

2021 Synod 2023 For a synodal Church

Synod Local Activities Guidance

Purpose of Consultations/Conversations

- The purpose of these consultations/conversations is to explore and answer this two-part question: *How does this “journeying together,” which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?*

Possible Consequences of Consultations/Conversations

- One possible consequence of these consultations/conversations is to activate energy and creativity of all who will participate in the journey, so that they may continue sharing ideas and explore subthemes of this two-part question.
- Another possible consequence of these consultations is that leaders who have the gifts needed to conduct outreach consultations will reveal themselves.
- A third possible consequence of the consultations/conversations is that our communion with one another will be strengthened.

Ground Rules for Participants

- We will create an environment in which all persons and viewpoints are welcome and respected and in which no one should fear repercussions for any thoughts, ideas, or feelings that are shared.
- We will openly communicate how the Holy Spirit is speaking to us.
- We will not debate Church politics or Church doctrine that comes from the Living Tradition, Sacred Scriptures, and the Catholic Catechism; nor will we debate secular politics.
- We will not attempt to convert others to our way of thinking.
- We will not set specific goals or strategies.

Good Communication Begins with Good Listening

- To fully address this two-part question together first requires listening to the Holy Spirit, who like the wind “blows where it will; you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (Jn 3:8). Be open to surprises that the Spirit will surely prepare for us along the way. This openness will initiate an energy that allows participants to begin to reap some of the fruits of journeying with companions.
- Listening is transactional, not a passive activity. We are sending messages, while at the same time, we are receiving messages. Healthy communication requires respectful, active listening.
 - While someone is expressing thoughts and feelings, focus only on that person, and remain curious and open to understanding the key message and the emotions shared.
- Suspend judgment. Our instinctive judging capacity can cause us to be closed to ideas and

feelings that differ from our own. Often, because we perceive that another person does not hold the same viewpoint as we do, we pass judgment on that person, which usually involves stereotyping. This behavior affects our ability to listen deeply. Be aware of your judgment and put it aside; this is an expression of respect for your sister or brother and opens the door to learning and building relationships.

- Be a responsive listener by using appropriate facial expressions: nodding and smiling [unless a sad story is being shared]; a blank face indicates a lack of interest. Slumped posture, a bored expression, looking around the room, whispering to your neighbor, texting, frowning [unless a sad story is being shared], and yawning indicate that the speaker is uninteresting and not worthy of your attention.
- Resist “cross talk” and “stage-hogging.” When someone says something that interests us, we sometimes feel the urge to say something like, “Yes! That’s happened to me,” or “If you think that was amazing, let me tell you what happened to me!” When you find a story or idea intriguing, write down your comment so you may mention it when it is your turn to speak.
- Avoid selective and insulated listening and know the difference. Responding only to parts of a statement that personally interests you is selective listening. Avoiding hearing an uncomfortable message is insulated listening.
- Resist being a defensive listener—taking others’ comments as personal attacks. Be charitable toward your sisters and brothers and assume their intention is not to offend.
- Resist ambushing and insensitive listening. Ambushers listen carefully and remember what a speaker says to use the statement against them or to create an argument. Insensitive listeners respond to superficial content of a message and miss the emotional information that may not be verbally expressed.

Responsible Speaking Leads to Good Communication

- Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your words and trust what follows.
- Speak purposefully and authentically. Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the questions at hand and be conscious of sharing time with other participants.
- Take responsibility for your personal ideas and feelings by using “I” language. No one person can speak for an entire group of people. If you are the designated person to share results of a group consultation, then use “we” language. Avoid starting sentences with “it” because that evades responsibility and avoid “you” language because that unfairly places responsibility on everyone.
- Tell your story to the degree that you feel comfortable.
- Avoid powerless language. Instead of saying, “I am kind of disappointed,” say, “I am disappointed.” Do not begin a thought with, “I probably shouldn’t say this, but…” Say what you need to say; you have been asked to share.

Be Aware that Not Everybody Communicates in the Same Way, and Take Responsibility for Personal Needs

- Some people feel uncomfortable speaking in front of a large group of people, which is one reason to break into small groups for sharing and then designate a speaker for the group when the large group comes together.
- Some people may prefer to write their experiences and ideas, rather than speak them aloud.
- Those who are hearing impaired should inform parish coordinators so that appropriate accommodations may be arranged.
- Those who are concerned about language barriers should inform parish coordinators so that appropriate accommodations may be arranged.

