



Suggested Facilitator's Detailed Listening Session Outline

Below the facilitator will find a detailed outline for a larger group listening session.

Regular font indicates directional information.

Italicized font indicates a script for the facilitator to follow.

Essentially, the role of the facilitator is to lead the session, making sure to keep the listening session on track, providing time updates (e.g. "You have five more minutes for this question."), and to move the group through the conversation.

It is helpful if every group has a small group facilitator who guides the group through the discussion.

Every group needs to have a note-taker. The note-takers could be identified ahead of time, or you can have groups identify a note-taker during the session.

Equipment and Material for Listening Sessions:

- A room or space with tables and chairs for all participants.
- Microphone, if a larger group
- Hospitality table with drinks and snacks, if desired
- Copies of the schedule
- Paper
- Pen
- Bible, open to Acts 2:14-21

Schedule:

- Hospitality (10 minutes)
- Welcome and Introductions (2 minutes)
- Opening Prayer (3 minutes)
- Participant Ground Rules (5 minutes)

- Overview of the Synod Process (15 minutes)
- Small Group Discussion 1: The Fundamental Question (60 minutes)
- Break (20 minutes)
- Small Group Discussion 2: The Core Questions (60 minutes)
- Wrap Up, and Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

[Detailed Script for Facilitators:](#)

Hospitality (10 minutes)

Welcome and Introduction (2 minutes)

Begin on time introducing the session and welcoming the participants. Introduce yourself to the participants and invite the participants to introduce themselves to the other group members seated at their table. Be sure to have the pastor/parish director, other parish clergy, parish staff or other parish leaders (e.g. Parish Council chair) introduce themselves.

Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

The pastor, priest or parish director, or in their absence, the facilitator, should lead the opening prayer.

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

R: Amen.

Leader: ***Come, Holy Spirit***

R: Fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love.

Leader: ***Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.***

R: and you shall renew the face of the earth

Leader: ***O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit instructed the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Spirit we may know what is right and always rejoice in his consolation, through Christ our Lord.***

R: Amen

Psalm 100

Our response is: Serve the Lord with Gladness

R: Serve the Lord with Gladness

Leader: ***Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness Come before him, singing for joy.***

R: Serve the Lord with Gladness

Leader: ***Know that he, the Lord, is God. He made us, we belong to him, We are his people, the sheep of his flock.***

R: Serve the Lord with Gladness

Leader: ***Go within his gates, giving thanks. Enter his courts with songs of praise. Give thanks to him and bless his name.***

R: Serve the Lord with Gladness

Leader: ***We make our prayer complete and perfect by praying together Our Father...***

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

R: Amen.

Ground Rules for the Listening Session: (5 minutes)

Following the opening prayer, say:

The Synod involves active listening and discernment. Listening is the heart of our conversation today. Remember to give full attention to each other, and listening to the voice of God in your hearts. Listen for understanding by taking to heart what other people share. As we share, people will speak, one at a time, without interruption, while others listen. Everyone will have the chance to speak and if you like, you may choose to pass. No one person should dominate the discussion.

Every small group will have a note-taker. Please take a moment to select a member of the group who will write down the major themes or important points of your group's discussion.

Give the group a few minutes to identify a note-taker, and ask the note-takers to take the paper and pens on the table.

Overview of the Synod Process: (15 minutes)

Say:

As you arrived today, you received an outline for today's gathering. Please take a few moments to review the agenda today.

Give the participants a minute to read silently, then say:

As you know, the entire Catholic Church is called to participate in the upcoming Synod of Bishops. The Synod is entitled: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission." Synod is a Greek word (synodos) meaning a meeting or assembly. The two Greek words that make up Synod are syn meaning together and hodos meaning way or journey. Pope Francis has

called the entire People of God to journey together! This Synod is not just another meeting with oral presentations and written reports. This Synod is a process of journeying together. As the Church, we will listen to each other, dialogue with each other, pray together, discern together and make decisions together for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

Pope Francis is asking each local diocese to gather together - clergy, religious and laity - to first listen to each other's joys and hopes, and griefs and anxieties (c.f. Gaudium et Spes no. 1). After we listen to each other, we are called to dialogue together on ways we can accompany each other as we seek to grow in holiness. Listening and speaking within the Church always involves prayer. We are listening, dialoguing and praying together so that we can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. The "goal" of this journeying together is not to create a new vision or pastoral plan with objectives. Rather, the goal of our journeying together is to be present with one another, to listen and learn with each other, and to grow closer to the Lord and His Church.

