



PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Listening Session #2

Walking together, inspired by the Holy Spirit



*For a Synodal Church:
Communion, Participation and Mission*

Dear Participant:

Thank you for being an important part of this first phase of the 2021-2023 Synod of Bishops!

Pope Francis wants to hear from the whole Church about what is happening in local parishes. He and the bishops would like to know what individuals think we should all be doing to help make our parishes better. The way he has proposed doing this is through this synodal process.

This is an unprecedented moment in our Church. The Holy Father has called for listening on a scale we have never before seen. All the baptized in every diocese, in every country, on every continent are asked to participate in the synod process. As the Church, we will pray together, listen to one another and seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in discerning where the Holy Spirit is leading us as a parish, a diocese, and a universal Church.

Each individual matters and each of our experiences is valid and deserves to be heard. No one is excluded from this process – all are welcome. We are on this journey of faith together. *Come, Holy Spirit!*

“The purpose of this Synod . . . is to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people’s hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission.” (Vatican Handbook for the Synod)

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

Please keep these guidelines in mind as you listen and share with respect for one another in your small group.

- Listen respectfully and without judgment.
- Allow an opportunity for everyone to speak.
- Be an open-minded listener.
- Pause briefly between speakers.
- Sharing is optional.
- Remember that we are here to listen and not to problem-solve or convince.
- There is no topic off the table. Speak honestly.
- Before speaking, say a prayer to the Holy Spirit for wisdom.
- Remember that differences of opinion are good. We learn more from those who hold opinions different from our own.
- “Be courageous in listening and courageous in speaking.” (*Vatican Handbook on the Synod*)

EXAMEN: PERIOD OF PRAYER AND REFLECTION

In what ways do you experience God's love and blessings in your life each day?

Ask God to allow the Holy Spirit to be stirred up in each of us during this session.

Ask God for insight and understanding to recognize the movement of the Holy Spirit. Ask for the grace to be open to the Spirit and for the courage to go where the Spirit leads.

Reflecting back to our first listening session together, did you feel like part of a community journeying together? Were you able to truly listen to another? Did you feel listened to? Recall how that felt.

If you had the opportunity to encounter someone on the periphery of the Church, bring that encounter to mind. How were you aware of the Holy Spirit's presence during that conversation? What might you need to share from that conversation? Pray for that individual now. Ask God what the next step is in order to nurture that relationship.

If you have not yet had a chance to encounter someone from the periphery of the Church, who might God be calling you to encounter? What steps can you take to facilitate that encounter? Pray for the person that God places on your heart.

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? In what ways have the Sacraments nurtured you?

Is there any hurt in your experience of Church? 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?

Where in your life has God called you to be most present, to be most alive to be your best self? Where have you participated in bringing Christ's life and love to the world – maybe as a child, a teen, a young adult, today?

In what ways have you failed to be who God was calling you to be?

Where does God need you most in the Church today? What one action might you want to move towards tomorrow? Make a firm, but gentle resolution to do so.

SMALL GROUP LISTENING AND SHARING

Round 1: Fruit of Personal Reflection

Take a couple of minutes to reflect in silence on these questions. The aim is not to address all the questions, but only those that the Holy Spirit leads you to. Read through all of them first and see where you are drawn to share.

After a time of silence, allow each person 2-3 minutes to speak. 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. As a reminder, when others are speaking, everyone else should listen with an open and humble heart.

If there is extra time after everyone has had a chance to share, you can move on to the next round or go around the circle again until the time is finished.

- What are some of the things that were stirred up in your heart during the Examen Prayer?

- How have you seen the Holy Spirit moving in and through you during the weeks since the first listening session?

The following are some questions that were considered at our first listening session. As you've continued to ponder them, what are some insights you've gained?

- What do you most treasure about our faith and your membership in the Church?

- What are your dreams for the Church?

- What breaks your heart?

- To what is the Holy Spirit calling us as a church in the 21st century?

Round 2: Fruit of Encounters in the Periphery

Take a couple of minutes to reflect in silence on these questions. Again, you do not need to share on all the questions, but only those to which the Holy Spirit leads you. Read through all of them first and see where you are drawn to share.

After a time of silence, allow each person 2-3 minutes to speak. Anyone in the group can begin, then continue in the same manner as the first round.

Once everyone has had a chance to share, discuss which one or two points could be shared with the larger group from these two rounds.

- What is important to share from your encounter in the periphery? Please remember to respect the privacy of the person you encountered – share key takeaways without revealing their identity or private information.

- How did you feel reaching out to listen to someone who feels disconnected to the Church? Did you feel the Spirit moving in the conversation?

- If you have not had an encounter yet, who do you feel God has placed on your heart to encounter? What are your hopes for that conversation?

- Which are the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical or existential peripheries of our local community that still need to be heard? Whose voices are missing?

TIME FOR DISCERNMENT

Quotes from “Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future”, Pope Francis.

Quote #1:

“Between the first step, which is to come close and allow yourself to be struck by what you see, and the third step, which is to act concretely to heal and repair, there is an essential intermediate stage: to discern, and to choose...

“For this second step, we need not just openness to reality but a robust set of criteria to guide us: knowing we are loved by God, called to be a people in service and solidarity. We need, too, a healthy capacity for silent reflection, places of refuge from the tyranny of the urgent. Most of all, we need prayer, to hear the prompts of the Spirit and cultivate dialogue in a community that can hold us and allow us to dream. Thus armed, we can read right the signs of the times and opt for a way that does all good...”

