Conversation Facilitator Guide
## Conversation Facilitator Guide

### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission of the National Dialogue Conversations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Facilitator</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note about Recruiting Facilitators and Listeners</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips for Facilitating</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for Your Role</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating an Environment for Sharing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting Conversation Questions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating the Conversation</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording the Conversation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing the Content of the Conversation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Through with Participants</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: You are Part of an Important Mission of Listening</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource: Conversation Agenda</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conversation Facilitator Guide

The Mission of the National Dialogue Conversations

Too often we talk about young people without allowing ourselves to be challenged by them... Some might think it would be easier to keep you at ‘a safe distance’, so as not to be provoked by you. But it is not enough to exchange the odd message, or share nice photographs. Young people must be taken seriously!... In the Church — I am convinced — it should not be this way... We are in need of this: to hear of your journey in life. What do you seek? ... In order to tune in to the same wavelength as the younger generations, intense dialogue is of great help.

- Address of Pope Francis at the Pre-Synodal Meeting with Young People, March 19, 2018

Heeding the call of Pope Francis for taking young people seriously, the Church in the United States engaging in a National Dialogue with young Catholics. The vision of the National Dialogue is an energized and unified Catholic Church committed to forming and engaging youth and young adults as missionary disciples. This effort includes conversations with those who are, and those who are not, practicing the Catholic faith. We need to hear their stories, share the love of Christ with them, and learn what we can do as a church, both on the local and national level, to accompany them in their journey and more effectively share with them the beauty, truth, and freedom that only Christ offers.

The current research is clear: many youth and young adults in our country are becoming less engaged in and/or are walking away from organized religion. Through the conversations of this National Dialogue, the Church hopes to identify how we might transform our ministry practices to more effectively accompany all youth and young adults in their journey of life and faith and facilitate their growth in becoming missionary disciples, reversing the trend of dis-engagement and dis-affiliation.

The purpose of the conversations taking place within the National Dialogue is to more deeply understand the lived experience of youth and young adults so that as a church, we can transform our ministry practice to more effectively encounter and accompany the young church.

The intent is that these conversations will be a holy experience of dialogue, listening, encounter, and accompaniment. The hope is that these conversations will build upon what we are learning from the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment and the Fifth National Encuentro.

Four groups will participate in conversations: youth, young adults, parents, and ministry leaders. The young people who will participate will include youth and young adults who are actively engaged in their Catholic faith as well as non-Catholics and those who are no longer Catholic or are participating in a marginal way. Many of these conversations will be with groups that will bring together a variety of
perspectives. Some of conversations will be with individual young adults, ministry leaders, or parents. These voices will join in conversations with a purpose, where the experience of young people can be shared.

Conversations can have a lasting and powerful impact. A conversation can broaden the way we look at things. Listening and dialoguing lead us to break out of our limited vision and see things in new ways. Sometimes, a conversation changes us.

That is what we are hoping for. We are hoping that these conversations will lead to the transformation of our ministries with youth and young adults. We know that many young people walk away from faith. Many young people feel far away from God’s saving love. We love young people and we love the Church. **What do we need to change to really engage this generation and help youth and young adults grow in faith and join actively in the mission of the Catholic Church?**

The National Dialogue hopes that these conversations will lead to transformation on a variety of levels.

- **Person** – Those who are involved in the conversations, those who are facilitating, and those who reflect on the results of the conversations will grow in the ways that they relate to and minister with youth and young adults.
- **Ministry** – The organized ministries aimed at youth and young adults will grow in their responses to young people. This will include growing some efforts of the ministry, eliminating some, and creating new ways of engaging young people.
- **Parishes, Catholic Schools, and Organizations that Serve Youth and Young Adults** – Communities will reflect on the reality of the experience of young people and transform the ways that youth and young adults are engaged, included, and empowered for leadership.
- **Dioceses** – The local Church will bring together the voices of youth, young adults, ministry leaders, and parents to discern with their bishop a direction for renewed ministries with youth and young adults.
- **Nation** – The Catholic Church in the United States will heed the call of the Holy Father to reflect on the experience of young people and plan for an energized response to fully engage this generation of youth and young adults.
Taking care of young people is not an optional task for the Church, but an integral part of her vocation and mission in history. ... just as our Lord Jesus Christ walked alongside the disciples of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35), the Church is also urged to accompany all young people, without exception, towards the joy of love. With their presence and their words, young people can help rejuvenate the face of the Church.

