



# PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Listening Session #1

*Walking together, inspired by the Holy Spirit*



Dear Participant:

Thank you for being an important part of this first phase of the 2021-2023 Synod of Bishops. The theme for the synod is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.” Synodality expresses the nature of the Church as the People of God journeying together on the same path.

Pope Francis has called the entire People of God to journey together! 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!*

*And so, brothers and sisters, let us experience this moment of encounter, listening and reflection as a season of grace. The Synod offers us the opportunity to become a listening Church, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen. To listen to the Spirit in adoration and prayer. To listen to our brothers and sisters speak of their hopes and of the crises of faith present in different parts of the world, of the need for a renewed pastoral life and of the signals we are receiving from those on the ground.” (Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod)*

*“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*)

## OPENING PRAYER

### SIGN OF THE CROSS & GREETING

Leader: +In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us praise the God of wisdom, knowledge and grace. Blessed be God forever.

All: **Blessed be God forever.**

### RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL PROMISES

Leader: As we prepare to listen together to the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit we received in Baptism, let us renew our baptismal faith:

Leader: Do you renounce Satan?

**All: I do.**

Leader: And all his works?

**All: I do.**

Leader: And all his empty show?

**All: I do.**

Leader: Do you believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth?

**All: I do.**

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered death and was buried,  
rose again from the dead  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father?

**All: I do.**

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting?

**All: I do.**

Leader: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church.  
We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**All: Amen.**

### **BLESSING WITH HOLY WATER** *(optional)*

### **COLLECT**

## PERIOD OF REFLECTION AND SHARING ON SCRIPTURE

*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 twice. We will be asked to listen to what words or phrases speak to us and what feelings arise.*

1 COR. 12:12-26

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," any more than the head can say to the feet, "I do not need you." Even those members of the body which seem less important are in fact indispensable. We honor the members we consider less honorable by clothing them with greater care, thus bestowing on the less presentable a propriety which the more presentable already have.

God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to the lowly members, that there may be no dissension in the body, but that all the members may be concerned for one another. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members share its joy.

## FIRST PROCLAMATION OF SCRIPTURE

- **Listening:** As the Scripture passage is read aloud, listen for one word or phrase that stands out to you. We will share that with each other after the passage is read.
  - **Sharing:** What one word or phrase stood out to you? Please just share that word or phrase. We will not share any more than that at this time.
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## SECOND PROCLAMATION OF SCRIPTURE

- **Listening:** We are going to listen to the Scripture passage once more. Please listen for what stands out, and reflect on what the Holy Spirit might be trying to tell you.
  - **Sharing:** Briefly share what you have heard in the passage and how God might be speaking to you. What feelings arise within you? Where do you believe the Holy Spirit is leading?
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*“Participation is a requirement of the faith received in baptism. As the Apostle Paul says, ‘in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body’. In the Church, everything starts with baptism. Baptism, the source of our life, gives rise to the equal dignity of the children of God, albeit in the diversity of ministries and charisms. Consequently, all the baptized are called to take part in the Church’s life and mission. Enabling everyone to participate is an essential ecclesial duty! All the baptized, for baptism is our identity card.” (Pope Francis upon the opening of the Synod)*

## SMALL GROUP LISTENING & SHARING

**Important:** *The aim is not to answer all of the questions. Instead, take the time you need to read through the entire list first to see which questions catch your attention. It is often in those places that the Holy Spirit will speak. Then, when ready, begin sharing in your small group. Trust that the Holy Spirit will be your guide.*

*“What characterizes a synodal path is the role of the Holy Spirit. We listen, we discuss in groups, but above all we pay attention to what the Spirit has to say to us. That is why I ask everyone to speak frankly and to listen carefully to others because, there, too, the Spirit is speaking.”* (“Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future”, Pope Francis)

1. What is your understanding of journeying together as a People of God, all members of the same Body of Christ?
2. In what ways does our parish look like a group of people journeying together on the same path? How about our diocese? How can we do better?
3. Who are the voices in our community that often get overlooked or remain unheard?
4. What members of the Body of Christ are missing from the Table of the Lord?
5. The Holy Spirit has given gifts to every Baptized person. In what ways are we calling forth the gifts and talents of everyone? How can we do better?
6. The mission of the Church is to bring people to Jesus. How are we called to participate in the mission of the Church?
7. What do you most treasure about our faith and your membership in the Church?
8. What are your dreams for the Church?
9. What breaks your heart?
10. To what is the Holy Spirit calling us as a Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

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## **LARGE GROUP SHARING**

A member of your small group is invited to share with the larger assembly the highlights of what was shared in your group. Be mindful of not sharing anything of a confidential nature

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

*Leader:* We are made one in our baptism. And so we pray with one voice as Jesus taught us:

**All: Our Father....**

### **CONCLUDING RITE**

*While making the sign of the cross on themselves:*

*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.**



# 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

**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.

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 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.).

## **Questions for Reflection and Sharing After an Encounter in the Peripheries**

Please fill out one page per encounter. Feel free to use extra pages if needed. Bring this form with you to the second listening session. You may also take a picture of your form and email it to [synod@pastoral.org](mailto:synod@pastoral.org) or you can submit input via the online portal at <https://owensborodiocese.org/synod/>.

*Tell us a little about who you encountered and why you chose them (without revealing private information or their identity):*

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*What are some important takeaways from the conversation?*

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*If they had specific prayer requests, please share them here (anonymously).*

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*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 invited to dive deeper into synodality before our second session to reflect further on this topic of journeying together, either individually or as a group. This could be as a couple or family, in a prayer group, youth group, retreat, faith formation class, parish council or committee meeting, RCIA meeting, or with clients in an outreach. This reflection will enrich our sharing when we come back together as a group. You can find a tool on the diocesan website to help you in your deep dive into synodality: <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](mailto:synod@pastoral.org)
- ◆ Please make plans now to join us for session 2 of our parish listening. We need your voice!
- ◆ 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>

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## PRAYER FOR THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, the first word of the Latin original meaning, “We stand before You, Holy Spirit,” which has been historically used at Councils, Synods and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years. For the Synod 2021-2023, everyone is invited to pray this simplified version of the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*.

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.