In this gathering, as we listen, dialogue, and pray, we take part in a practice that dates back to the earliest Church. Throughout the history of the Church, the Church has gathered in Synod to open our hearts to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Foundational to religious life is the gathering of the brothers and sisters in prayer, listening to the voices of members, and discernment. A key question in understanding Pope Francis' invitation for the whole Church to journey together is - What is Synodality?

A helpful short definition of the Synod of Bishops. It is a gathering of bishops that

- 1. Fosters closer unity between the bishops and Pope*
- 2. Provides counsel to the Pope on matters of faith and morals, and discipline of the Church*
- 3. Studies questions concerning the Church in the world*

Voting in the Synod of Bishops is limited to bishops present at the Synod gathering. However, clergy, men and women religious, theologians, catechists, canon lawyers, and lay experts all participate in the Synod gathering with bishops by providing their counsel.

We gather today to do just that, to provide our bishops with counsel – also to reflect on the questions put forward to us by Pope Francis, and to listen to our brothers and sisters. Let us begin.

First Small Group Discussion: The Fundamental Question

Say:

As we begin our listening session, let's remember: Our Synod journey takes place in the midst of where the Church ordinarily lives and works in the day to day lives of the faithful. The Synodal process invites each one of us - the People of God to recall that we journey together. Moreover, in that journey of faith, we are called to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. (c.f. Preparatory Document no. 37)

Invite a parishioner to volunteer to read Acts 2:14–21, then say:

As we listen to the Word of God, let us reflect on how the Scripture calls all to share and to proclaim the Good News, to open our hearts to listen to the faith journey of our brothers and sisters, to pray as a community and open our hearts to hear voice of the Holy Spirit.

Invite parishioner to read: Acts 2:14-21

Instruct the small groups to:

Please turn to your agenda to find the Fundamental Question. Before we begin sharing with one another, I want to remind everyone that group members will take turns sharing their reflections, one at a time, without interruption, while other group members listen. The note taker will record reflections. Please keep your answers to 1-2 minutes per person.

Read aloud:

A Synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” Take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions:

- *How is this “journeying together” happening today in your parish?*
- *How is the Holy Spirit inviting your parish community to grow in “journeying together?” (Preparatory Document, no. 26).*

In your own experience, think about:

- *What experiences, in your local parish, does this question bring to mind?*
- *What are the joys of your parish life?*
- *What are the difficulties and obstacles to parish life that you have encountered?*

After a minute or two for participants to reflect, and jot a few notes, remind the group:

One member speaks at a time, without interruption, as other members listen. Please keep your responses to 1-2 minutes per person. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Allow 10 minutes for small group sharing.

At the end of 10 minutes, post the following question:

Where in these experiences do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit?

After an additional 10 minutes of sharing, invite participants to take a 20-minute break.

Break (20 minutes)

Second Small Group Discussion: The Core Questions

Invite people to return to their tables after the break time is over.

Say:

Thank you for your openness and participation prior to the break. At this time, the process invites us to go deeper. Keep in mind our fundamental conversation earlier as we explore areas that are at the heart of our community. As a reminder, the note takers will continue to record group sharing, one person speaks at a time, without interruption, as others listen. Please keep your responses to 1-2 minutes per person. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Listening (10 minutes)

Say:

*“Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice.”
(Preparatory Document no. 30)*

“The meaning of the journey to which we are all called is above all that of discovering the face and form of a Synodal Church, in which “everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit.” (Preparatory Document no. 15)

The questions we will consider under Listening are:

- *How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst?*
- *How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore, including those on the peripheries?*
- *What space is there to listen to the voices on the peripheries, especially cultural groups, women, the disabled, those who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?*

Take a moment to reflect and jot down a few notes.

After a few minutes for participants to reflect, remind the group that:

Again, one person speaks at a time, without interruption, as others listen. Please keep your responses to 1-2 minutes per person, summarizing your reflections on the three questions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Allow 10 minutes total for this section.

Speaking Out (10 minutes)

Say:

Let's move onto our next core question: Speaking Out.

