



# Encounters in the Peripheries

Invitation to Go Forth and Listen

Pope Francis has called this Synod for the purpose of focusing on synodality – on how we are “traveling together” as pilgrims on our way to heaven – in order to become a Church that listens well.

Since together we are the People of God, the Church is much better equipped to make pastoral decisions that reflect the will of God if it has first listened to the voices of its members – all of its members. Pope Francis reminds us that we have a special responsibility to seek out the voices of those who are easily and often overlooked in Catholic discussion and decision-making – the voices from the periphery.

***You play a key role in seeking out those who would otherwise not be heard!***

Who do you know or who do you have contact with who is least likely to participate in your local synodal process? Consider reaching out to them.

Are you willing to go further out of your comfort zone? Consider pairing up with someone else from the parish to encounter someone you don't already know who lives on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical or existential peripheries of our world.

The main purpose of this encounter is *to listen* and for that person to experience being listened to. The secondary purpose is to bring their voice to the parish synodal process or even to invite that person to participate if they are open.

## Tips for reaching out

1. Pray for wisdom to decide who to reach out to and for the Holy Spirit to accompany you. Begin praying for that person regularly.
2. Identify or create a setting for listening. Invite the person to quiet place without many distractions. For example, if you are at a family gathering, consider finding a spot where others cannot hear or are less likely to interrupt the conversation. If you are speaking with someone under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult make sure to follow Safe Environment Guidelines.
3. Engage people in a natural and polite way. Show a real interest in hearing their perspective.
4. Do not treat the questions like a survey or fill in answers while you are listening. You are encouraged to write about what they shared, but not until after the conversation is over.
5. You do not have to ask every question. Use these questions as a way to get the conversation started and then *listen, listen, listen*. Some good follow up comments/questions are: Tell me more about that. How did that make you feel? What are you learning from that?
6. Focus on listening. Do not interrupt or give advice. It is natural for what they share to spark memories or connect to your experiences. Instead of sharing yourself at this time, try to focus on

**What is a periphery?** Places where our sisters and brothers are vulnerable, excluded, treated as outsiders, living in fear, isolated, ignored, invisible. Many baptized Catholics may not be active in our churches. Others find themselves estranged, feeling that they do not belong to our parish communities.

what they are saying, their feelings and their own experience as you listen. Consider staying in touch with them and sharing your experience in a future conversation. Visit <https://owensborodiocese.org/synod/> for more tips on active listening and ideas for sharing your faith with them in the future.

7. Take note of any concrete requests and follow up on them. For example, do they need something specific from the parish or specific information that you can find out for them?
8. Pray in thanksgiving after the encounter. Continue to pray for the person you encountered, especially for any intention they specifically requested.

### Steps for the Encounter

1. **Invitation:** Say something like: “In our church we’re discussing how we can listen better. It made me wonder what you thought. Can I ask you some questions?”
2. **Questions:** Use these suggested questions as a starting point. You don’t have to ask them all.
  - a. If you don’t already know them well, ask something to get to know them better. Where are you from? Where is your family from?
  - b. What are some things you worry about? What are some things that make you really happy?
  - c. What are some obstacles that prevent you from achieving your hopes and dreams?
  - d. Do you consider yourself Catholic? Were you raised Catholic? Does faith have an impact in your life today?
  - e. Have you gone to a Catholic church lately? Do you feel like you belong or are welcome in the Catholic Church?
  - f. How can the Catholic Church be more present in your life?
3. **Follow up:** Depending on their openness during the conversation, consider inviting them to participate in your parish’s listening session, invite them to your small group or to Mass or an upcoming social gathering. Consider suggestion another encounter to continue the conversation and respond to any questions or requests they may have brought up.
4. **Prayer:** Ask if there is a specific way you can pray for them. Ask if you can pray with them. If they say yes, lead a short, simple prayer for them and their intention. If they say no, assure them you will be praying for them and their intention. Share their prayer intention anonymously at the parish listening session.
5. **Appreciation:** Thank them for taking time to talk with you.
6. **Reflection and Writing:** After your conversation set aside some time to reflect on what you heard and fill out the following page to make sure their voice is heard as part of the synodal process. You can submit them via email at [synod@pastoral.org](mailto:synod@pastoral.org) and/or bring them to the next step in the synodal process (for example, a parish listening session, regional listening session, etc.).

