

Reflections on the **Synod on the Amazon**



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Small Group Spiritual Conversations with “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology”: Preparatory Document of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazon Region

Welcome!

This October 2019, a special Synod of Bishops will gather to reflect on the theme “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology.” In preparation for this event, we invite you to join with the People of God living in the Amazon, the Church, and others all around the world in discovering through prayer, spiritual conversation and discernment how you can also contribute in your context to a renewed vision and set of actions on issues related to the Amazon.

This is a small group process combining personal prayer and three sessions of group spiritual conversation, based on the Preparatory Document that can be found online here:

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/08/180608a.html>.

This journey is meant to be an accompaniment to your reading of this document, with the three-fold purpose of:

1. Seeing the Identity and Cries of the Pan-Amazonia
2. Discerning Towards a Pastoral and Ecological Conversion
3. Acting on New Paths for a Church with an Amazonian Face

As Teilhard de Chardin says, “We are spiritual beings having a human experience!” As a spiritual people, we want to open our eyes, ears, and hearts to the promptings and invitations of the Holy Spirit and respond authentically, according to God’s Love and Care for all.

This booklet is composed of:

- Guidelines for Personal Prayer and Small Group Spiritual Conversations
- Facilitator’s Guidelines for Small Group Spiritual Conversations
- Part 1 Personal Prayer sheet
- Part 2 Personal Prayer sheet
- Part 3 Personal Prayer sheet

Share Your Group Actions!

The document for the Synod on the Amazon is organized using the social inquiry approach of “See, Judge/Discern, Act,” and so each small group session is focused on one of these three areas. At the end of the third session, groups are invited to share their actions on the website for the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM):

<https://catholicclimatemovement.global/amazon-synod/>. These actions may be quite diverse at either an individual or group level. For example, lifestyle choices, prayer services, education, ecological initiatives, pastoral activities, advocacy, and networking are all potential worthwhile



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actions. Whatever the action, the significance is in the **discernment** process that identifies specific, concrete outward action. This is because **discernment** is the response believed to be prompted by the Holy Spirit not merely human will!

Background

In anticipation of the upcoming Synod on the Amazon, the Steering Committee of GCCM was enthusiastic about engaging in this worldwide reflection with the Church and finding ways to make impactful contributions. For this, Mauricio Lopez CVX, the Executive Secretary of REPAM and the sole lay member on the Council for the Synod on the Amazon, strongly encouraged a discernment process—both personal and communal. So, the GCCM working group for the Synod on the Amazon developed this process of personal prayer and small group spiritual conversations over three sessions. The process was very well received by GCCMs Steering Committee, and many of GCCMs partners encouraged GCCM to share this process with its global members and beyond.

Acknowledgments

Members of the GCCM Steering Committee: Ann Marie Brennan (Christian Life Community), Marianne Comfort (Sisters of Mercy), Amy Echeverria (Columbans & Chair GCCM Board), Christina Leano (GCCM), Jacqui Remond (GCCM Oceania), Alirio Caceres Aguirre (D.P.), Fabian Campos (GCCM), Fr. John Leydon (Columbans), Sr. Sheila Kinsey (USIG), Daniel Hale (CAFOD), José Aguto (Catholic Climate Covenant).

Sr. Laurence Loubières, xmcj (Xavière sister, director of the Service for Discernment in Common of the Jesuits in Canada.)

Fr. Trevor Scott S.J., Jesuit Province of Canada



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Guidelines for Personal Prayer and Small Group Spiritual Conversations

"Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology":

Preparatory Document of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazon Region, 08.06.2018

Invitation to Participate

We invite you to join with the Church around the world through a process of personal and group reflection of seeing, discerning and acting on issues impacting the Amazon region as well as other biomes and which have universal messages and implications for everyone worldwide.

We hope that if you choose to participate in this process that you will commit to:

- Regular prayer periods with the preparatory document; and
- Attendance at the three small group sessions of spiritual conversations.
(In the event it may not be possible to participate in all 3 sessions, you may submit your reflections to your small group in writing.)

After completing this process, your group is invited to share the insights and actions that you have discerned together on the website for the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM): <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/amazon-synod/> These actions may be quite diverse at either an individual or group level, for example, lifestyle choices, prayer services, education, ecological initiatives, pastoral activities, advocacy, networking, etc. Whatever the action, the significant step is the discerning process. This is because the process of spiritual conversations or dialogue for discernment inspires responses believed to be prompted by the Holy Spirit!

