



# Spreading the Fire of God's Love

REFLECTION BOOKLET

DIOCESE OF  
FORT WAYNE-SOUTH BEND

# Prayer for Synod 2026

Blessed Trinity, Source of our life and our unity,  
We ask for your presence with and within us as  
we undertake this synodal journey.

Create in us, and in all those responsible for  
preparing the synod, a discerning spirit.

Help us to deepen our relationship with you  
and with one another over the months and  
weeks ahead.

Grow in us the fire of your love, that we may  
eagerly respond to your loving invitation to  
spread the joy of the Gospel and to serve the  
poor, suffering, and vulnerable.

Form us to be better disciples, creating  
vibrant, mission-oriented communities of faith,  
hope, and charity.

We ask this through the intercession of our  
diocesan patrons, Mary, the Immaculate  
Conception, and St. Matthew.

Amen.

## DIRECTIONS FOR BOOKLET USE

Please use this as a resource for prayerful reflection and  
discernment focusing on the five themes of our Diocesan Synod:

- 1. Evangelization: Sharing the Truth and Joy of the Gospel**
- 2. Catechesis: Forming Disciples of All Ages**
- 3. Spiritual and Liturgical Life: Living in Relationship with the Trinity**
- 4. Vocations: Responding to God's Loving Invitation**
- 5. Outreach: Serving the Poor, Suffering and Vulnerable**

Each theme begins with relevant quotes from Scripture and  
Tradition. Then offers some questions for reflection on this  
theme in the life of your parish. Finally it concludes with  
personal prompts for your prayerful consideration. You are  
encouraged to approach these questions slowly and prayerfully,  
and to take notes as you prepare for your parish consultation.

Over the course of your time using this booklet, consider having  
conversation on any of the fruits of your prayer and reflection  
with family, friends, other parishioners, person standing behind  
you in line, person sitting next to you in the stands, etc...

Once you have worked through all five themes, please spend  
additional time on the final set of questions in preparation  
for your parish consultation. These questions are intended to  
gather the fruit of the synodal themes as well as other areas  
that you feel moved to comment upon. When you come to the  
parish consultation, these three questions will form the content  
of your table conversation.

# By the Numbers: Our Diocese Today

## SCHOOLS

**HIGH SCHOOLS**  
(4 in the diocese)

**3,216**

25/26 Enrollment

↑ **8.6%**

over the last 5 years

**ELEMENTARY**  
(39 in the diocese)

**13,670**

25/26 Enrollment

↑ **9%**

over the last 5 years

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

**5,804**

Students in Religious Education

**196,910**

Catholics in our Diocese

**141,970**

(in 50,716 households)

Registered Catholics in our Parishes

**54%**

Regular Mass Attendance  
(% of registered parishioners  
regularly at Mass on Sunday)

## SACRAMENTAL LIFE

(average per year between 2010-2024)

**2,548**

Baptisms (declining overall)

**2,228**

Infant average  
(declining overall)

**335**

Adult average  
(growing overall)

**705**

Marriages (declining overall)

**1,154**

Funerals

## PRIESTS

**111**

Active in Diocese  
(including religious  
and intl. priests)

**69**

Active  
diocesan  
priests

**23**

Retired  
diocesan  
priests

**3**

Set to  
retire by  
2030

**10**

In formation  
(ordination  
by 2030)

## MULTICULTURAL MINISTRY IN OUR DIOCESE

**17**

Parishes with official  
Hispanic Ministry

**33** Weekend Masses in Spanish

**1** Weekend Mass in Vietnamese

**1** Weekend Mass in Burmese

**1** Monthly Mass in Korean

## EVANGELIZATION

Sharing the Truth and Joy of the Gospel

### Scripture and Tradition

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

**MATTHEW 28:18-20**

The task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church...Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity...it is the whole Church that receives the mission to evangelize, and the work of each individual member is important for the whole.

**EVANGELII NUNCIANDI, 14-15**

Lay people fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, that is the proclamation of Christ by word and testimony of life. For lay people, this evangelization acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world.

**CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 905;  
CITING LUMEN GENTIUM, 35**

### Reflect: Evangelization in Our Parish

- How does our parish share the truth and joy of the Gospel beyond our parish campus?
- Does our parish offer a seeker-friendly program for those interested in learning more about Jesus or Christianity (i.e. Alpha or Rescue Project)?
- What is our parish's digital outreach? Does our parish website have up-to-date information? Are Mass and Confession times easy to find on our website? Does our parish have active social media accounts?
- Does our parish have active faith-sharing groups? What about in Spanish?
- Has our parish conducted door-to-door outreach in the past 10 years?
- Have I been trained in personal testimony or evangelization by my parish?
- Does our parish distribute invitations to Christmas and Easter Masses in our community?
- Does our parish offer hospitality or fellowship events specifically for newcomers or non-parishioners?
- How many people have gone through OCIA (formerly RCIA) at our parish in the last 5 years?
- Does our parish feel like an "evangelizing" or "mission-oriented" community?
- Does our parish engage in ecumenical and interfaith relationships through common prayer, dialogue, or joint charitable service activities?

# Pray and Discern: Evangelization in My Life

*Begin a time of prayer, ideally at least 15 minutes or more, by putting aside any distractions. Have a pen and paper at hand, and take a few slow breaths as you quiet your heart. Make the sign of the cross, offer this time to God, and ask God to guide you.*

**God, what is the joy I find in my relationship with You, the Gospels, and/or being Catholic?**

- How would I describe that joy my own words?

## What are the contexts in which I share my joy and my story of faith?

- Who do I tell about it and are there times when I avoid it? Why?
- Is there one person in my life right now with whom you, God, would like me to share my faith?

**Do I feel prepared to offer my own testimony as your disciple, Jesus, if called upon?**

- How open am I to learning how to do this?

**If I eagerly share my faith with others, in what ways do I adjust for the audience's level of faith engagement?**

## Have I experienced the Church as an evangelizing community?

- What would an evangelizing community feel like?
- What are some of the behaviors or actions that build an evangelizing, mission-oriented community?

*Close by thanking God for love and guidance during this time of prayer. Ask God for help with any steps you feel God is inviting you to take.*

## NOTES

## CATECHESIS

Forming Disciples of All Ages

# Scripture and Tradition

At the heart of catechesis we find a person, the person of Jesus of Nazareth,...[T]he definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.

**CATECHESI TRADENDAE, 5**

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. Therefore, you shall love the LORD your God with your whole heart and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words...Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.

**DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9**

Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted,

generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.

**CATECHESI TRADENDAE, 18**

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechism precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith.

**CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 2226**

# Reflect: Catechesis in Our Parish

- Does our parish offer ongoing adult faith formation (not just OCIA)? What faith formation opportunities have I participated in?
- Can a family seeking a religious education program for their children find it at our parish? What age groups do we offer programming for?
- Does our parish currently offer youth ministry, young adult ministry, men's or women's faith formation groups, or faith enrichment programs for seniors?
- How does our parish take advantage of digital platforms for catechesis (FORMED, Word on Fire, etc.)?
- Does our parish offer catechesis and/or sacrament preparation in Spanish or other languages?
- How does our parish support families practice their faith at home and form parents as the primary teachers in the faith of their children?



# Pray and Discern: Catechesis in My Life

*Begin a time of prayer, ideally at least 15 minutes or more, by putting aside any distractions. Have a pen and paper at hand, and take a few slow breaths as you quiet your heart. Make the sign of the cross, offer this time to God, and ask God to guide you.*

## **How do I continue to grow in my knowledge and practice of the faith?**

- What are the formal and informal ways I attend to this regularly (reading, bible study, on-going education, talks, retreats, etc...)?
- If I do not attend to it regularly, what gets in the way?

## **Who is it my responsibility to help to educate in the faith? Who is entrusted to my care in regards to catechesis?**

- How do I fulfill this responsibility?
- Who are my partners in this work?

## **If I have children, what time do I spend with them talking about the faith?**

- How often do we pray together in our home?

## **If I have siblings or spouse, how do we grow in faith together?**

- Can our faith, God, prayer be topics of conversation?
- How can we help one another to grow in our relationships with God?

## **What are the elements of faith: knowledge, practice, prayer, Scripture that I feel called to grow in?**

- How could I choose to engage one of these elements in the year ahead?
- Would I do it on my own, with a friend or family member, or with the community in some way?

## **How do I support catechesis and religious education in our parish?**

- Do I have skills that I could offer for the service of others? (language skills, teaching, theological education, small group facilitation, scheduling or organizational skills...)?
- Do I have space in my life presently to put time and effort into supporting catechesis in our community in some way?