"All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity." (Preparatory Document no. 30)

"The Pastors, established by God as 'authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church' should not be afraid to listen to the flock entrusted to them. The consultation of the People of God does not imply the assumption within the Church of the dynamics of democracy based on the principle of majority because there is, at the basis of participation in every Synodal process, a shared passion for the common mission of evangelization and not the representation of conflicting interests." (Preparatory Document no. 14)

The questions we will consider under Speaking Out are:

- What enables or hinders you from speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our local Church and in society?
- What space is there in our parishes for the voice of people including active and inactive members of our faith?

Take a moment to reflect and jot down a few notes.

After a few minutes for participants to reflect, remind the group that:

Again, one person speaks at a time, without interruption, as others listen. Please keep your responses to 1-2 minutes per person, summarizing your reflections on the two questions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Allow 10 minutes total for this section.

Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission and Sharing Authority and Participation (10 minutes)

Say:

Let's move onto our next core question: Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission and Sharing Authority and Participation.

"Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate. A Synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church." (Preparatory Document no. 30)

The members of the People of God are united by Baptism, and “if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispenser of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to dignity and to the activity common to all the Faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ.” (Lumen Gentium, no. 32)

The questions we will consider under this core question are:

- *How are the baptized members of your parish able to participate in the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel?*
- *What hinders people from being active in your parish?*
- *How is authority or governance exercised in your local parish?*
- *How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice in your local parish?*

Take a moment to reflect and jot down a few notes.

After a few minutes for participants to reflect, remind the group that:

Again, one person speaks at a time, without interruption, as others listen. Please keep your responses to 1-2 minutes per person, summarizing your reflections on the three questions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Allow 10 minutes total for this section.

Discerning and Deciding (10 minutes)

Say:

Let’s move onto our next core question: Discerning and Deciding.

In a Synodal style, we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community. Synodal style of decision-making is to listen first, dialogue, pray, discern, and then the pastor makes a decision on behalf of community. A Synodal Church does not make decisions to accomplish pre-identified priorities. “In a Synodal Church, the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God’s will.” (Vademecum no. 1.4)

The questions we will consider for Discerning and Deciding are:

- *How does your parish use the methods of listening and speaking (consultation) to make decisions?*
- *How does your parish promote participation in decision-making within the hierarchical structures of the Church?*

- *Does the decision-making methods of your parish help you to listen to all members of the community including those who are on the peripheries of parish life?*

Take a moment to reflect and jot down a few notes.

After a few minutes for participants to reflect, remind the group that:

Again, one person speaks at a time, without interruption, as others listen. Please keep your responses to 1-2 minutes per person, summarizing your reflections on the three questions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Allow 10 minutes total for this section.

Celebration (10 minutes)

Say:

Let's move onto our next core question: Celebration.

"They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles." (Acts 2:42-43)

"Journeying together" is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. (Preparatory Document no. 30)

The questions we will consider for Celebration are:

- *How does prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially Sunday Mass, inspire and guide your parish?*
- *How does your prayer life and celebration of the Mass inspire and inform your personal decisions and decisions in the parish community?*
- *How does the parish invite all baptized Catholics, including our ethnic communities, youth, families, and persons with disabilities and their families, into the active life of the parish, especially Sunday Mass?*

Take a moment to reflect and jot down a few notes.

After a few minutes for participants to reflect, remind the group that:

Again, one person speaks at a time, without interruption, as others listen. Please keep your responses to 1-2 minutes per person, summarizing your reflections on the three questions. I will call time and we will then move to the next question.

Allow 10 minutes total for this section.

Final Question: The Holy Spirit (10 minutes)

Say:

We hear in Paul's Letter to the Romans: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

Here is our final question:

From your small group sharing, name one insight where you heard the voice of the Holy Spirit today?

Please keep your responses to 1 minute per person.

Allow 10 minutes total for this section.

Closing (5 minutes)

Say:

I would like to thank you all for sharing and listening. Please turn to the Prayer for the Synod, and let us pray together:

*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.*

At the conclusion of prayer, say:

Note takers should bring their documentation to the front of the room and thank you all who participated in this week's listening session. The recorded comments from the groups will be compiled into a parish report and sent to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee for inclusion in the report that will be sent to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Thank you and God Bless.