Personal Prayer

In preparation for each of the three sessions, you will be provided with a prayer sheet consisting of texts from the preparatory document, sacred scripture, and guidance for prayer.

We recommend that you divide up the text and scripture over the days that you pray, ideally every day as part of this program. Allow yourself at least one-half hour to contemplate the selected reading.

You can use the prayer sheet or a process of *Lectio Divina* focusing on a portion of the text that you want to pray over. *Lectio Divina* or Sacred Reading is a way to slowly and prayerfully read a text to discern God's message for you through the words. When doing *Lectio Divina* you read the same text several times, meditatively.

Lectio Divina

3 readings

- 1st Reading: Listen for the stirrings and inner movements of the Holy Spirit within you. What *words or phrases* especially touch your heart? What specifically is moving you in the preparatory document?
- 2nd Reading: Enter the passage again. What *point strikes you most powerfully*? What *emotions* do you have about it? Why is that the case? *Where in your life* today is God speaking to you on the issues being described in the preparatory document? (Be specific.)
- 3rd Reading: Receive what Christ has for you today. What do you sense God might be saying to you in relation to the issues and insights being described? What is your *personal invitation* from the Lord? What do you feel drawn to engage in?
- Record significant points and ones that you may wish to share with your group.

The regular practice of prayer will be an important contribution to the groups' spiritual conversation, allowing the Holy Spirit to flow and infuse the process!

Group Format: Spiritual Conversations

The small group will meet 3 times to engage in spiritual conversations.

In the spiritual conversations, in the midst of the group of 2 or more gathered in Christ's name, the wonder of God is often revealed! Spiritual conversation helps to become aware of the way in which God is inviting the group and its members to align their thinking and acting with the Spirit's work in the world.

Three Rounds of Sharing

Each session of spiritual conversation will have three rounds of sharing.

First Round. In turn, each one shares the fruit of their personal prayer, using the notes taken after their prayer periods. During this first round, people do NOT react by speaking to what is being shared, except to ask for a clarification. Active listening is the way each person is invited to participate in this conversation, unless it is your turn to share.

Silent Reflection. Consider those feelings and movements I experienced as I listened to others. What feelings arose within me? When did I feel in harmony with others? Where did I feel resistance? Did I sense greater clarity on a particular point? Did I discover something new?



Second Round. Share the significant point(s) from your silent reflection.

At the end of the second round: Try to name the theme that is arising among you.

Third Round. Offer a brief prayer that expresses the lived and shared experience in this session.

Spiritual Conversations: Recommendations for fruitful dialogue

To promote sacred listening and expression during our sharing, here are a few recommendations:

- The main attitude is respectful, grateful and prayerful listening.
- Describe YOUR prayer EXPERIENCE in a short, succinct, and clear way (2 minutes max).
- Speak in the first person "I" and not in the third person
- This is not a place to give a homily, convert others to your point of view, impose your agenda on others. This is also not a place to solve other people's problems.
- Each person speaks in turn, without interruption. Each is an "expert of their own experience."
- Silence between speakers is appropriate, and sometimes necessary.
- Silence does not mean simply waiting for the other person to finish speaking so I can speak, but silently and prayerfully listening to what the speaker is genuinely saying.
- Be considerate about what is confidential. This means: do not quote anyone outside the group, except with the consent of that person.

More Resources:

- REPAM, the Catholic Church's Pan-Amazonian Network has put together a wonderful popular version of the Preparatory document here: <http://redamazonica.org/wp-content/uploads/DP-En.pdf>
- Learn more how your community can take action around the Amazon with the Global Catholic Climate Movement: <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/amazon-synod/>



Facilitators Guide

for Small Group Spiritual Conversations with

"Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology": Preparatory Document of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazon Region, 08.06.2018

We are delighted that you will facilitate a small group to pray with the theme "Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology." Here are some guidelines to assist your small group process.

Logistics

This small group process takes place over three sessions of spiritual conversations, with participants committing to personal prayer in between each of the sessions. Each group session can take between 1 to 2 hours. A schedule for a session of 1 hour and 15 minutes is offered below. Groups may choose to have a pre-session to review the program and process for prayer and spiritual conversations.

