



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

Ecumenical Listening Session

Thank you for participating in this first phase of the upcoming Synod of Bishops. The theme for this synod is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.” Synodality expresses the nature of the Church as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Pope Francis has invited everyone to participate in a dialogue with one another and with the worldwide Catholic Church. In this phase, we are asking all Catholic parishes, schools and organizations in our diocese to gather, listen and discern what it means to be Church and where the Holy Spirit is calling us.

This is a process of communal discernment, rather than individual discernment. As such, we are called to journey through this process together. During this listening process, we are inviting everyone to engage in reflection and the practice of Spiritual Conversations using St. Ignatius of Loyola's great prayer of Examen, Scripture meditation or less formal ways of sharing. We will reflect back on our experiences, both collectively and individually, and then project forward and ask “Where is the Holy Spirit leading us as a diocese?”

Each individual matters and each of our experiences are valid and in need of ears to listen. Nobody is excluded - all are welcome. We are on this journey of faith together. In seeking where God has been beckoning to us, we also look to where that same call harkens us forward into a new and vibrant way of being Church together.



Catholic Diocese
of Cleveland

LET'S PREPARE

The listening and discernment experience



Time/Duration: 2 – 2.5 hours

Number of participants: Maximum 5-7 per group

Suggested location: Anywhere quiet

Welcome participants. Introduce yourself and invite everyone to introduce themselves to their fellow group members seated at their table. Identify a facilitator and notetaker for each table group. Briefly present the “Respectful Communication Guidelines” below.

Respectful Communication Guidelines*

R: take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel, and speak with words others can hear and understand

E: use EMPATHETIC listening, not just words but also feelings being expressed, nonverbal language including silence

S: be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

P: PONDER on what you hear and feel before you speak

E: EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C: keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T: TRUST the process because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong but to experience true dialogue

LET'S GATHER & PRAY TOGETHER

You may like to say together the prayer provided below or just speak to God from your heart.

We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name. With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts; Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it. We are weak and sinful; do not let us promote disorder. Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path nor partiality influence our actions. Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life and not stray from the way of truth and what is right. All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place and time, in the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever. Amen.



*Retrieved on November 3, 2022 from <https://www.usccb.org/committees/cultural-diversity-church/bicm-appendices>.

LET'S REFLECT

The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey. Invite participants to reflect on their relationship with members of other Christian traditions and denominations. You may want to use the following questions:



- What relationships does our faith community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations?
- What do we share and how do we journey together?
- What fruits have we drawn from walking together? What are the difficulties?

LET'S SHARE & LISTEN

Anyone in the group can begin, and the person on their left is the next person to share. If that person is not ready to share, move on to the next person but remember to come back around. Continue clockwise around the circle, until each person in the group who wishes to share has had their turn. Then move onto the next round of sharing and listening until all three rounds are completed. When others are speaking, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.



Invite each person in the circle to take 2 minutes to share with the group the fruits from their reflection.

Following the discussion, reflect for a couple of minutes in silence.



Invite each person in the circle to take 2 minutes to share with the group from their reflection on what they have heard.

What have you heard the Spirit saying in the voices of the group?

This time when sharing, do not add anything new to the conversation – just your response to what you have already heard.



What seems to be resonating in the conversation and what the Spirit is asking of us?

How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?



Spiritual Conversation process adapted from Plenary Council 2020, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. Retrieved on October 22, 2020 from https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Final-Draft-Listen-Discern_2-Bleed.pdf

LET'S THINK LOCALLY



Take some time now, as a group, to discuss any ideas which might be acted upon locally, in your own lives, in parishes, communities or schools or in other parts of your local neighborhood. Think about who you can collaborate with locally. You may want to provide participants several post-it notes to write down their ideas as they reflect.

When others are sharing their ideas, remember to listen with an open and humble heart. You can ask the person sharing questions about their idea for understanding, but be sure to resist critique.

What ideas do we have that can nourish our local faith community?

Identify 2 or 3 emerging actions. Remember, these actions need to be:

- clear
- stated as a positive
- as specific as possible
- a real action (practical, achievable and measurable)

Reflect

Take some time to reflect and pray individually on the emerging actions the group has identified. Ask God for a feeling of consolation – a feeling of peace or fullness of your heart about your decision if it is indeed where the Holy Spirit is guiding you.

LET'S GIVE THANKS



Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

-Holy Spirit Prayer of Saint Augustine

LET'S RESPOND

The small group facilitator and notetaker will meet immediately after to complete the Listening Session Recorder Form and submit it to the Synod contact person for your parish, school or organization.



ECUMENICAL LISTENING SESSION RECORDER FORM

Date: _____

Location: _____

Round 1. Share your experiences

What fruits have we drawn from walking together?

Round 2. Re-read your experiences in greater depth

What have you heard the Spirit saying in the voices of the group?



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