- *Instrumentum Laboris for the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment*, # 1, 2018.

Conversations with a Purpose

- The conversations that are part of the National Dialogue will gather people’s words and stories to promote greater understanding.
- The focus is to understand more deeply youth and young adults’ experience of engagement with the Catholic Church.
- Facilitators will guide the conversations and record the words and stories.

The Role of the Facilitator

As a facilitator, you will guide these conversations by asking questions, inviting participation, and listening to the participants. During the conversation you will need to record key things that you hear. Take some notes while you are facilitating and budget some time immediately after the conversation to record what you heard and the insights that were shared. You might consider asking someone to help and be a “listener” to assist you record the sharing. After the conversation, you will share what you heard with the National Dialogue and with leaders in your local ministry setting.

**Before** the conversation, facilitators will:

- Learn and understand the purpose of the National Dialogue.
- Prepare for their role.
- Prepare for asking questions and listening.
- Know the audience.
- Choose the question set.
- Review questions and be ready to reword for your group and follow up.

**On the day of** the conversation, facilitators will:

- Arrive early and ready for the conversation.
- Create an environment of hospitality and safety for sharing.
- Guide the conversation and invite participation.
- Record the key insights from conversation.
- Complete the Recording Form and the Facilitator and Listener Reflection Form from the conversations

**After** the conversation, facilitators will:

- Follow through with sharing the conversation content with the National Dialogue.
- Follow up with participants.
- Reflect on the implications of the conversation personally and for their ministry.
Note about Recruiting Facilitators and Listeners

If your role includes organizing these conversations, you will be recruiting facilitators and listeners to help. The role of the facilitator is crucial to the conversations. We want youth and young adults to feel cared for and listened to. We also want to gather their experiences to help transform our ministries. Not all catechists, teachers, or ministry leaders are well suited to the role of facilitating and listening. Identify people who have the gifts for this role and choose carefully. If the facilitator will be working with youth, be sure to adhere to safe environment policies.

For conversations with young adults, parents, and ministry leaders, you could have a “peer” be the facilitator. In these cases, it would be especially important that facilitators will have participated in a conversation with their peers prior to their facilitation. This will provide good practice but will also keep the roles clear. Facilitators should stay in the role of listener and not go back and forth by sharing their own experience, except in cases where a brief personal sharing is part of the way to explain the question and is used to invite participation.

We recommend that you recruit a listener for each conversation. This person will record key insights, experiences, and ideas that are shared in the conversation and will collaborate with the facilitator to reflect on the gathering and complete the recording and reflection forms. Ideally, the listener should not be a participant in the conversation and should have an opportunity to participate in a conversation with their peers.

Tips for Facilitating

...listening is the truest and boldest kind of language that young people are vehemently seeking from the Church. We should also acknowledge how hard it is for the Church to really listen to all the young, without exception. Many of them feel that their voice is not considered interesting or useful by the adult world, either in the social or ecclesial domain.

Instrumentum Laboris for the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, #65, 2018.

Here are three tips for facilitating in a way that will provide experiences of encounter with Christ’s love and provide a rich sharing that can help mold and transform our ministries with young people.

Focus on Accompaniment  Be Empathetic  Stay Curious
Tip #1: Focus on Accompaniment

We want to know youth and young adults better and walk with them in faith. Knowing the WHY for these conversations will keep us centered in love. If we want to be Good News to young people, we need to know the headlines on their hearts. We can accompany young people through our words, behaviors, non-verbal communication, and openness. We can communicate that the participants in the conversations are collaborators with us in the process. We can empower them to tell their story. Through our presence, youth will feel accompanied. They will encounter the listening Jesus who walks with them in their questions.

Tip #2: Be Empathetic

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. It is about working to try to really understand their perspective.

“Empathy is the ability to mutually experience the thoughts, emotions, and direct experience of others. It goes beyond sympathy, which is a feeling of care and understanding for the suffering of others. Both words have similar usage but differ in their emotional meaning.”