Timing of sessions: The schedule of the sessions is up to the group. The group can meet weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly for a total of three sessions.

Group location: Groups can choose to meet in person, over the telephone, or via video conference.

Facilitator(s): Before beginning the first session, determine if there will be one facilitator, or if this position will rotate. The role of facilitator is to welcome the group at the beginning of each session and guide the dialogue as a spiritual conversation. This person may also choose to read the recommendations for spiritual conversations shared below at the first session to help promote sacred listening and expression. Facilitators will also serve as timekeepers to ensure that in the available time, everyone has the space to express themselves and that the group may be able to do at least the first two rounds of sharing.

Spiritual Conversations: Recommendations for fruitful dialogue

To promote sacred listening and expression during the conversations, here are a few recommendations to share with the group. They are also included in the participants prayer guideline sheet.

- The main attitude is respectful, grateful and prayerful listening.
- Describe YOUR prayer EXPERIENCE in a short, succinct, and clear way (2 minutes max).
- Speak in the first person "I" and not in the third person
- This is not a place to give a homily, convert others to your point of view, impose your agenda on others. This is also not a place to solve other people's problems.



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- Each person speaks in turn, without interruption. Each is an “expert of their own experience.”
- Silence between speakers is appropriate, and sometimes necessary.
- Silence does not mean simply waiting for the other person to finish speaking so I can speak, but silently and prayerfully listening to what the speaker is genuinely saying.
- Be considerate about what is confidential. This means: do not quote anyone outside the group, except with the consent of that person.

Before the Dialogue: First Spiritual Conversation

Before the first spiritual conversation, share the Guidelines for Discernment with the group, as well as the Personal Prayer Part 1. There is a suggested schedule of praying with the texts over a period of 6 days if your group sessions are weekly. This is a recommended format. Please encourage your participants to pray with the texts in the order and fashion that works best for them. You may wish to schedule a pre-session meeting to review this process.

Structure of Group Session of Dialogue for a Spiritual Conversation

Each session of spiritual conversation will have three rounds of sharing. Here is a suggested structure for a group that meets for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

6:00 pm Welcome and Opening Prayer

6:05 [First Session only] Introductions (if this is a new group)

[First Session only] Reminder of Guidelines for Spiritual Conversations

6:10 First Round: Invite each person to share the fruit of their personal prayer, using the notes taken after their personal prayer periods. During this first round, people are invited NOT to react to what is being shared, except to ask for a clarification.

6:25 After everyone has shared, invite the group to enter into a period of silent reflection. You can then pose the following questions for reflection: *Consider those feelings and movements I experienced as I listened to others. What feelings arose within me? When did I feel in harmony with others? Where did I feel resistance? Did I sense greater clarity on a particular point? Did I discover something new?*

6:30 Second Round. After the second round, invite each person to share the significant point(s) from their silent reflection.

6:45 Themes/Consensus. At the end of the second round: invite the group to name any themes that may be emerging or points of consensus that arise from listening as the group. If there are no contributions, you might help this process by offering any initial prompts about a theme/consensus.

7:00 Third Round. Invite each person to offer a brief prayer that expresses the lived and shared experience in the session.

7:10 Closing: The facilitator can offer any closing words. S/he may also choose to lead the group in a closing prayer such as 'Laudato si' a Prayer for Our Earth' or an Our Father.

7:15 End

Share Your Group Actions!

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More Resources:

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- Learn more how your community can take action around the Amazon with the Global Catholic Climate Movement: <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/amazon-synod/>

Your Feedback

We would be delighted to hear any feedback you may have about this initiative or this dialogue process. Please send GCCM a note at annmariebrennan@yahoo.com.



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Personal Prayer on Part 1 Seeing: Identity and Cries of the Pan-Amazonia

Purpose

The purpose of Part I of the preparatory document for the *Synod on the Amazon* is to raise your awareness and understanding of the realities in the Amazon.

Through personal prayer with the texts in Part I, you can deepen your reflection and release any insights or feelings you may have in relation to this unique biogeographic community on Earth. Note those points felt strongly in your prayer.

Sharing the fruits of your prayer with your small group in spiritual conversation allows for even greater clarification, insights, and inspiration.



