



Diocese of San Diego

SYNOD | SÍNODO

2021- 2024



Building Eucharistic Communities

PARISHES AND GROUPS HANDBOOK

GUIDE

Synod Sessions — FALL 2023

SDCATHOLIC.ORG/SYNOD

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Forms

Jot Notes, Extended Notes and Cover Sheet are provided at the end of this guide.

“Speak from the place in your heart where you are most yourself. Speak directly, simply, lovingly, gently, and without any apologies. Tell us what you see and want us to see; tell us what you hear and want us to hear...Trust your own heart. The words will come. There is nothing to fear.”

— Henri Nouwen

Introduction

This guide is designed for parish/group coordinators, small group facilitators and note-takers who are playing key roles in the Diocese of San Diego's consultation of the faithful, formally called a synod, to take place in October and November 2023.

The faithful will encounter and listen to each other's experiences in the Church in small group sessions. These sessions are at the center of the consultation. The sessions will use a model utilized across time and cultures called "council," which empowers the participants to speak spontaneously from the heart while the others listen attentively and ensures that everyone is treated with dignity and respect. (More information about this concept is on page 11.)

The participants in the small group sessions will sit in a circle and answer three questions. This guide will describe how the circles are to be organized and run, and how to document what the participants said for submission to the diocese. The forms to submit your data also will be available on the webpage sd catholic.org/communicationresources.

The following information is included:

- Overview of small group circle sessions
- Basic circle elements
- Facilitator script for the circle sessions
- Data collection sheet for the circle note-takers
- Data submission sheet for parish/group coordinator

The diocesan synod coordinators are deeply grateful for our pastors and all of those individuals in parishes, groups and organizations who will help us to hold the small group sessions. We also thank the consultants who are advising us during the synod. We pray for the intercession of the Holy Spirit in this journey we are embarking on together.

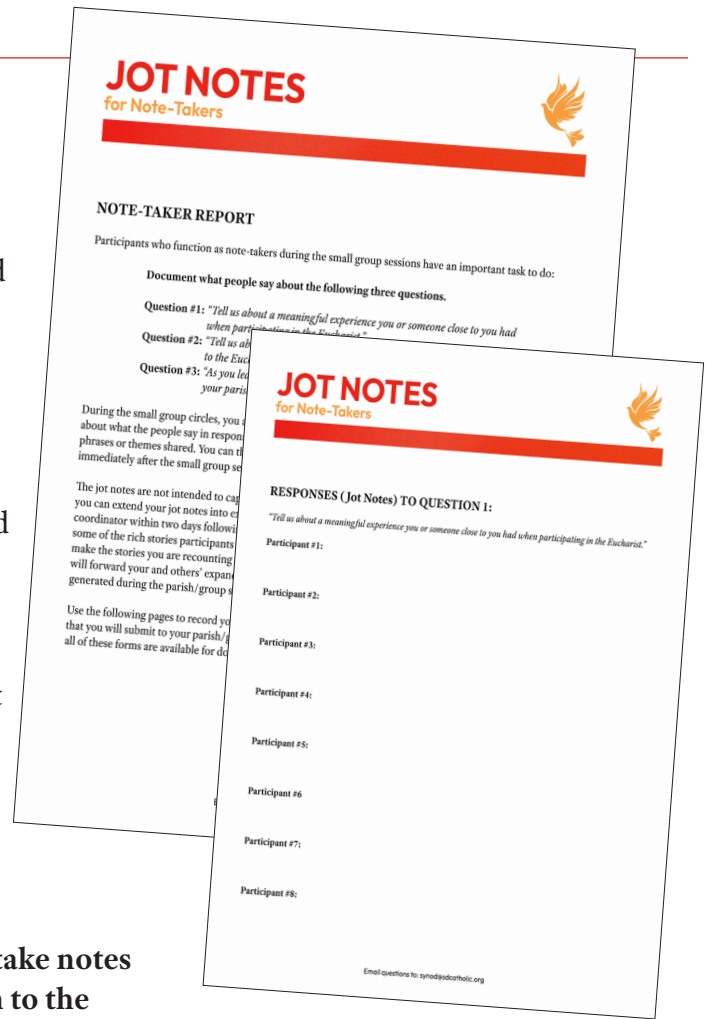
Facilitators and Note-Takers

Role of the Facilitator (word origin: from *facilitare*, meaning to make easy)