- PassNowNow.com — The Real Difference Between Empathy and Sympathy

The author Brené Brown explains that empathy is a skill that strengthens with practice and encourages people to both give and receive it often. By receiving empathy, not only do we understand how good it feels to be heard and accepted, we also come to better understand the strength and courage it takes to be vulnerable and share that need for empathy in the first place. She shares nursing scholar Theresa Wiseman’s four attributes of empathy:

- **To be able to see the world as others see it**—This requires putting your own "stuff" aside to see the situation through your loved one's eyes.
- **To be nonjudgmental**—Judgement of another person’s situation discounts the experience and is an attempt to protect ourselves from the pain of the situation.
- **To understand another person’s feelings**—We must be in touch with our own feelings in order to understand someone else’s. Again, this requires putting your own "stuff" aside to focus on your loved one.
- **To communicate your understanding of that person’s feelings**—Rather than saying, "At least you..." or "It could be worse..." try saying, "I've been there, and that really hurts," or (to quote an example from Brown) "It sounds like you are in a hard place now. Tell me more about it.”

- Brené Brown, Psychology Today
  https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/partnering-in-mental-health/201408/bren-brown-empathy-vs-sympathy-0

To empathize, we listen more than we talk. We explore feelings and pay attention to what they say, what they do not say, and what their non-verbal communication tells us. One of the most important things about being empathetic is to avoid judgment. Judgment shuts down the conversation and cuts us off from the stories and experience we need to understand. Sometimes, the most difficult part is controlling facial expressions. It is easy to show concern about something that is said or be worried about something that is misunderstood; this often shows on your face and in your non-verbal cues.
Facilitators should be aware of this and work to avoid the grimace or scowl. If you become aware that you frowned, own it and move on. A facilitator could say, “I’m sorry, I furrowed my brow at that comment. It made me think of something I am concerned about. I’ll watch for that—I really want us to keep sharing openly.”

We need to be sure to stay in the role of an empathetic listener. We should not switch hats to become the teacher, catechist, or correcting authority figure. This is difficult to do because we get comfortable in our role. Let us say a young person shares a big feeling and challenges something that the Church does. Our temptation is to defend the Church or to correct the young person’s understanding. What we need to do is explore that great big feeling and find out more about why they felt that way. Make a note to follow up later. Jumping into their story with the right answers could feel satisfying, but it might shut off the conversation and we may miss the insight that is being shared.

To stay empathetic, facilitators should avoid correcting participants responses. We also need to avoid affirming or agreeing with some participants but not with others.

**Tip #3: Stay Curious**

We can show how much we want to know and understand their experience by our posture of listening, the energy in our voice, and our stance of openness. The questions and follow-ups show our interest and help us understand their experience and their perspective.

An important way to stay curious is to follow up. We can ask participants to share more details. “What was happening when you experienced that? How did that make you feel?” We can ask them to elaborate. Tell me more about that... What happened next... We can clarify. It sounds like you would recommend...

**Preparing for Your Role**

To feel ready for your role, you will want to know the group you will facilitate, know the questions, and know the process of listening. Prepare by reviewing this facilitator guide and viewing the videos, which will provide you with tips and tools for leading the conversations. This guide will also help you choose the questions that match with the individual or group you will be listening to. The National Dialogue website will provide videos and resources that can help you in your role. Visit the website at [www.nationaldialogue.info](http://www.nationaldialogue.info) for more information.

Another way to get ready will be to work with ministry leaders in your setting to learn as much as you can about the group you will be facilitating. You will really want to know your audience. You also want to know the questions well and be ready to adapt them as needed to keep the conversation going. You might consider practicing the questions by having a conversation with someone you know well just to be comfortable with the flow.

Prepare yourself by:
- Reviewing the Conversation Recording Guide
- Learning about your audience
- Exploring resources to help in growing as a facilitator
- Understanding the questions
• Matching questions with your group (and being ready to adapt)
• Practicing asking questions with one or more people you know well
• Praying for strength, guidance, and openness for your role

If possible, we recommend that you **participate** in a conversation to provide input from your perspective and to prepare for listening. Gather with other facilitators and answer the questions for ministry leaders and/or parents. This conversation should be recorded and submitted as a conversation, but you could also use this as a teaching moment. After the conversation, discuss the questions and talk about what helped and what seemed to limit conversation.

