



Synod on Synodality Listening Session – Convener’s Guide

The following provides an overview of the listening session:

- Purpose:** Pope Francis invites all the baptized around the world to participate in the Synod on Synodality by sharing their experiences, hopes, and concerns for the Church and to listen to the same from others.
- Invitees:** All who are baptized in Christ are invited and welcomed to participate in a Synod listening session. Whether highly engaged in the faith, disengaged, or somewhere in between, our people have personal stories and views to share. In fact, Pope Francis has repeatedly stressed that the Synod needs to hear from those who are frequently on the margins and who feel distanced from the Church. This local sharing of experiences will help guide the worldwide Synod and will allow opportunities for growth in our Archdiocese.
- Promotion:** The listening session should be widely promoted to diverse audiences. Parish bulletins, pulpit announcements, electronic communications, social media postings, newsletters, word of mouth, etc. The objective is for the widest audience possible to receive a welcome invitation to participate in this Synod process by sharing their thoughts and experiences.
- Duration:** A typical listening session will be approximately 90–120 minutes.
- Format:** If the gathering has eight (8) or more attendees, consider small group breakouts of 4-5 per table for sharing. A list of reflection questions will be given to attendees for dialogue and sharing their own stories, experiences, and dreams for the Church.

Three stages are suggested for a typical in-person listening session:

- (1) Convener welcomes attendees, highlights the Synod objective/ process/ timeline, and describes the purpose of the session (20 minutes).
- (2) Breakout into small groups of 4-5 per table for sharing and listening on reflection questions (70 minutes).
- (3) Reconvene full group to hear a sampling of learnings from small group dialogues (30 minutes).

Resources: Electronic resources available to view and download at www.archlou.org/synod-2022.

Conclusion: After the listening session concludes, the convener will complete a Listening Session – Convener Feedback to Archdiocese form that captures the essence of the gathering and send it to the Archdiocese. The Archdiocese will collect similar firsthand feedback summaries from conveners of all diocesan sessions and will compile a final report that reflects the wide spectrum of what was learned from the faithful in this local Synodal journey.

A. Before the Listening Session

1. Listening session conveners should become familiar with the Synod process. Several resources are available at www.archlou.org/synod-2022. This Listening Session Convener's Guide, the [Listening Session Participant Overview](#), the [Listening Session – Selecting Reflection Questions](#), and the [Synod on Synodality – Frequently Asked Questions](#) will be particularly helpful.
2. Create a team to promote and execute the listening session. Persons should be assigned to handle promotion, facilities, hospitality, and to serve as small group scribes. In choosing scribes, you may wish to invite parishioners and/or staff who have experience with facilitation to participate on the team and to attend the listening session(s) to serve in this role for the small group process that will be part of the listening session. (See below for a description of roles.)
3. Promote attendance at the listening session through a variety of communication platforms. [Bulletin blurbs and announcements](#), [a social media toolkit](#), [petitions](#), and [other tools](#) are located at www.archlou.org/synod-2022. Be sure to share the one-page [Listening Session Participant Overview](#) document in various ways during this promotion phase so that those considering participation are prepared for the experience. If you are requesting RSVPs for the listening session, which is recommended, be sure to share in advance the [Listening Session Participant Overview](#) document and the [Listening Session – Participant Reflection Questions/Notes](#) document with your selected questions filled in with those who plan to attend. (For more information about selecting questions, see point #4 below about Listening Session Questions.)

Descriptions of Roles

Promotion/Hospitality

- Promote awareness of the Synod listening session date, time, purpose and invite all to attend.
- Prepare space for attendees to gather in one group, and have space ready for small group breakouts of 4-5 people per table.
- Prepare for any audio/visual needs, if applicable.
- Consider whether to offer snacks and refreshments.

Convener

- Serve as the local point person for the listening session.
- Select the reflection questions to be used for the listening session.
- Serve as the full group facilitator of the gathering.
- Complete the [Listening Session – Convener Feedback to Archdiocese](#) document and submit to the Archdiocese. This form also can be submitted online [here](http://www.archlou.org/Feedback-Archdiocese). (www.archlou.org/Feedback-Archdiocese)

Small Group Scribes

- One person selected per small group breakout table.
- Present reflection questions to the small group.
- Participate in the small group listening and sharing discussions.
- Take notes of pertinent comments, experiences, visions, dreams, and learnings.
- Orally share a sampling of the notes with the full group.

Participants/Attendees

- Understand what the Synod seeks to accomplish, and what is beyond its scope.
 - Be open to sharing your experiences, stories, and dreams of Church.
 - Respectfully listen to others as they share their personal journeys.
4. Finalize the [agenda](#) and choose the questions that you would like to focus on at your listening session. There are ten themes chosen for the Synod, with a selection of questions under each theme; these are summarized on the [Listening Session – Selecting Reflection Questions](#) document. Depending upon the context of the listening sessions (e.g. parish, Catholic organization or lay movement, religious community) some themes may be more appropriate than others for your participants. It is better to cover one or two themes more deeply than to try to deal with all themes. For the small group dialogue, the convener, in collaboration with other leaders of this process, should review these reflection questions and choose a maximum of 3-4 questions that are most pertinent to the local context. In addition to your selected questions, all groups should answer a final question, “As we conclude this time of listening and sharing personal views, experiences, and dreams for our Church, what is the Holy Spirit saying to us in this conversation today?” See [Listening Session – Selecting Reflection Questions](#) document for the detailed themes and suggested questions. If you are asking participants to RSVP (recommended) to the listening sessions, please share with them and the scribes in advance both the [Listening Session Participant Overview](#) and the [Listening Session – Participant Reflection Questions/Notes](#) with your selected questions filled in on this document. This form is on the www.archlou.org/synod-2022 web page as [a Word document](#) or as a [fillable PDF](#) for your convenience in editing it to add your questions.

