



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

Facilitator Guide

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

People

- Identify a skilled facilitator to lead the conversation. The main responsibilities of the facilitator are to:
 - Make everyone feel welcome. Ensure a safe space by reminding everyone to be respectful and kind to one another.
 - Gently invite everyone to participate, without forcing people to speak if they have nothing to say. Keep confidentiality.
 - Avoid dominating the group conversation – or allowing anyone else to dominate.
 - Stress that the sessions are about listening to and learning from one another.
- Identify someone to serve as notetaker. The role of the notetaker is to:
 - Capture the consensus of the group and themes that come up throughout the discussion.
 - Record significant moments and breakthrough ideas. You may want to use notebook paper to jot down notes and then transfer main ideas to the Listening Session Recorder Form at the end of the session.
 - Keep notes brief, but include enough information so that people not present in the group will understand the essence of what occurred and what was shared.
- Identify a timekeeper to keep the process moving on schedule.
- If you are planning a large group gathering, you may want to put together a Hospitality Team to create a welcoming environment.

Space

- Prayer table with a Bible, cross, image of Mary or nativity scene, etc.
- Tables and chairs set up for small groups (5-7 people)
- Hospitality table with drinks and snacks

At each table place

- Facilitator Guide
- Participant's Guide (one per person)
- Listening Session Recorder Form (one per group)
- Extra paper to record comments
- Pens and/or pencils
- Post-it notes for participants to write down ideas to share
- Watch (no phones)
- Box of tissues
- Provide nametags, especially for those who are new
- Sign In Sheet to collect basic information about participants and to help identify potential delegates to the Diocesan Pre-synodal Gathering
- One or two Bibles (if using the Scripture Reflection)

The listening and discernment experience



- Time/Duration: 2 – 2.5 hours
- Number of participants: Maximum 5-7 per group
- Suggested location: Anywhere quiet

Session Outline

- Let's Gather & Pray Together
 - Welcome, introductions, guidelines, prayer
- Let's Reflect (Choose ONE option)
 - Option 1. Examen, page 5-6
 - Option 2. Scripture Passage, page 7
 - Option 3. Missionary Action (Narrative Approach), page 8
- Let's Share and Listen (Ask for notetaker and timekeeper)
 - Round 1 (skip if using option 2 or 3 above)
 - Round 2
 - Round 3
- Let's Think Locally
 - What are three concrete, practical steps we can take to journey together as Church?
- Let's Give Thanks
 - Closing Prayer
- Let's Respond
 - Facilitator and notetaker/recorder finalize notes and send to Synod contact person for your parish, school, or organization

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

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

LET'S GATHER & PRAY TOGETHER



Note to facilitator: Begin on time introducing the session, welcoming participants. Introduce yourself to the participants and invite participants to introduce themselves to their fellow group members seated at their table. Briefly present the “Respectful Communication Guidelines” on page 3 (Participant Guide, page 2).

Over the past couple of years, we have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic which has affected us all on a personal, local and global scale. The Church continues to struggle from the wounds caused by the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable people. Racism, intolerance and violence have fomented divisions, not only in Church and society, but even within our own families. We have experienced a continual rise in mental health needs, the effects of climate changes, and anxiety in family life. It is easy to feel discouraged. And yet, we are a people of hope. St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans, “Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer” (Romans 12:12). The story of faith is one of perseverance in the midst of struggle and points to the importance of walking together in God’s grace during turbulent times.

As we gather to listen to each other, we will notice patterns that have developed, where we see the Holy Spirit coming alive within the lives of the people, and where we see that people are still in need of God’s grace. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.” (GS, 1)

So, today, we step in the direction that Christ asks of us, and as we do, together we pray:

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.

LET'S REFLECT



Note to facilitator: This reflection is an opportunity to set the context and tone for the conversations that will take place during the "Share and Listen" section. We highly recommend using the Examen (option 1). It should be read aloud slowly and calmly, pausing briefly between each sentence. If you feel that your group will not be comfortable with this type of prayer, you may choose a Scripture meditation (option 2), or one of the conversation starters (option 3) instead. When using options 2 or 3, continue with "Share and Listen, Round 2" on page 10.

Option 1. Examen

Take some time now and find a place of comfort and peace. Relax—there is no agenda but God's right now, and God simply wants you to be here in this moment.