*Close by thanking God for love and guidance during this time of prayer. Ask God for help with any steps you feel God is inviting you to take.*

## **NOTES**

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## SPIRITUAL AND LITURGICAL LIFE

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Living in Relationship with the Blessed Trinity

## Scripture and Tradition

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter their house and dine with them, and they with me.

**REVELATION 3:20**

The essence of biblical faith [is that] people can indeed enter into union with God. But this union is no mere fusion, a sinking in the nameless ocean of the Divine; it is a unity which creates love, a unity in which both God and individual remain themselves and yet become fully one.

**DEUS CARITAS EST, 10**

You need to see the entirety of your life as a mission. Try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognizing the signs that God gives you. Always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received.

**GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE, 23**

The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's supper.

**SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM, 10**

## Reflect: Spiritual and Liturgical Life in Our Parish

- How many Sunday Masses (including Saturday Vigil) are celebrated at our parish each week? How many Masses are offered in Spanish or another language? How many public daily Masses are celebrated at our parish each week?
- Does our parish offer Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament?
- When during the day is it possible to pray in the church or in front of the tabernacle?
- Is Confession regularly offered at our parish in a weekly scheduled time slot? Does this time (do these times) make it available to people in different places of life?
- How does our parish train altar servers, lectors, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion? How often?
- Does our parish offer opportunities for communal prayer outside of Mass?
- Does our parish have an intercessory prayer group or prayer ministry? How do parishioners submit prayer requests?
- What does our parish do to foster a contemplative spirit, personal discernment?



# Pray and Discern: Spiritual and Liturgical Practice in My Life

*Begin a time of prayer, ideally at least 15 minutes or more, by putting aside any distractions. Have a pen and paper at hand, and take a few slow breaths as you quiet your heart. Make the sign of the cross, offer this time to God, and ask God to guide you.*

## How do I continue to grow in my relationship with God?

- When do I talk to God? When do I listen to God?
- When I pray, which person of the Trinity am I most often envisioning?

## How do I prepare for Mass spiritually?

- How well do I participate interiorly in each part of the Mass and exteriorly when called for?
- How does my experience of the Mass affect my daily life during the week?

### Do I feel equipped to make a good examination of conscience?

- How often do I take advantage of the sacramental grace of Confession?

**How does the pace of life or prevalence of digital technology/ social media impact may ability to pray, to be contemplative, or to appreciate the value of silence?**

## When do I pray with others outside of liturgical prayer?

## What is the role of intercessory prayer in my spiritual life?

*Close by thanking God for love and guidance during this time of prayer. Ask God for help with any steps you feel God is inviting you to take.*

## NOTES

## VOCATIONS

Responding to God's Loving Invitation

# Scripture and Tradition

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.

### 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7

The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts, rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them. We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness...

Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today's world. May you come to realize what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life.

*GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE, 11, 23*

Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are sacraments of Christian initiation. They ground the common vocation of all Christ's disciples, a vocation to holiness and to the mission of evangelizing the world. They confer the graces needed for the life according to the Spirit during this life as pilgrims on the march towards the homeland. Two other sacraments, Holy Orders and Matrimony, are directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God.

**CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 1533-34**

# Reflect: Vocations in Our Parish

- Is missionary discipleship or responding to God's loving invitations in our life preached at my parish?
- What youth or young adult groups do we have that make space for young people to think about their future in the context of God's plan for their lives?
- How often are weddings celebrated at our parish? Anniversary masses or celebrations?
- How does our parish support married couples and families in their vocations?
- Does our parish actively promote vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life? How do we do that?
- How many permanent deacons or priests have been ordained from our parish in the last 10 years?
- How many women from our parish have entered religious life in the last 10 years?

# Pray and Discern: Vocation in My Life

*Begin a time of prayer, ideally at least 15 minutes or more, by putting aside any distractions. Have a pen and paper at hand, and take a few slow breaths as you quiet your heart. Make the sign of the cross, offer this time to God, and ask God to guide you.*

**What is my purpose? How much is God a part of my consideration of my purpose?**

- Have I considered how I am making my life a gift for others?

**How am I living my vocation (discipleship, state-of-life, in the world)?**

**How do I best live out my vocation so that it is a witness to others? Is it joyful?**

**Who are the models I look up to in particular vocations:  
Which priest(s)? Religious? Married couples?  
Consecrated or chaste singles?**

## How am I encouraging others to respond to their vocation?

- As a parish how can we raise up/display models for vocations?