Quote #2:

“How do we apply these noble but abstract criteria to the large and small choices we make? This calls for the kind of reflection and prayer known as *discernment of spirits*. Discernment means to think through our decisions and actions, not just by rational calculation but by listening for His Spirit, recognizing in prayer God’s motives, invitations and will. There is a principle worth remembering in these times: ideas are debated, but reality is *discerned*.

“This is a difficult thing for those of a more impatient disposition, who believe that to every problem there must be a technical solution, as if it were merely a question of finding the right switch...But discernment is vital if we want to create a better future...

“Discernment...allows us to navigate changing contexts and specific situations as we seek the truth. Truth reveals itself to the one who opens herself to it... If you don’t open up, you can’t discern...”

“The Spirit shows us new things through what the Church calls ‘signs of the times.’ Discerning the signs of the times allows us to make sense of change. In interpreting and praying over events or trends in light of the Gospel, we can detect movements that reflect the values of God’s Kingdom or their opposite.”

Quote #3:

“The discernment step allows us to ask: What is the Spirit telling us? ...

Discerning what is and what is not of God, we begin to see where and how to act...How do we distinguish the spirits? They speak different languages; they use different ways to reach our hearts. The voice of God never imposes but proposes, whereas the enemy is strident, insistent, and even monotonous. The voice of God might correct us, but gently, always encouraging, consoling, giving us hope. The bad spirit on the other hand offers us dazzling illusions and tempting sensations, but they are fleeting. It exploits our fears and suspicions, and seduces us with wealth and prestige. If we ignore it, it responds with contempt and accusation, telling us: You’re worthless...

“The voice of God opens your horizons, whereas the enemy pins you against a wall. Where the good spirit gives you hope, the bad spirit sows suspicion, anxiety, and finger-pointing. The good spirit appeals to my desire to do good, to help and to serve, and gives me strength to go forward on the right path. The bad spirit, conversely, closes me in on myself, and makes me rigid and intolerant. It is the spirit of fear and grievance. It makes me sad, fearful and irritable. Rather than freeing me, it enslaves me. Rather than opening me up to the present and the future, it encloses me in fear and resignation.

“Learning to distinguish these two kinds of ‘voice’ allows us to choose the right path forward, which is not always the most obvious, and to avoid making decisions while trapped in past hurts or in fears of the future that risk immobilizing us.”

SMALL GROUP LISTENING AND SHARING

Round 3: What is the Holy Spirit Calling Us To Do?

Take a couple of minutes to reflect in silence on these questions. Again, you do not need to share about all the questions, but only those to which the Holy Spirit leads you. Read through all of them first and see where you are drawn to share.

After a time of silence, allow each person 2-3 minutes to speak. Anyone in the group can begin, then continue in the same manner as the first round. Remember that participants may also write their comments on note cards if they feel uncomfortable or do not have a chance to share everything in this small group.

Once everyone has had a chance to share, discuss which one or two ideas could be shared with the larger group.

- What actions do you feel the Spirit is calling the Church to take – in your personal life, in our community, as a diocese, as a universal Church?

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

- How are you personally feeling called to put your gifts and talents at the service of these actions? *(If you'd like, you may write your contact information on a notecard along with the area of ministry you'd like to be involved and submit that to the facilitator at the end of this session.)*

CLOSING PRAYER

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

CONCLUDING RITE

While making the sign of the cross:

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

Leader: Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord. [OR Go in peace.]

All: Thanks be to God.

Notes to Participants:

- ◆ For more information about the Synod on Synodality, please visit the Diocese of Owensboro website at: <https://owensborodiocese.org/synod>
- ◆ You are welcome to submit comments about your conversations in the periphery or reflections in small groups directly to the diocese via email at synod@pastoral.org
- ◆ If you'd like to read more about the Synod on Synodality, we would recommend these resources:
 - Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality: <https://www.synod.va/en/news/vademecum-for-the-synod-on-synodality.html>
 - Preparatory Document for the Synod on Synodality: <https://www.synod.va/en/news/preparatory-document.html>
 - *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* by Pope Francis: <https://www.amazon.com/Let-Us-Dream-Better-Future/dp/1982171863>

Please make plans to now to join Bishop Medley for a Regional Listening Session in your area.

REGIONAL LISTENING SESSIONS WITH BISHOP MEDLEY

Day	Date	Time	Location	Language
Tuesday	March 8, 2022	6:00 – 8:00 PM	Holy Name, Henderson	English
Thursday	March 10, 2022	6:00 – 8:00 PM	Holy Spirit, Bowling Green	English
Monday	March 14, 2022	6:00 – 8:00 PM	Sts. Peter & Paul, Hopkinsville	English
Saturday	March 19, 2022	10 AM – Noon	Sts. Peter & Paul, Hopkinsville	Spanish
Monday	March 21, 2022	6:00 – 8:00 PM	Blessed Mother, Owensboro	English
Tuesday	March 22, 2022	6:00 – 8:00 PM	St. Thomas More, Paducah	English
Sunday	March 27, 2022	2:00 – 4:00 PM	Holy Spirit, Bowling Green	Burmese