Texts

Select a portion of the following texts for each prayer period, completing all the texts over the course of several days and before the next small group session. Please feel free to pray with the suggested Sacred Scripture or text in a way that works best for you. One way to pray with the texts of the Preparatory Documents is below: Visualize, Asking for Grace, Guidance for Prayer, Conversation with God, Closing Prayer, and Recording Points. You may also choose to use *Lectio Divina* to pray with the texts as described in the Guidelines.

Below are the sections of the Preparatory Document and some Scripture texts organized in a suggested personal prayer schedule, however, please pray with the texts in a way that works best for you and your group gatherings.

Part I of the Preparatory Document: Seeing. Identity and Cries of the Pan-Amazonia

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/08/180608a.html>

Prayer Period 1: Moses at the Burning Bush, *Exodus 3:1 – 12*

Prayer Period 2: Preamble, Par 1. The Territory

Prayer Period 3: Par 2. Socio-Cultural Diversity, Par 3. Identity of Indigenous People

Prayer Period 4: Par 4. Church's Historical Memory, Par 5. Justice and the Rights of Peoples

Prayer Period 5: Par 6. Spirituality and Wisdom

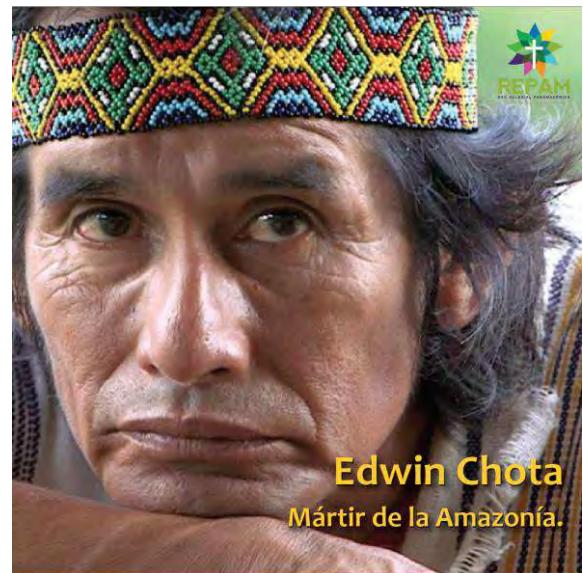
Prayer Period 6: The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus, *Mark 10:46-52*, Questionnaire, Part 1, #1-9

Guidance for Prayer

Visualize

Before reading the text:

I imagine myself in the Amazon forest walking alongside the indigenous people and with Jesus, accompanying us.





Asking for Grace

I ask God for the grace to see with my eyes and heart the experience of the Amazonian people and all creation in this territory today.



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Guidance for Prayer

- Slowly and prayerfully read the portion of the text from the Synod on the Amazon Preparatory Document which you have selected for your prayer.
- Imagine the scene:
 - the landscape, the sounds, the vegetation, the water, the animals...
 - the Indigenous communities living in the Amazon basin, their relationship with the land, water, animals, their culture and wisdom
 - the logging, mining, agriculture and other forms of exploitation of the Amazon basin currently going on
 - the way the indigenous communities experience the land and its current exploitation
 - the way the Church is trying to be present to these realities
- What do you SEE?
- Contemplate the way Jesus looks on the scene of the Amazonian peoples and the realities of their lives today. What does Jesus SEE?
- How is Jesus moved by what is seen?

Conversation with God

- Dialogue with God about what you have experienced in your prayer
- How is God responding to you in return?

Closing prayer

End your personal prayer session with a Laudato Si' Prayer, the Our Father or any prayer that rises up within you at that time.

Recording Points for Spiritual Conversation Session

- In preparation for the spiritual conversation, write 2 or 3 points that you felt strongly in your prayer and plan to share with your small group at the next session.

Photo credits: REPAM

Personal Prayer on Part 2

Discernment: Towards a Pastoral and Ecological Conversion

Purpose

Part 2 of the preparatory document for the Synod on the Amazon invites us to be open to conversion—ecologically, pastorally, spiritually, culturally, socially.

Through personal prayer with the texts in Part 2, you can deepen your reflection and notice movements within that highlight particular hopes, responses, paths, as well as invitations of conversion for you. Note any points felt strongly in your prayer.

Sharing the fruits of your prayer with your small group in spiritual conversation allows for confirmation of those areas of conversion and identification of areas still needed for conversion.