## How can we help young people to hear the voice of God, especially in our “noisy” culture?

**Do I find myself reluctant to pursue, explore, or encourage others particularly to vocations of priesthood**

**or religious life?**

- Where does that come from, what are the roots of my hesitation?

**How do I see/notice/observe the beauty in the complementarity of vocations present in the Church around us? How do vocations support, fortify, and witness to one another?**

## How do we support our priests?

*Close by thanking God for love and guidance during this time of prayer. Ask God for help with any steps you feel God is inviting you to take.*

## NOTES

## OUTREACH

Serving the Poor, Suffering, and Vulnerable

# Scripture and Tradition

Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.

**MATTHEW 25:40**

Our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all, and that the Eucharist thus compels all who believe in him to become 'bread that is broken' for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world. Keeping in mind the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, we need to realize that Christ continues today to exhort his disciples to become personally engaged: 'You yourselves, give them something to eat' (Mt 14:16). Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world.

**SACRAMENTUM CARITATIS, 88**

## Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy:

Feed the hungry.	Instruct the ignorant.
Give drink to the thirsty.	Counsel the doubtful.
Clothe the naked.	Admonish sinners.
Shelter the homeless.	Bear wrongs patiently.
Visit the sick.	Forgive offences willingly.
Visit the imprisoned.	Comfort the afflicted.
Bury the dead.	Pray for the living and the dead.

The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest [and most vulnerable].

**CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 1397**

# Reflect: Outreach in Our Parish

- Where would one of our parishioners in need of food go for assistance? Do we operate a food pantry or have an active St. Vincent de Paul society?
- Where would a mom in need of support go for resources?
- What resources does our parish community offer for those in grief or suffering from the pain of bereavement, annulment, divorce, or incarceration?
- Do we offer any ministry to the most vulnerable and those that support them? (ie: the homebound, those dealing with addiction, same-sex attraction, or mental health struggles)
- How do we as a community reach immigrants, refugees, or the unhoused.

# Pray and Discern: Outreach in My Life

*Begin a time of prayer, ideally at least 15 minutes or more, by putting aside any distractions. Have a pen and paper at hand, and take a few slow breaths as you quiet your heart. Make the sign of the cross, offer this time to God, and ask God to guide you.*

## Who is my neighbor? How well do my actions reflect it?

- What are their needs/challenges?
- What keeps them from feeling like my neighbor?
- What can I do to make them feel like my neighbor?

**Which of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy am I most consistently engaging?**

- Which of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy do I rarely, if ever, engage?
- Do I feel called to more or deeper engagement? If so, what more?

## Is service/outreach a priority in my life?

- Do I fulfill my obligation to service as consistently as I do my Sunday obligation to
- Mass? If I do, or desire to, what does that look like?

### How does my parish encourage people of all backgrounds to fully participate?

- How comfortable am I inviting people of all backgrounds to participate?
- Who might feel uncomfortable participating in our parish community?

## What does our parish do to recognize its place in the Global Church?

- How do we connect ourselves with our neighbors around the world?

*Close by thanking God for love and guidance during this time of prayer. Ask God for help with any steps you feel God is inviting you to take.*

## NOTES





**Where does our parish need to grow right now? Our diocese?**

## How are our communities engaged in ecumenical and interfaith relationships and activities?

The diagram illustrates the five phases of the Synod process, connected by a central vertical line with downward-pointing arrows. Each phase is presented in a light beige box with a dark brown title and a list of activities or dates.

- Preparatory Phase**
  - Sept 14: Announcement to lay faithful
  - Summer 2025**
    - Work of Preparatory Commission
    - Aug 15: Release of Synodal Directory
- Parish Phase**
  - Fall 2025–Winter 2026**
    - Prayerful Parish Opening
    - Personal reflection and discernment
    - Parish Consultation
- Special Consultations Phase**
  - Winter 2025–Spring 2026**
    - Special focus group conversations
    - Digital engagement of College students
- Prepare with Prayer**
  - Summer 2026**
    - A time for the lay faithful and all Synod delegates to prayerfully prepare for the upcoming sessions
    - Synthesis of consultation materials and final arrangements for Synod Sessions
- Synod Sessions**
  - Fall 2026**
    - Session I: Oct 31–Nov 1 (South Bend)
    - Session II: Nov 20–21 (Fort Wayne)



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