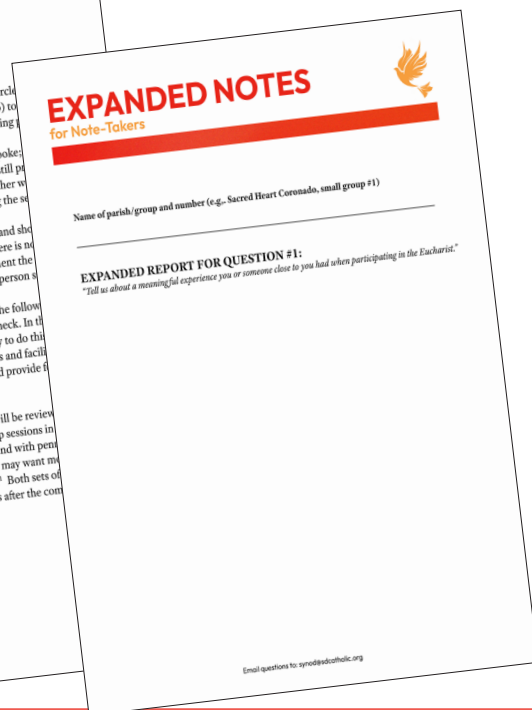
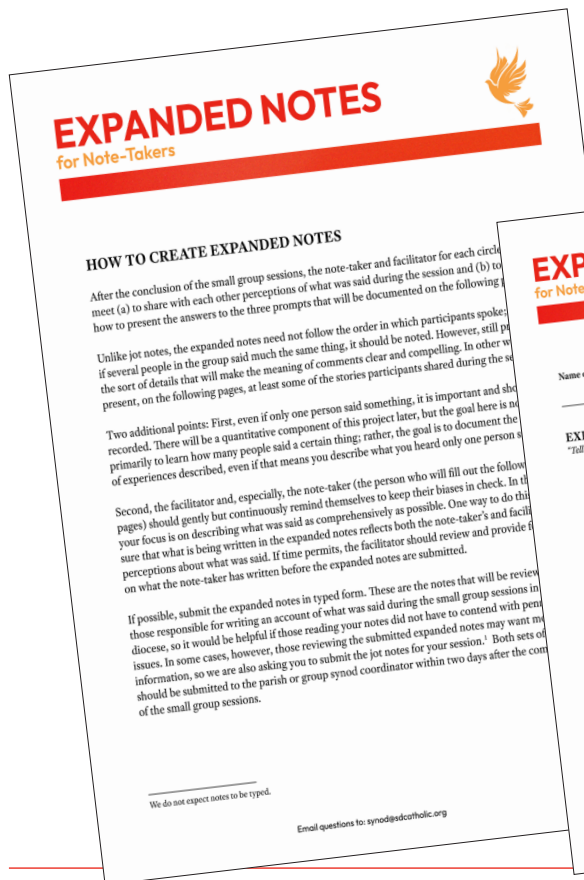
- To present the questions, or prompts, the participants will answer in the circle.
- To safeguard the integrity of the process.
- To establish and clarify ground rules before beginning the circle.
- To assist the circle in clarifying its needs regarding goals and logistics, including, confidentiality, time frames, breaks, endings.
- To invite any voice or perspective that may be missing.
- To swiftly resolve any problem, such as someone talking for too long, that can derail the circle process.
- Facilitators will use a script to guide the small group sessions.

Role of the Note-Taker

- Each circle will have a designated note-taker that will record some of the answers and even a few noteworthy quotes.
- All quotes and information will be used anonymously, not attributed to any individual by name. The diocese will collate this content as an expression of the body of the Church.
- The note-taker will receive a data collection form that she/he will follow and “jot notes” while sitting in circle with the rest of the participants.
- Note-takers should remain silent while other participants are speaking and not ask any questions of the participants while in circle.
- Note-takers are also participants in the circle and will have the opportunity to respond to the three questions.
- **Note-takers will use special forms to take notes and then expand them for submission to the parish/group synod coordinator.**



These forms can be found at the end of this guide and are also available for downloading at sd catholic.org/communicationresources.