B. Conducting the Listening Session

Be sure that all participants have prayer handouts, the [Listening Session Participant Overview](#) document, and your local version of the Listening Session – Participant Reflection Questions/Notes.

Introduction

Introduce yourself as the overall convener of the listening session and introduce any other key leaders that are present, such as the Pastor.

Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

The process should begin with an opening prayer service that incorporates the [“Prayer for the Synod: Adsumus Sancte Spiritus.”](#) A suggested prayer service can be found [here](#).

Listening Session Convener Provides Background for the Process (5 minutes)

- Context: A worldwide process that will take place from 2021-2023 that begins with this diocesan phase. Pope Francis has called all the faithful to embrace synodality as a process for being Church in the third millennium. Guided by the Spirit, Catholics are being asked to “walk together” to listen to Jesus in and through Sacred Scripture and tradition and listen to one another to discern the will of God for carrying out the mission of the Church. This diocesan phase will conclude with a report to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in June of 2022. The worldwide synodal process will conclude with a Synod of Bishops in Rome in October of 2023.

- Review Listening Session Participant Overview document key messages:
 - It is important that we understand the Synod's objective for the consultation. Participants are invited to offer their experiences, wisdom, hopes, and concerns around specific themes; to dream about the Church we are called to be; and to listen as others similarly share their experiences. This is an opportunity for us to hear and learn from diverse voices and backgrounds, and to discern how God calls us to journey forward together to fulfill our Catholic mission in the world.
 - Perhaps equally important is that we understand what the Synod listening session is not. It is not about planning, solving, persuading, or debating. It is not about particular voices having greater or lesser influence than others. And, it is not about compiling statistics, data, survey results or producing volumes of documents.

Listening Session Convener Explains the Process (5 minutes)*

- This process utilizes dialogue (relational and focused on exchanging perspectives) rather than discussion (talking to reach a decision or conclusion), debate (competitive interaction focused on convincing one another), or diatribe (one-way communication designed to browbeat, inspire, or shame).
- Be open to being led by the Holy Spirit rather than your own agendas or opinions.
- Look beyond our immediate concerns and issues. Consider those at the peripheries and think about the big picture and long-term realities of being Church.
- Look forward and dream rather than being focused only on problems and problem solving.
- Consider how we journey together as the Body of Christ, as a community, rather than focusing only on structures.
- One person speaks at a time. Allow everyone to have the opportunity to speak and listen respectfully to others with an open mind.
- Emphasize the importance for all groups to answer the final question: "As we conclude this time of listening and sharing personal views, experiences, and dreams for our Church, what is the Holy Spirit saying to us in this conversation today?"
- If they wish, participants can jot down thoughts and notes on the local version of the Listening Session – Participant Reflection Questions/Notes.
- The scribe assigned to each small group will introduce questions for dialogue, take notes on the themes surfaced during the small group session, and report a summary of the small group dialogue in a large group feedback session at the end of this listening session.

Questions?

C. Small Group Dialogue (70 minutes)

Ask participants to organize themselves into groups of 4-5 people for small group listening sessions. As participants begin their dialogue, suggest that they begin with a brief prayer to the Holy Spirit (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.”).

During the small group dialogue phase, conveners should monitor the time and check in with small groups in case questions need to be answered or assistance provided.

Scribes should use the local version of the Listening Session – Participant Reflection Questions/Notes form to record notes of the dialogue and to assist in their report to the large group after the small group process is completed. Scribes also will give their notes on this form to the convener after the listening session is completed.

D. Large Group Reporting (30 minutes)

After the small group sessions are completed, ask participants to gather again for a large group session in which the scribes will orally share a sampling of the dialogue that occurred in their small groups. Conveners may wish to ask a scribe to take some notes on this large group reporting process. At the end of this large group reporting session, ask the scribes to give you their Listening Session – Participant Reflection Questions/Notes form from each group.

E. After the Listening Session

As soon as possible after the listening session(s), conveners should fill out the [Listening Session – Convener Feedback to Archdiocese](#) and forward to Tink Guthrie at the Archdiocese of Louisville. This form contains more general questions about the experience, sources of energy and inspiration, examples of diversity of thoughts, and unique stories or perspectives from this experience. Conveners should not send the individual small group or participant feedback forms to the Archdiocese.

This form can be submitted [online](#) at www.archlou.org/Feedback-Archdiocese. It also is available as a [Word document](#) that you can email or mail Tink Guthrie tguthrie@archlou.org, Archdiocese of Louisville, 3940 Poplar Level Road, 40213-1463. All forms must be returned by June 1, 2022.

**Special thanks is extended to the Leadership Roundtable for the document “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission. Process for Facilitating Synodal Consultations,” which provided helpful information to inform the talking points for this introduction to the listening session process.*