**Creating an Environment for Sharing**

“Accompanying young people requires going beyond a preconceived framework, encountering young people where they are, adapting to their times and pace of life and taking them seriously.”
Preparatory Document for the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, Part III, #1.

These conversations will be a place of encounter. Youth and young adults will encounter Christ through the sharing, each other, and a listening representative of Church. The environment for sharing is crucial to this experience. As the facilitator, you will create a place for sharing that is characterized by hospitality, respect, and safety.

The environment for conversations will vary. Some will occur in a meeting room in the parish, while others could take place in a neighborhood coffee shop. Most conversations will be in groups of five to seven participants. Some conversations with young adults may be one-on-one.

Keep these ideas in mind as you choose and prepare the environment.

Create a space for sharing where:
• Participants can easily see and hear you and each other. A circle of chairs in an open space or sitting around a table can work well.
• Everyone in the conversation is at the same level. Avoid having some members standing or sitting on the ground while others are sitting in chairs.
• The chairs are appropriate for youth and adults. Avoid sitting in children’s desks or in rows in a classroom.
• The temperature and lighting in the room can be adjusted as needed for comfort.
• There are few distractions such as excessive noise or people coming in and out of the room.
• Participants are called by name. Be sure to provide nametags if a member or members of the group are not known by you or each other.

Assume a posture of openness by:
• Sitting squarely in the chair, leaning slightly forward. Do not slouch.
• Making eye contact.
• Relaxing.
Safe Environment
All conversations should be guided by the safe environment policies of your diocese. Be sure to consult with leaders in your ministry setting as needed while you are planning and implementing the conversations. One important guideline for conversations involving minors is that there would also be more than one adult present in the ministry setting. It is also crucial that you remind participants that nothing that is shared for the National Dialogue will be identified with an individual person. Participants should be assured that conversations will be kept confidential unless they share something that indicates that they would harm themselves or someone else.

Selecting Conversation Questions

The questions are designed to help us know and understand young people’s experience of life, faith, and Church. The questions will help break open their experience, and give them the chance to share their feelings, thoughts, convictions, and suggestions.

There are question sets designed for youth and/or young adults, parents, and ministry leaders. The questions to be used in the conversations with youth and young adults are further arranged into two groupings based upon how most of the participants in the conversation would describe themselves: (1) non-, former, or marginal Catholics, and (2) active and/or engaged Catholics. This is not a label we would tell the people we are in dialogue with, or a scientific category, but a method to ask the most appropriate questions for the participants and to analyze the content of the conversations.

Category 1
- NON-CATHOLIC: Never has been Catholic.
- FORMER CATHOLIC: At one time was Catholic, but now has left the Church.

Category 2
- ACTIVE CATHOLIC: Glad to be Catholic and self-identify as one. Faith is part of his/her life, but it does not have much to do with daily activity. Goes to Mass on fairly regular basis. Believes in God and in Jesus. Catholicism mainly comes from family/culture.

The National Dialogue is providing the same questions for youth and young adults so that results can be combined and reported in a way that matches with the Synod and Fifth Encuentro Process. Even though the questions are the same for both groups, we recommend that you have separate conversations with youth and young adults unless pastorally appropriate (e.g. pastoral juvenil hispana).

There are three different question sets that you can select to use with each of the four groups.
- Youth and/or Young Adults – Non, Former or Marginally Active
- Youth and/or Young Adults – Active and Engaged
- Parents of Youth and/or Young Adults
- Ministry Leaders who work with Youth and/or Young Adults
One set for each group includes just the questions. There is also a set for each group that includes quotations from the Pre-Synod Document for the upcoming Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment. These questions could be especially helpful for groups who participated in processes providing input to the Pre-Synod. There is also a set that includes quotations from the Fifth National Encuentro. These questions could be especially helpful for groups who participated in the Encuentro. Select the question set that you believe will work best for your group.