Basic Circle Elements

The quality of a circle is that the form itself creates a sense of equality. We can see who is present. All seats are equally powerful and at the same level of importance.

Every circle has a center. The center actually and symbolically holds the common intentions and values as represented by objects of significance. The objects in the center, called “talking pieces,” can be picked up and held. They serve as tools for focusing attention and empowering the one holding them. The person holding the talking piece “has the floor.”

PROMPTS

We will invite the participants in the small groups to answer the following questions as part of the synodal process:

Question #1: “Tell us about a meaningful experience you or someone close to you had when participating in the Eucharist.”

Question #2: “Tell us about a challenge you or someone close to you experienced related to the Eucharist.”

Question #3: “As you leave this experience, how can you be the living presence of Jesus in your parish and community?”

Creating the Circle

Before the session begins, the facilitator should:

- Ensure the physical space of the circle is inviting.
- Include in the center symbols and objects meaningful to the group.
- Arrange seating in a circle, unless absolutely impossible.
- Assure that the emotional space is open, safe, and nurturing.
- Assure that as much as possible, there will be no interruptions.
- If possible, avoid conference tables, desks, or other furniture in the middle that might serve as a barrier, hiding place, or crutch.

THE FOUR INTENTIONS OF COUNCIL (CIRCLE)

We will ask the circle participants to follow these four intentions:

Speak from the Heart

- Use “I” statements instead of “you,” to avoid characterizing others’ thoughts or feelings.
- Tell your personal story instead of philosophizing.
- Favor feelings over facts and opinions.

Listen from the Heart

- Seek understanding instead of agreement or disagreement. Avoid analysis and evaluation.
- Refrain from interruptions to respect the speaker. Listen to what is said without judgement.
- Seek to reveal and understand positions and assumptions, rather than attacking or defending.

Be Lean of Expression

- Speak leanly; cut to the chase. Avoid filler or thinking out loud.
- Before speaking, you can ask yourself, “What serves the circle, myself, and the greater good?”

Be Spontaneous

- Speak to what is alive in you in the moment, instead of rehearsing or editing your story.

OPENING THE CIRCLE

- Honor the transition from busyness and business as usual into the circle, perhaps with a moment of silence, a deep breath and affirming, “Are we ready to begin?”
- Mark the beginning with a short prayer. For these synodal sessions, begin with Taizé hymn “Veni Sancte Spiritus” (“Come Holy Spirit”).
- Invite people to clear their minds and be fully present.

USING A “TALKING PIECE”

Each participant is to hold a “talking piece” when it’s his or her turn to speak.

- It is an object chosen to symbolize the visions and intentions of the group.
- Focuses the attention of circle participants.
- Signals a clear beginning and ending to each person’s sharing.
- Assures that each speaker has full time to complete her/his communication.
- Creates a pause between speakers, during which the group can digest what has been said.
- Identifies the next speaker.
- Can be held in silence or just passed.
- Recommend a “comfort cross” or a “rosary” be used as the talking piece.

FORMAT

The talking piece passes clockwise (to the left) around the circle. This is an ideal format to assure that everyone who wants to speak may do so.

CLOSING

- The facilitator, getting a sense of how the group is doing, determines how best to close the circle, which can include a summation of experiences and /or expressions of gratitude. If time permits, it can include an opportunity for everyone/anyone to offer a closing comment or placing the “talking piece” in the center for individuals to use to add any final thoughts.
- End with a prayer and perhaps one formal or ceremonial gesture – a group thank you, a cheer or a moment of silence. Use whatever may be appropriate to mark a clear ending to the intentional time in the circle and a stepping back into the ordinary time outside of it.

Overview of the Day: Small Group Sessions

LOGISTICS

Total time: 2.5 to 3 hours (including transitions/breaks)

Number of people: 6 to 8 people per small circle (maximum 10 people)

Number of small circles: To be determined by the number of people who register to participate.

Number of facilitators per circle: one

Number of note-takers per circle: one

KEEPING TIME

The parish/group coordinators will be responsible for keeping track of time for the overall event as well as making announcements on time remaining during the small group circles.

The facilitator will be responsible for keeping track of time in their respective circles.