Texts

Select a portion of the following texts for each prayer period, completing all the texts over the course of several days. Please feel free to pray with the scripture or text in a way that works best for you. Here is a suggested schedule.

Part II: Discernment: Towards a Pastoral and Ecological Conversion

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/08/180608a.html>

Proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus in the Amazonia

Prayer Period 1: Christ's mission in the world - John 18: 33 - 37

Prayer Period 2: Par 7. Biblical-theological dimension

Prayer Period 3: Par 8. Social dimension

Prayer Period 4: Par 9. Ecological Dimension

Prayer Period 5: Par 10. Sacramental Dimension, Par 11. Ecclesial-missionary dimension

Prayer Period 6: Questionnaire, Part 2, # 1 to 6



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Asking for Grace

- I ask God for the grace of openness to the Holy Spirit in discerning how best to accompany and care for our brothers, our sisters, and all creation in the Amazonia.

Guidance for Prayer

Read the selected text three times. Consider these questions as you read.

1. First Reading of the text: What word(s), idea(s), or phrase(s) stand out for you?
2. Second Reading of the text: What is Jesus saying to you?
3. Third Reading of the text: What call or invitation of the Holy Spirit do you hear?



Conversation with God

- Dialogue with God about what you have experienced in your prayer
- How is God responding to you in return?

Closing prayer

End your personal prayer session with a Laudato Si' prayer, an Our Father or any prayer that rises up within you at that time.



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Recording Points for Spiritual Conversation Session

- In preparation for the spiritual conversation, write 2 or 3 points that you felt strongly in your prayer and plan to share with your small group.

Photo credits: REPAM

Personal Prayer on Part 3

Action: New Paths for a Church with An Amazonia Face

Purpose

Part 3 of the preparatory document for the Synod on the Amazon invites us to action. As you prayerfully read and reflect on the various dimensions of action, even if you do not live in the Amazon region, consider the possible actions that you or your group may take that would positively impact the future of the Amazon (and similar biomes on Earth) and the lives of those living in the region.

Refer to the guide below for personal prayer to deepen your reflection and to release any insights/ thoughts/ feelings you may have in relation to this unique biogeographic community on Earth. Note those points felt strongly during your prayer. At the end of the small group session for Part 3, as the group finds consensus, you may share insights, experiences of this process, and decisions on concrete action on the GCCM website at: <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/amazon-synod/>



Texts

Select a portion of the following texts for each prayer period, completing all the texts over the course of several days.

Please feel free to pray with the scripture or text in a way that works best for you.

Part III: Action: New Paths for a Church with an Amazonian Face

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/08/180608a.html>

Prayer Period 1: Par 12. Church with an Amazonian face

Prayer Period 2: Par 13. Prophetic Dimension



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Prayer Period 3: Par 14. Ministry with an Amazonian face

Prayer Period 4: Par 15. New Paths

Prayer Period 5: Holy Ground - Exodus 3:5, Encounter with Jesus by the Sea - John 21

Prayer Period 6: Questionnaire, Part III, # 1 to 14

Asking for Grace

I ask God for the grace to better understand which face of Christ is the Church in Amazonia called to embody?

Guidance for

Prayer

Suggestion: Read the selected text three times. Consider these questions as you read.

1. First Reading of the text:
What word(s), idea(s), or phrase(s) stand out for you?
2. Second Reading of the text:
What is Jesus saying to you?
3. Third Reading of the text:
What call or invitation of the Holy Spirit do you hear?



Conversation with God

- Dialogue with God about what you have experienced in your prayer.
- How is God responding to you in return?



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Closing prayer

Close with "A Prayer for Our Earth" by Pope Francis in Laudato Si:

<https://catholicclimatemovement.global/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Aprayerforourearth.pdf>

Or, you may close with an Our Father or whatever prayer rises up within you at the time.

Recording Points for Spiritual Conversation Session

- In preparation for the spiritual conversation, write 2 or 3 points that you felt strongly in your prayer and plan to share with your small group.

Action

Note that in the third small group session, members will be sharing the fruits of their prayer and also specific action points that they may commit themselves to as individuals, families, communities. We encourage you to share insights, experiences, and/or actions on the website of the Global Catholic Climate Movement: <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/amazon-synod/>

Photo credits: REPAM



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