There are many distractions—thoughts often flow into our heads. We want to make God the centerpiece of our attention right now. It may help to close your eyes or to find a spot in the room to look at and focus your attention on. You may also wish to use your breathing to center your attention. Should you become distracted in this time—simply return to focusing your attention on the rhythm of your breathing. You can also use a sacred word as a mantra to keep focused. As an example, Jesus—Jesus—Jesus. Let the words fade away as you become more focused on the God who is waiting for you.

My voice will guide you through this process—but at any time if you wish to stay with an image or experience that you are having—feel free to stay with that and simply tune me out and tune in to what is capturing your attention.

Let's spend about a minute in quiet. Ask the Holy Spirit to be here with you as we invite God to speak to us today. *(Pause 30 seconds)*

We're going to look back today on our experience of Church. To begin, bring to mind your favorite experience of your church community. Whatever that is for you. Let it come immediately to you. When and where have you had the best experience? Savor it for a moment and notice it again in your imagination. Stay with your favorite experience looking at it for some time. *(Pause 60 seconds)*

Slowly, now let your memory fade away, offering your gratitude to God for that experience. We're now going to change the imaginative scenery—but first we need to ask for God's help. We ask the Holy Spirit to give us eyes to really see—we pray that we can see the truth, to see things as they are and not how we would like them to be—to look at our moments where we were true disciples of Christ and the moments where both we and others fell short of that. Take some time now to ask for this gift of seeing things as they are from the Holy Spirit, the giver of truth. *(Pause 30 seconds)*

Now we are ready to look back on our lives. Think back to your first memory of Church. Whatever it was—do not judge these moments—just observe the moments that you have chosen. Ask yourself: How do I look? How am I behaving? What are my feelings in these moments? Stay with those first moments now for some time. *(Pause 60 seconds)*

Jesus prayed that we all may be one. To be in communion with one another. When have you truly felt connected to the Church? When have you most felt like you were a member of the Body of Christ? Who helped you feel most connected to the Church? What have been the highlights of your life in your faith community? How did you get involved? Stay with these moments for some time now and notice your feelings. *(Pause 60 seconds)*

Let these moments fade away slowly now. Christ calls us to participate in Church and society: to be His hands, His feet, to go where God needs us to be. Where in your life has God called you to be most present, to be most alive, to be your best self? Perhaps when you serve those less fortunate; maybe when you care for your family, teach them to love God and live as faithful Christians; maybe when you find ways to engage in your community and advocate for the voiceless; perhaps when you work to make others feel comfortable, appreciated, and welcomed. Where have you participated in bringing Christ's life and love to the world? Note any changes in your relationships, or any shifts in your prayer life as you watch the ways you have participated in Church life—maybe as a child, a teen, a young adult, today? *(Pause 30-60 seconds)*

Finally, is there any hurt in your experience? Being part of the Church is a human experience and Christ shared in our humanity. When did you not feel welcome in our Church community? Who in the Church may have wounded or disappointed you with their actions or their failures to act? Look gently on these moments, but notice your feelings at that time. *(Pause 30 seconds)*

Now, look at the truth of your life and allow yourself to see the times you regret. The times when you failed to live as Christ called you to live. The times you didn't make a welcome space for others—when you failed to step up when you were needed—when your sin led you away from being the person you were called to be. *(Pause 30 seconds)*

Allow these moments to fade away gently, and ask yourself, how am I feeling? Do I feel more gratitude or resentment? Eagerness or anxiety? Whatever it is—offer those feelings to God. Remember that the one who loves us is here now with us. Sit and converse with Jesus. Offer him the moment that touched you most deeply and listen to what he says in response. Express gratitude for all that has been given to you. Ask for what you need most right now and what you feel the Church most needs right now. Rest with Jesus for a moment now and be grateful for the time that he always has to listen to you and for his boundless love and mercy. Speak and listen to Jesus for a while. *(Pause 60 seconds)*

Let your conversation with Jesus begin to come to a close. How are you feeling? Where might God be calling us now? What is our mission now, Lord? What one action might we want to move towards tomorrow? Make a firm, but gentle resolution to do so. Where does God most need you in his Church today? *(Pause 30-60 seconds)*

And as we bring our time of examen to a close, we notice that we are breathing—in and out—we are alive, and in this room—slowly we begin to notice our gratitude for this time. What are you most grateful for?

As we close our time, we end with our prayer to our loving God. Our Father...