GENERAL FLOW OF THE DAY SMALL-GROUP(S) SESSIONS ARE HELD

1. 25 min Opening: Welcome by pastor and parish/group synod coordinator. Recorded video is played explaining why the Church and our Bishop has called us here today, and how the circle works.
2. Prayer (dedication) in the large group: “Veni Sancte Spiritus” (“Come Holy Spirit”).
3. 60-75 min for small circle sessions. Follow basic circle format. (See small group script.)
4. Closing: Give thanks and transition to big group for closing prayer.
5. Hold debrief circle for the note-takers and facilitators after small group circles end. Review and submit within two days of holding the circles the data sheets for each circle to the parish/group synod coordinator.

Overview of a Circle Session

Initial gathering space with video screen could be rows of chairs or a semi-circle, depending on the number of participants. Greetings will be offered, logistics explained, video shown, and prayer shared. Participants will be directed to their respective circles.

In the breakout circles, facilitators will remind participants what they have just seen in the video regarding how the sessions will be held, mentioning:

- Four intentions
- Talking piece
- Introduction of the note-taker
- Opening and closing of the small circle

FLOW OF SMALL CIRCLE

1. Prayer/dedication and lighting of candle
2. Circle participants answer questions in the sharing rounds
3. Closing

Note: To be transparent, explain how data will be collected in the circles.

SMALL CIRCLE QUESTIONS

The synodal vision of the Pope and Bishop will be presented in the introductory video and will assist in reflection and dialoguing on the themes of sorrow-joy-hope.

Question 1: “Tell us about a meaningful experience you or someone close to you had when participating in the Eucharist.”

Question 2: “Tell us about a challenge you or someone close to you experienced related to the Eucharist.”

Question 3: “As you leave this experience, how can you be the living presence of Jesus in your parish and community?”

CIRCLE CLOSING

Facilitators thank participants for this meaningful time, and someone is invited to put out the candle. Small circle participants’ experience is complete. All can gather together as a large group one final time.

LARGE GROUP

The large parish or affinity group will reconvene to briefly express gratitude, next steps, farewells and closing prayer.

After the large group meeting ends, hold debrief sessions for facilitators and note-takers. All facilitators and note-takers will gather to clarify their data collection notes and turn in notes/data sheets. Note-takers will debrief their experience. A prompt or two could be offered by the parish/group coordinator, such as: “What stands out for you from what you heard?”; and “What

Facilitator Script for the Circle

BEFORE THE SMALL GROUP CIRCLE BEGINS

1. Ensure each small group circle has the requisite number of chairs (ideally 6-8 per circle).
2. Have a small candle to light at the opening of the circle placed in the center of the circle.
3. Have a small talking piece that can be used to pass to each participant as he or she answers the questions. A talking piece can be a wooden comfort cross, a rosary, or some other item that has meaning to the participants.
4. Each facilitator should introduce themselves to their small group. The facilitator should also identify/introduce the note-taker.

OPENING THE CIRCLE

1. Each participant will stand behind their chair.
2. The facilitator will ask each participant to take a deep breath before stepping into the circle to sit in their chair.
3. Together, the small group participants will cross the threshold, i.e., enter the circle and seat themselves. Make the participants aware that as they enter the circle it signifies that they are entering sacred space and spending sacred time together.
4. The facilitator will open the circle by lighting the small candle; the lit candle indicates that the circle has begun.
5. The facilitator will lead small group in prayer:

“Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.”

6. The facilitator will remind the participants of the Four Intentions of Council (Circle):
Speak from the Heart, Listen from the Heart, Be Lean of Expression, Be Spontaneous
7. The facilitator will remind all participants that what is shared will remain anonymous, and that the note-taker will be taking notes to gather information for our Bishop and the Church to better respond to the needs of the faithful.
8. Please have all participants verbally agree to allow the note-taker to take notes that will be shared with the diocese. Participants may notify the facilitator after the circle if he/she would not like to have their story shared.

DURING THE CIRCLE

1. The facilitator will read the first question:

“Tell us about a meaningful experience you or someone close to you had when participating in the Eucharist.”

The facilitator will begin by taking the talking piece and answering the question. After the facilitator answers the question, he/she will pass the talking piece to the person seated to his/her left, and each participant will have an opportunity to answer the question. The note-taker will be seated to the facilitator’s right side, and will be the last participant to answer the question. Once the note-taker answers the first question then the first round is considered complete.

