

SYNODAL CONVERSATION

FACILITATOR GUIDE

Thank you for accepting the invitation to serve as a room facilitator for this conversation. This guide provides step-by-step instructions on your facilitation role, the supplies needed, room setup and details about what table hosts will be facilitating at each table. Your role is of the utmost importance in creating a meaningful and engaging experience for everyone involved.

ABOUT SYNODAL LISTENING ¹

Synodality and synodal listening are ways of being to which Pope Francis has invited all of us. While these are not new concepts in the Church, the processes used in synodal listening provide new ways of encountering one another and Jesus' invitational leadership. Engaging in synodal listening allows us not just to formulate recommendations but also to learn about one another, connect on a deeper level, make space to intentionally listen to the Holy Spirit, and welcome wisdom to emerge through sharing from our lived experiences.

ROOM SET-UP AND SUPPLIES

- ✦ Room(s) conducive for listening that include table circles of 6 – 8 participants.
- ✦ Play quiet ambient music to foster an atmosphere of contemplation. When table conversations begin, lower the volume.
- ✦ A chime to aid in the facilitation of the process.
- ✦ On each table:
 - 1 or 2 candles, to be lit before the session begins.
 - 2 one-minute sand timers.
 - 2 table host guides.
 - 1 set of participant guidelines for each person.
 - 1 summary card with a pen for the table host to collect table wisdom and pass back to the room facilitator.

SETTING THE TONE: YOUR ROLE

Welcoming

Each room will play quiet music, and candles will be lit on each table. The room facilitator will welcome people and invite them to enter in silence. You will set the tone for the conversation.

Participant arrival

Please make sure that participants are seated before you begin.

Note: If you are planning a large gathering in several rooms, we recommend having a greeter at the entrance of every room. The greeter should help people find a table and ensure they enter the room in respectful silence. Greeters should encourage late arrivals to sit at the tables toward the back of the room, until the room facilitator has offered instructions and table groups have begun their conversations. Table hosts are free to begin conversations at their table after the room facilitator has offered instructions, practicing hospitality if latecomers join.

Quiet opening

After all participants have found their way to a table in silence, the room facilitator will strike a chime to begin the session.

Chime.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION: YOUR SCRIPT

Intention

Call the room to gather and name the intention for the conversation.

“We are here to have a synodal experience. The intention for our table conversations is: to listen together to the call of the Spirit to our Catholic health care ministry.”

Pause.

Table guidelines

“I invite us to be aware of the guidelines for these conversations, which you can also find at your table. Please refer to them as needed. They are as follows:”

Pause and read the Guidelines:

Honor the intention: Be mindful of the sacredness within the conversation.

Listen to understand: Instead of preparing your response, listen to grasp what others are trying to say.

Speak from the heart: Share from your own experience.

Speak to be understood: Avoid long stories or complicated examples with a lot of detail. Instead, aim to be succinct.

Be open to growth: Enter into the process from a place of humility.

Stay curious: Lean into nonjudgmental inquiry. Remain open to hearing other or differing perspectives. Return to wonder.

Listening rounds

“We will be invited to experience three rounds of a spiritual conversation at your table. Your table host will mention the centering question for each of the rounds. Let us share from our personal experience in the first round and listen intently to others. The second round will allow us to share what we have heard that brings new insight, and in the final round, we will be invited to discover the wisdom we want to share with the rest of the group. We pray in our listening we will move from the ‘I’ to the ‘WE’.”

Time

“Each one of us will always have one minute to share. This will allow for everyone to have the opportunity to speak and for the three rounds of conversation critical to the synodal listening process.”

Explanation of the table host

“Each table has an assigned table host who will serve as convener and timekeeper. The table host will gather the table’s wisdom to share with the rest of the group at the end. We are grateful for their willingness to serve in this role. When your table has completed the three rounds of conversation, the table host will move to closing and will request a gesture of gratitude to the group. Then move to silence and wait for the rest of the circles/tables to finish.”

Sacred space

“We are invited to engage fully in this process and hold the sacredness of what is being offered by each participant. Let us speak with intention and pause briefly after each person has spoken, and also hold the trust together.” Pause.

Invite the table to pray.

“Let us pray as we begin: May we offer room in our thoughts, our listening, and our speaking to the Holy Spirit whispering in our midst, Amen.” Pause.

Begin

“I now invite table facilitators to begin. Please refer to your Table Host Guide.”

Chime.

WHEN TABLE CONVERSATIONS BEGIN

- ✦ Pray for the participants, the table hosts and the Spirit's communing presence – for openness, curiosity and mutuality.
- ✦ Make yourself visibly available if table hosts or participants have questions. This will ensure a respectful, conversational environment.
- ✦ Refer to Table Host Guide.
- ✦ Be prepared to serve as a table host if needed.
- ✦ Each table will complete their conversation at a different pace.
- ✦ Tend to the room's environment and invite participants to remain in prayerful silence until all conversations have ceased.

SENDING FORTH

When all the tables have concluded three rounds and the room is moved to quiet:

- ✦ Thank participants and table hosts.
- ✦ If time allows, invite tables to briefly share their insights.
- ✦ Collect the written table summaries.
- ✦ Explain how participants will receive a synthesis of the gathering.
- ✦ Invite those gathered to a closing prayer:

“Holy Spirit, continue to encourage us to listen. May we listen to those we serve, may we listen to our collaborators, and may we listen to God's voice speaking in our time. Amen.”