Option 2. Scripture Reflection

Note to facilitator: Choose ONE of the following Scripture passages and lead the small group in Lectio Divina. Before you begin, ask for three people to be readers. If no one is comfortable reading, the facilitator can also be the reader, but try to get at least one or two other voices.

- Acts 2:1-11 (Coming of the Holy Spirit)
- 1 Cor 12:4-11 (Spiritual Gifts)
- 1 Cor 12:12-26 (One Body, Many Parts)
- Lk 24:13-35 (Road to Emmaus)
- Mt 5:13-16 (Salt and Light)
- Lk 8:4-15 (Parable of the Sower)

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina, or Divine Reading, is a slow reading and praying of a Scripture passage, allowing God to speak to you through His Word. It isn't a study of Scripture, but rather a listening to what God has to say to you today. We will listen to a passage being read three times. We will be asked to listen to what words or phrases speak to us and what feelings arise. We will reflect more deeply on that, and then listen as God calls us into action.

READ

- As the Scripture passage is read out loud, listen for one word or phrase that stands out to you. We will share that with each other after the passage is read. *Have someone read the passage slowly.*
- **Sharing:** What one word or phrase stood out to you? Please just share that word or phrase. We will not share any more at this time. *Anyone may pass at any time.*

REFLECT

- We are going to listen to the Scripture passage again. Please listen for what stands out, and reflect on what God might be trying to tell you. *Have someone else read the same passage slowly.*
- **Sharing:** Briefly share what you heard in the passage and how God might be speaking to you. What feelings are arising within you? *Anyone may pass at any time.*

RESPOND

- This final time as we listen to this passage, ask the Holy Spirit what God might be asking you to do. Is God calling you to action? *Have someone else read the same passage prayerfully.*
- **Sharing:** Share what you think God is asking you to do. *Anyone may pass at any time.*

REST

- *Invite everyone to some quiet time and close this section with a prayer, such as the Glory Be.*

Move to page 10, "LET'S SHARE AND LISTEN," and continue with "Share and Listen, Round 2."

Adapted from <https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/prayer/personal-prayer-life/different-ways-to-pray/lectio-divina/>.

Option 3. Missionary Action (Narrative Approach)

The synodal process is an opportunity to carefully listen to others and the Holy Spirit as we dream and discern how we are called to live as and be Church. During this process, it is important to not only connect and listen to those in the Church, but also those who are, for one reason or another, on the periphery, away from the Church, or disconnected. Their voices and input can be vitally important for our efforts and must be included. To this end, we encourage participants after the listening and discernment experience to reach out to someone who is away from and/or not connected to the Church. This Option 3 will allow participants to experience the missionary action with each other before they are sent into the community. Below are two suggestions for conversation starters.



- **One's life story.** Invite the person to share their story and view of faith. You may wish to use the following questions: *What has been your experience of God and faith in your life? How does the Church play into your story?* Care should be taken to consider what paths these stories open up for the parish, school or organization as we re-envision our journey as Church. In light of what you've heard, what steps does the Spirit invite us to take?
- **Finding the right words.** Invite participants to share words evoked when you say Church and "walking together with Jesus". Participants can be encouraged to explain why they responded the way they did. In light of what you've heard, what steps does the Spirit invite us to take?

While this experience can be uncomfortable, sharing the love of Christ must become part of the day-to-day interactions of a missionary disciple, especially to those on the periphery, as we actively listen to and journey with one another. A synodal Church must become comfortable with the uncomfortable. Our conversations are not about converting people or trying to get them to join anything. Rather, we are asking for their insight and perspective. Using this input, we can re-envision our own role within a missionary church on the journey. Below are a few considerations as you reach out to those who may not be connected to the Church.

- **Be hospitable and gracious** when you approach someone and ask to speak with them. Allow enough time for sharing. Do not rush anything.
- **Be clear** on why you would like to gather their insight for the Synod process. It is about listening to others and learning from each other's experiences, insights, and dreams.
- **Simply listen** with an open heart. Use the questions and prompts provided to aid your conversation. Do not add your input to their sharing or try to debate or persuade them.
- **Lead with a loving and joyful disposition** and make the conversation about their experience. Allow the conversation to flow naturally. Do not try to force any kind of response or fish for an answer.
- **Be non-judgmental** in your words, actions, and posture. Do not add "leading" questions to your consultation.
- **Offer a brief prayer** of gratitude at the end of the consultation.
- **Thank the participant** and ask if they would like to learn more about how the Church will be using the Synod process in its future visioning and planning.
- **Follow up** with the participant after a few days and thank them again for their time. Reiterate that if they would like to learn more about the Church, to connect with you.

