

Ignatian Examen for the Continental Stage of the Synod on Synodality 2021-2024

By Ariell Simon, M.Div.

Let us open in prayer...In the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

God, we ask that you enter into this conversation with us [tonight/this day]. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, which guides and knits us together as your Church. Amen.

We gather together to continue to walk this Synodal path of dialogue and discernment. The Synod leadership has selected Isaiah 52:4 as a scripture to light our way in this stage of the process: “Spread out your tent clothes unsparingly, lengthen your ropes and make firm your pegs.” This exhortation comes from the words of the prophet Isaiah, a message from God to the people of Israel promising a hopeful future. In verse 4, Isaiah continues, “Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated.” The prophet speaks to our very human urge to retreat and retract in the face of uncertainty and change. Yet, this scripture calls us to live in the expansiveness of God’s promises. Instead of allowing fear to close us off, God invites us to stretch out our tent, expand our reach, and open wide our doors as we trust in the faithfulness of our God. In order to engage in this conversation, let’s enter that mindset together through an examen.

To prepare for this examen, please find a comfortable and relaxed position, close your eyes, [feel free to turn off your screen if that will help you enter into a space or posture of prayer] ... and use these next few moments to focus on just your breathing... notice your heartbeat, any subtle movements in your body, and allow yourself to simply be in awe of the gift of Life... As thoughts, concerns, or distractions come up during this sacred time, gently acknowledge them, and let them pass. (pause)

- Think back through the past year, to the voices that you have heard through the Synod process – perhaps at meetings you have attended, in documents you have read, in prayers you have shared with others. (pause) Think of what you have heard from the Working Document for the Continental Stage. What themes resonated with your own experiences? (pause)
- What perspectives were new or illuminating to you? (pause)
- Where have you experienced consolation or hope in this process? (pause)
- What tensions or divergences emerged as you listened to others? (pause) Where have you felt fear or defensiveness arise within yourself? (pause)
- Think back to the words of the prophet Isaiah. What might it mean to expand our tent in this process? Who needs to be included? What ropes need to be lengthened, and what pegs or foundations need to be made firm to support this expansion? (pause)

Now, allow these memories and thoughts to fade away gently. Check in with yourself – how are you feeling? Do you feel hope or fear? Abundance or scarcity? Whatever it is – offer those feelings up to God (pause)

Finally, as we come back into the present, consider:

- What feels important for you to bring to this conversation today? (pause)
- What grace might you need to share and listen with your whole heart?

We now close our Examen with a prayer...

God, who created our Church as a body with many diverse parts, we ask that you give us the wisdom and grace to hear and honor one another today. Expand our tent, open our hearts to one another, and strengthen your Church in service of the world. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.