Question Sets

Youth and/or Young Adults – Non, Former or Marginally Active
A1 - Without quotes
A2 - With quotes from the Pre-Synod document
A3 - With quotes from the Fifth National Encuentro document

Youth and/or Young Adults – Active and Engaged
B1 - Without quotes
B2 - With quotes from the Pre-Synod document
B3 - With quotes from the Fifth National Encuentro document

Parents of youth and/or young adults
C1 - Without quotes
C2 - With quotes from the Pre-Synod document
C3 - With quotes from the Fifth National Encuentro document

Ministry leaders who work with youth and/or young adults
D1 - Without quotes
D2 - With quotes from the Synod document
D3 - With quotes from the Fifth National Encuentro document

The question sets are available on the National Dialogue website and are provided in the Recording Form, available at www.nationaldialogue.info. Once you have identified the questions for your audience, practice asking the questions with someone you know and review the questions with other leaders in your ministry. The questions are key to the conversation. You will want to “speak in a language they will understand.” After reviewing and practicing, make notes as needed for rewording or adapting questions for your audience.

Facilitating the Conversation

As a facilitator, you will guide the conversation with the questions and invite participants to share. You will model and encourage good listening so that each person feels heard and respected. Some Good discussions give people the chance to think about a question and decide how he or she feels about the topic. A facilitator keeps the discussion going like a volleyball player keeps the ball in the air.

Use the following ideas to help you lead the conversation.

• **Invite participation.** Give each person a chance to speak. Develop some fun ways to get each person contributing to the subject and to redirect persons who are sharing too much. Always respect a participant who chooses to pass on a specific question.

• **Be sure to address everyone in the group by name.** If the participants are not already familiar with one another, be sure they have name tags.
• **Be comfortable with silence.** Give participants a chance to think and reflect on the topic and the question.

• **Be ready to make the topic more real by rephrasing the question or relating the topic to a common experience.**

• **Provide verbal cues and non-verbal cues** that demonstrate that you are listening. This could include a simple encouragement such as “un huh” or a nod.

• **Summarize the discussion.** Repeat back main ideas and check your understanding. As a way of closing the topic or checking for new ideas, you can summarize the sharing you have heard so far.

These tips were adapted from course materials of the Center for Ministry Development.

**Using the Conversation Agenda**

The **Conversation Agenda** (Resource available on page 15) provides a suggested process for introducing the National Dialogue conversations, introducing yourself, facilitating group introductions, praying, and setting the tone for sharing.

Review the agenda and make notes for adapting this process for your conversations as needed. Note that the agenda and the questions should serve more as a guide than a script. You should make changes as needed to invite participation for your community.

**Asking Follow-Up Questions**

Participants will feel heard as you ask additional follow-up questions that help you to understand what is being shared. Keep these three kinds of follow-up questions and responses in mind as you guide the conversation:

**Details**

Ask participants to fill out the picture, showing your curiosity.

- *Who was with you?*
- *What was it like being there?*
- *Where did you go then?*

**Elaboration**

Invite participants to share more by elaborating.

- *Tell me more about that.*
- *How did you feel about that?*
- *Can you give me an example of what you are talking about?*
- *I think I understand what you mean.*
- *That helps me understand, can you talk a little more about that?*

**Clarification**

Gently ask for clarification, making sure to communicate that it is your difficulty.

- *I’m not sure I understand what you mean by ‘hanging out’. Can you help me understand what that means?*
- *I want to make sure I understand what you mean. Would you describe it for me again?*

**Recording the Conversation**

The conversations that are taking place around the United States will help guide the transformation of ministries and the renewed engagement of youth and young adults. Each gathering should have one or more person who is dedicated to recording the key insights, ideas, and feelings shared in the
conversation. As a facilitator, you can take notes during the conversation, but it is also highly recommended that you invite someone to be a Listener, to record key ideas. For youth conversations this would be an additional adult leader. For young adult conversations, this might be one of the young adults who is participating, who could also record the sharing.

It can be awkward to stop the facilitation to take notes and sometimes, participants can feel “studied.” It is important to set this up by acknowledging that you are taking some notes so that you can share their ideas, but that nothing which is shared will be identified with a specific person. The facilitator should take written notes using the Recording Form. Avoid using a laptop, or a tablet so that you can keep your focus on facilitating the group. The listener can use a laptop or tablet. Note: do not use a recording device or your computer to make an audio recording of the conversation. You would need special permissions for participants and from parents of minors to make an audio recording. The listener can use a laptop or tablet to record key insights, ideas, and stories using the Recording Form.