LET'S SHARE AND LISTEN

Note to facilitator: Each small group will need a notetaker and timekeeper. Take a moment to identify volunteers. Please use the "Recorder Form" to record the participants' responses to the questions.

This practice of Spiritual Conversations is taken from the Ignatian tradition. It is a part of the communal discernment process and provides a way for groups of people to listen to God, by listening to one another. It is a way for us to listen for the voice of the Spirit.

SHARE AND LISTEN, ROUND 1

Invite each person in the circle to share aloud with the group the fruits of their individual prayer, and say how they are feeling using the lead-in statements below. Allow each person 2-3 minutes to speak.



"In my prayer today... And I feel..."

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. Remind them that when others are speaking, they should listen with an open and humble heart.

Reflect

Once everybody has shared, the whole group reflects in silence for 5 minutes. During this time, invite them to think about what they have heard the people in your group say, and ask themselves:

"What am I hearing the Holy Spirit saying to us?"

They may wish to journal, to draw or simply sit quietly with their thoughts.

**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*

SHARE AND LISTEN, ROUND 2

Invite each person in the circle to take 2 minutes to share with the group from their reflection. Ask what have they heard the Spirit saying in the voices of the group. Use these lead-in statements:



**"Listening to the Holy Spirit through the voices of this group, I have heard...
And it leaves me feeling..."**

Remind them that this time when sharing. They should not add anything new to the conversation – just their response to what they have already heard.

Reflect

Once everybody has shared, the whole group reflects in silence for 5 minutes. Invite them to think about how they are feeling and about their experience of prayer and listening today.

SHARE AND LISTEN, ROUND 3

This third round of sharing and listening is open, less structured than the previous two rounds. The purpose of open conversation is to reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation and what the Spirit is asking of us. Any person who wants to speak is invited to share. Remind them to listen deeply when someone else is speaking, and to respond to the conversation with an open and kind heart. Ask them to share their thoughts and feelings with the group in light of all they have experienced today. When sharing, they might like to begin with these words:



**"From our prayer and conversation today,
and thinking about how God is calling us
to be a Church that journeys together..."**

When the time is right, close the conversation by thanking everyone for sharing and invite them to enjoy a short break. Remember to note the time to get back together after the break.

BREAK

If there is time, take a 10–15 minute break.

LET'S THINK LOCALLY



Reflect in silence for 5 minutes

Invite participants to think about the concrete, practical steps which could be taken to move forward together as a Church. You may want to provide participants several post-it notes to write down their ideas as they reflect.

Share and Listen

Each person in the circle takes 2-3 minutes to share their ideas with the group. If you are using post-it notes, place these in the center of the group as you speak about them. 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. Remind them that when others are sharing their ideas, they should listen with an open and humble heart. They can ask the person sharing questions about their idea for understanding, but be sure to resist critique.

Group discussion, towards decision

Once everyone has shared their ideas for action, your group's task is to identify 2 or 3 emerging actions that can form the group's submission to the Synod contact person for your parish, school or organization. Below are some questions to guide your group's discernment:

**What concrete, practical steps could be taken
to move forward together as Church?**

**To what actions do we feel strongly called? In our personal life?
In our community? As a diocese?**

What is the most loving response to which the Spirit is calling us?

Write down the 2 or 3 emerging actions that have been drawn from the discussions. Remember, these actions need to be:

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

Reflect

An important part of discernment is listening to the voice of God within each one of us. This means we need to take notice of how we are feeling. Before submitting your group's response, invite them to 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 their heart about the decision if it is indeed where the Holy Spirit is guiding us.

LET'S GIVE THANKS



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

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.

Encourage participants to carry out a missionary action and have a conversation with at least one person that they know who is disconnected from the Church. *See Option 3 - Missionary Action for instructions (Participant Guide, "Let's Respond", page 5).* Review the key points of consideration and respond to participants' questions. Remind them to submit their notes to the synod contact person at their parish, school or organization once the missionary action is completed.

Finally, encourage everyone to continue the conversation with the leaders at your parish, school and Catholic organization and share their thoughts about the experience and conclusions from the listening and discernment process.