spirit inspired in your family?** Share the fruits of your exchange! Let's all respond to Pope Francis' invitation!
- Please send your summaries, drawings, photos to centredmvf@diocesemontreal.org before **May 23**. We will gather the contributions and submit them to the diocesan synodal team.

Enjoy the time together and good discernment!



DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

Please contact us with your questions and comments. The *Diocesan Centre for Marriage, Life and Family* is happy to hear from you! Centredmvf@diocesemontreal.org or 514 925-4300, ext. 206

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5- THE TESTIMONY OF A MOTHER WHO LIVED THE SYNODAL PROCESS WITH HER FAMILY

Time together is not time wasted!

During a meal, my husband, our two daughters (9 and 14 years old) and I experienced a moment of grace by living this synodal process adapted to families. After praying and asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide us, we took turns responding to the different questions.

We rediscovered how invaluable the gratuitous moments spent together were! We also rediscovered the richness of our differences; we are each unique and wonderful!

*Re-reading the moments of suffering within our family, far from locking us in bitterness, anger or resentment, helped us realize **how important everyone's happiness is, and gave us an even greater desire to contribute to it.** It helped us to realize even more how the path of forgiveness and reconciliation is a path of healing and growth.*

This synodal experience lived as a family was edifying for each one of us. It gave us the desire to take even more care of each other and to give thanks to the Lord for the gift that each one is for the community that we form.

*When the time came to talk about our dream for the Church, we realized that it was similar to the one we had for our family, our domestic church. We dream of **more unity, of moments of fraternal communion, of laughter between brothers and sisters, of moments of shared prayer, of the free gift of what we are, and of the talents that God has placed in us. We dream of encounters, of living together, of bridges built between generations, of mutual love, of reconciliation.***

Above all, we realized that, in order for our dream to become a reality, we must each contribute, invest ourselves and take the initiative when necessary.

*We will certainly repeat this experience, which had a particular impact on our children. **They felt listened to and taken into account in a special way!***

Bernadette, wife and mother of 2 children, 9 and 14 years old

6- RESOURCES TO GO DEEPER

Here are some resources to help your family with prayer, discernment and sharing.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Families and the Synod: Vatican Guide

Appendix B: Guide to Spiritual Conversation

Appendix C: Prayers

Appendix D: Tools for Young Children

Appendix E: Sharing Chart

PRAYERS:

- Please see the suggested prayers in Appendix C.

SONGS (VIDEOS):

- [Vin Nouveau: Louange MISSION JEUNESSE MONTREAL](#)
- [Comme je suis/As I Am. Leslie Motchum. MISSION JEUNESSE MONTREAL](#)

ON THE SYNOD:

- [Tuned to the Holy Spirit | Youth Ministry Gathering | 2021-2022 - YouTube](#)
- [Synod on Synodality- All You Need to Know \(through Sketches and Images\)-YouTube](#)
- [Synodal Microsite of the Archdiocese of Montreal](#)

INSPIRING TEXTS:

“The love lived in families is a constant force. The beauty of the reciprocal and gratuitous gift, the joy for the life that is born and the loving care of all members, from the smallest to the oldest, are some of the fruits that give the choice of the family vocation its unique and irreplaceable character, both for the Church and for the whole of society.” Pope Francis

“The Christian family is called to take an active and responsible part in the Church's mission in its own original way, placing itself at the service of the Church and of society in its being and in its action, as an intimate community of life and love.” Pope John Paul II

“It is in the family, “which could be called the domestic Church” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 11), that the first ecclesial experience of communion between persons matures, and where the mystery of the Holy Trinity is reflected by grace. “It is here that one learns endurance and joy in work, brotherly love, generous forgiveness, even if repeated, and above all divine worship through prayer and the offering of one's life.” Pope Francis