2. Upon completion of the first round, the facilitator will read the second question:

“Tell us about a challenge you or someone close to you experienced related to the Eucharist.”

The facilitator will use the same process that he/she used for the first round in answering the second question until all participants have had an opportunity to answer the second question.

3. Upon completion of the second round, the facilitator will read the third question:

“As you leave this experience, how can you be the living presence of Jesus in your parish and community?”

This question is for the third and final round. The facilitator can use the same process as the first two rounds, inviting one participant to start and then passing the talking piece to the left until all participants have an opportunity to answer the question/tell their story.

4. After the three questions have been answered by all small group circle participants, and if time permits, consider having a closing round where participants are invited to state what they heard during the small group session in a sentence or two. This may also be helpful to the note-taker as he/she summarizes and memorializes what was said in the small group circle.

CLOSING THE CIRCLE

1. The facilitator will lead or ask a participant to say a short prayer.
2. The facilitator will extinguish the small candle.

Background on Council Concept

Council is an ancient way and a modern practice, spanning diverse cultures and religions. Council elicits an experience of true community, recognizing that every person has a story to share, that each voice contains a piece of the whole. Through council, we strive to accept differences, find our own voices, and open to others. It seems essential that now, more than ever, we learn to awaken the spirit and practice deeply relational communication.

Council encourages attentive, compassionate listening and honest, spontaneous expression. Council makes room for new insights and understandings, wisdom in decision-making, and both personal and interpersonal healing.

- Values inquiry and questions over advocacy and speeches.
- Values curiosity over fixed opinions.
- Values understanding over self-defense.
- Values being truthful over being right.

Acknowledgements

The training material presented in this guide include items in the public domain, as well as copyrighted materials developed by the Ojai Foundation, Ways of Council, Center for Council and most notably “The Way of Council” by Jack Zimmerman and Virginia Coyle. No materials may be reproduced for commercial purposes without written permission. For further information, please contact the authors of this facilitator guide.

The material in this guide was collected by Alan Mobley, PhD, and Yamin Chehin, L. Ac. We acknowledge that the ways and forms of council offered is a body of work coming through us, but does not belong to us, nor was it created by us. We feel especially grateful to the lands that we come from and the many generations of cultural practitioners, most made anonymous by time’s passing, that have excavated, preserved, and breathed new life into circle forms. We recognize that some specific material presented in our work has been developed by others. Wherever possible we endeavor to give clear acknowledgment of these contributions.

Resources

BOOKS

Zimmerman, Jack & Coyle, Gig. (1996). “The Way of Council.” Bramble Books.

ONLINE LINKS

The Ojai Foundation <http://www.ojaifoundation.org>

Ways of Council <http://waysofcouncil.net/>

Center for Council <https://www.centerforcouncil.org/what-is-council.html>

DIOCESE OF SAN DIEGO

Robert Ehnou, PhD, Director for Office for Life, Peace, and Justice, rehnou@sdatholic.org or 858-490-8375.

JOT NOTES

for Note-Takers



NOTE-TAKER REPORT

Participants who function as note-takers during the small group sessions have an important task to do:

Document what people say about the following three questions.

Question #1: *“Tell us about a meaningful experience you or someone close to you had when participating in the Eucharist.”*

Question #2: *“Tell us about a challenge you or someone close to you experienced related to the Eucharist.”*

Question #3: *“As you leave this experience, how can you be the living presence of Jesus in your parish and community?”*

During the small group circles, you as the note-taker, will be taking notes, sometimes called “jot notes,” about what the people say in response to each of the prompts. Use the jot notes to capture key words, phrases or themes shared. You can then refer to these notes in your debrief with your group’s facilitator immediately after the small group session ends.

The jot notes are not intended to capture every word, rather brief notes unobtrusively taken. Later, you can extend your jot notes into expanded notes, which you will submit to your parish/group synod coordinator within two days following the small group sessions. When you do this, try to share at least some of the rich stories participants undoubtedly shared. Please include the kind of details that will make the stories you are recounting compelling and interesting. Your parish/group synod coordinator will forward your and others’ expanded notes and jot notes, along with an overall summary of ideas generated during the parish/group session, to the diocese.

Use the following pages to record your “jot notes.” Then, use other sheets to record your expanded notes that you will submit to your parish/group synod coordinator. In addition to being included in this guide, all of these forms are available for downloading on the webpage sd catholic.org/communicationresources.