Prepare to record the conversation by reviewing the question set that corresponds with your Recording Form. This form has the question sets available with space for your notes. This section should be completed during the conversation. Immediately after the conversation, review this section and write additional notes that clarify or summarize the ideas that were shared. Then, complete the Facilitator and Listener Reflection Form which matches with your group. This form asks you to provide some prioritizing and analysis of what you heard. If you had someone assist you as a listener, discuss the responses in the Recording Form and identify key ideas that were shared. Complete the reflection together.

Sharing the Content of the Conversation

After the conversation, you will be asked to share the information that you heard with the National Dialogue through an online survey. You will also be asked to reflect on the implications of the conversation for yourself and for the ministry you are part of.

Go online to submit the results for the National Dialogue (www.nationaldialogue.info). You will be completing a survey that will give you the opportunity to choose from some responses and enter comments. Your earlier reflections from the Recording Form and the Facilitator and Listener Reflection Form will be helpful to you in completing the online survey.

Share the results from your dialogue with your ministry, parish, Catholic school, and/or organization. This may be part of a meeting where all the conversations that took place in one setting can be shared. Similarly, you can share the results with your diocese, who may use online tools, and/or gather all the facilitators for sharing results.

Take some time to prayerfully consider the implications of the conversation for yourself. Heart to heart sharing is something that changes the way we look at things. Consider how this conversation has impacted you:

- How does this change or grow the way I feel about youth and young adults?
- What do I feel called to do or to do differently in the way I interact?
- What can I do in my ministry to respond to youth and young adults?
- What am I called to pray about?
Steps for Recording and Sharing the Conversation

1. Select the **Recording Form** that matches with your question set.
2. Select the **Facilitator and Listener Reflection Form** that matches with your group.
3. Use the **Recording Form** to record key ideas, feelings, examples, and stories that correspond to the questions in the conversation.
4. After the conversation, gather as Facilitator and Listener and review your notes in the **Recording Form**, then discuss and complete the **Facilitator and Listener Reflection Form**.
5. Submit your responses from the **Recording Form** and the **Facilitator and Listener Reflection Form** to the National Dialogue online at [www.nationaldialogue.info](http://www.nationaldialogue.info).
6. Share the results of the conversation with your local ministry, community and diocese.
7. Reflect on the implications of the conversation for yourself personally and in your ministry.

Follow-Through with Participants

Begin by thanking participants for being part of the process. Remind them of the purpose of the conversation and invite them to further ministry opportunities within your community. Follow up on any pastoral issues that may have surfaced in your conversations. For example, a young person may have shared challenging experiences or may have indicated an interest or a need to know more about the faith. Connect with local ministry leaders to plan for ways to follow up with participants in a way that matches their needs but also respects the confidentiality of their sharing.

Conclusion: You are Part of an Important Mission of Listening.

In the Gospel accounts, Jesus’ look of love is transformed into a word, that is, a call to newness of life which is to be accepted, explored and built up. Above all, calling means awakening a desire and jarring people from what blocks them or from the complacency which slows them down. Calling means asking questions which have no ready-made answers. In this way, and not by passively respecting norms, people are impelled to embark on a journey and to encounter the joy of the Gospel.

- *Preparatory Document for the Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, page 5.

Pope Francis asks us to listen to young people. The National Dialogue is important, and your leadership is crucial to the listening that needs to happen. You are part of something that is essential for our Church. Your sharing in this process will help connect young people with the love and mercy of Christ. You will help young disciples to share their gifts and their insights as they join in Christ’s mission of love.

There is one more thing that you are asked you to do, before, during, and after these conversations: pray. Pray for the leadership of the Catholic Church. Pray for all of those involved in the National Dialogue. Most of all, pray for young people and their families that they might allow themselves to experience the unfathomable love of Christ that is offered to them through the Catholic Church.
Resource

Conversation Agenda

Before the Gathering
1. Arrive early and prepared.
2. Bring supplies that are needed:
   - Nametags and a pen/marker
   - Pen and additional paper for notes
   - **Recording Forms** for Question Set that you selected (one form for the facilitator and one form for the listener.)
   - **Facilitator and Listener Reflection Form** for the group with whom you are working
3. Set up chairs to create a welcome environment for listening.
4. Adjust temperature and lighting as needed.
5. Relax and be ready to welcome participants.
6. Pray.

During the Conversation
1. **Introduce yourself.** Give the participants some idea about who you are and why you are involved in this process of listening.

2. **Share the purpose of the project** (suggested script below):

   *This conversation is part of the National Dialogue which is a response in the United States to Pope Francis’ call for the Church to listen to youth and young adults.*

   The purpose of this conversation is to more deeply understand your experiences so that as a church, we can transform our ministry practice to more effectively encounter and accompany you and your peers. You each have different experiences and views about faith and involvement with the Church. You each have a unique perspective to offer.

   *I will be taking some notes during the conversation. (Name) will be serving as a listener to record some key ideas. Nothing you say in this conversation will be identified with you personally. All information will be presented as summarized ideas. Your identity will not be known and nothing you share will be identified with you or shared outside this group unless you share something that indicates that you might harm yourself or someone else. When we are done with all the conversations, we will be reviewing the conversations for our ministry and sharing key insights with the organizers of the National Dialogue.*

3. **Ask if there are any questions** that people have before you get started. Invite participants to introduce themselves.

4. **Provide brief comments to guide the sharing** (suggested script below):
   - *We really want each person here to participate, to feel that they are heard, and to be respected. These ideas will help our conversation:*
   - *One person will speak at a time. Avoid interrupting or talking over each other.*
• Each person will speak for themselves. Speak from your experience. Try not to interpret what someone else has shared.

• Respect each person’s sharing and avoid judging other’s responses. You can share perspectives and experiences that are different from what you’ve heard, but this is not a debate.

5. Lead a brief prayer to begin (suggested script below):

   Loving God, thank you for gathering us. Bless this conversation! Be with us as we listen to each other and strive to know you better. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

6. Begin the conversation using the question set you selected for this group.

   • Remember that the conversation questions are a guide. You can use the questions provided or rephrase them in your own words as long as you keep the intent of the question the same. You can use this sequence of questions or skip around. You can go deeper into topics that seem important to understanding the experience of your participants. Your own skill and the “conversational path” your group interview takes will determine the nature of conversation. The participants may take you places you did not anticipate and that are very relevant to the dialogue. Be open to this!

   • If you find out that there are participants who would benefit from questions from a different set than the one you selected, you can include one or two questions from that set.

   • Record key ideas and responses that are shared using the Recording Form that corresponds with your question set.

7. When you are finished asking questions, thank the participants for their sharing. Remind them of the importance of their input and your commitment to share these ideas. Invite them to upcoming ministry opportunities in your community.

8. Lead the group in praying the Official Prayer of the National Dialogue:

   Loving God, open us to the beauty of dialogue that allows us to hear with our hearts and speak with our souls. May our conversations ignite your Spirit within us to go out into the world as missionary disciples. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

   Dios amoroso, abrenos a la belleza del diálogo que nos permita escuchar con el corazón y hablar movidos por tu Espíritu. Que nuestro diálogo, encienda ese mismo Espíritu en nosotros, y nos envíe por el mundo como discípulos misioneros. Por nuestro Señor Jesucristo. Amén.
After the Conversation

1. Immediately after the conversation, record your impressions of the recording using the **Recording Form** that corresponds with your question set. This form has the question sets available with room for notes. This section should be completed during the conversation. Immediately after the conversation, review this section and write additional notes that clarify or summarize the ideas that were shared. Then, complete the **Facilitator and Listener Reflection Form** that matches with your group. This tool asks you to provide some prioritizing and analysis of what you heard. If you had someone assist you as a listener, discuss the responses in the **Recording Form** and identify key ideas that were shared. Complete the **Facilitator and Listener Reflection Form** together. The **Recording Form** and **Facilitator and Listener Reflection Form** can be found online at [www.nationaldialogue.info](http://www.nationaldialogue.info).

2. Follow up on any pastoral issues that may have surfaced in your conversation. For example, a young person may have shared challenging experiences or may have indicated in interest or a need to know more about the faith. Connect with ministry leaders in your setting to plan for ways to follow up with participants in a way that matches their needs but also respects the confidentiality of their sharing.

3. Share the responses with the National Dialogue, your ministry, parish, Catholic school, organization, and/or your diocese.

4. Reflect on personal implications of the conversation.

5. Pray in gratitude for this opportunity to listen and serve in ministry.