JOT NOTES

for Note-Takers



RESPONSES (Jot Notes) TO QUESTION 1:

“Tell us about a meaningful experience you or someone close to you had when participating in the Eucharist.”

Participant #1:

Participant #2:

Participant #3:

Participant #4:

Participant #5:

Participant #6

Participant #7:

Participant #8:

JOT NOTES

for Note-Takers



RESPONSES (Jot Notes) TO QUESTION 2:

“Tell us about a challenge you or someone close to you experienced related to the Eucharist.”

Participant #1:

Participant #2:

Participant #3:

Participant #4:

Participant #5:

Participant #6

Participant #7:

Participant #8:

JOT NOTES

for Note-Takers



RESPONSES (Jot Notes) TO QUESTION 3:

“As you leave this experience, how can you be the living presence of Jesus in your parish and community?”

Participant #1:

Participant #2:

Participant #3:

Participant #4:

Participant #5:

Participant #6

Participant #7:

Participant #8:

EXPANDED NOTES

for Note-Takers



HOW TO CREATE EXPANDED NOTES

After the conclusion of the small group sessions, the note-taker and facilitator for each circle will meet (a) to share with each other perceptions of what was said during the session and (b) to discuss how to present the answers to the three prompts that will be documented on the following pages.

Unlike jot notes, the expanded notes need not follow the order in which participants spoke; rather, if several people in the group said much the same thing, it should be noted. However, still provide the sort of details that will make the meaning of comments clear and compelling. In other words, present, on the following pages, at least some of the stories participants shared during the session.

Two additional points: First, even if only one person said something, it is important and should be recorded. There will be a quantitative component of this project later, but the goal here is not primarily to learn how many people said a certain thing; rather, the goal is to document the range of experiences described, even if that means you describe what you heard only one person say.

Second, the facilitator and, especially, the note-taker (the person who will fill out the following pages) should gently but continuously remind themselves to keep their biases in check. In this role, your focus is on describing what was said as comprehensively as possible. One way to do this is to be sure that what is being written in the expanded notes reflects both the note-taker's and facilitator's perceptions about what was said. If time permits, the facilitator should review and provide feedback on what the note-taker has written before the expanded notes are submitted.

If possible, submit the expanded notes in typed form. These are the notes that will be reviewed by those responsible for writing an account of what was said during the small group sessions in the diocese, so it would be helpful if those reading your notes did not have to contend with penmanship issues. In some cases, however, those reviewing the submitted expanded notes may want more information, so we are also asking you to submit the jot notes for your session.¹ Both sets of notes should be submitted to the parish or group synod coordinator within two days after the completion of the small group sessions.

¹We do not expect notes to be typed.

EXPANDED NOTES

for Note-Takers



Name of parish/group and number (e.g., Sacred Heart Coronado, small group #1)

EXPANDED REPORT FOR QUESTION #1:

“Tell us about a meaningful experience you or someone close to you had when participating in the Eucharist.”

EXPANDED NOTES

for Note-Takers



Name of parish/group and number (e.g., Sacred Heart Coronado, small group #1):

EXPANDED REPORT FOR QUESTION #2:

“Tell us about a challenge you or someone close to you experienced related to the Eucharist.”

EXPANDED NOTES

for Note-Takers



Name of parish/group and number (e.g., Sacred Heart Coronado, small group #1):

EXPANDED REPORT FOR QUESTION #3:

“As you leave this experience, how can you be the living presence of Jesus in your parish and community?”

COVER SHEET

Parish/Group Synod Coordinator



COVER SHEET FOR COORDINATOR

This cover sheet should be completed by the parish/group synod coordinator. It will be the cover for all of the small group data collection sheets completed by the note-takers.

This sheet, along with the small group data collection sheets and jot notes, should be submitted in pdf format to the Diocese of San Diego to this email: synod@sdcatholic.org no later than November 22, 2023.

All of these sheets are available to download at [sdccatholic.org/communicationresources](https://www.sdcatholic.org/communicationresources).

Parish/Group: _____

Parish or Group Synod Coordinator: _____

Date (s) of Small Group Sessions: _____

Number of Participants: _____

Additional comments from the synod coordinator: