

# SYNODAL CONVERSATION

## TOOLKIT OVERVIEW

### Welcome

CHA is pleased to offer a synodal conversation toolkit to help members enhance the spiritual conversations being replicated throughout the Catholic Church. The Church of the future must be a synodal church – one that listens, welcomes and journeys together.

“A Synodal Church in mission is grounded in the ability to listen, which requires recognizing that no one is self-sufficient in the Church’s mission and that everyone has a contribution to offer and something to learn from others. Formation in listening is, therefore, an essential initial requirement.”

*Instrumentum Laboris, Synod Second Session, October 2024, No. 54*

### Why hold synodal conversations in Catholic health care? Why does it matter?

Listening is a bold contribution to human flourishing, and Catholic ministries need to model being places of authentic listening. People feel welcomed and respected when they are listened to. These conversations can help us create a shared understanding of mission – unified purpose, community and belonging. As has been said, the shortest distance between two people is a story. Listening changes the atmosphere.

### Why now?

First, because we are called to care for our communities. The times in which we live challenge us to build a community together. Without intentional and structured processes that convene

and allow us to hear each other’s stories, we risk further polarization or fragmentation. Second, the Church is finding new ways to make the dream of the Second Vatican Council a lived reality. The purpose of the Council, which called us to understand the Church as “People of God,” should ground our approach to care, trusting that God is always doing something new through the Spirit that journeys with us. As a ministry of the Church, synodality transcends a mere therapeutic process of listening; it is purposeful listening aimed at collaboration and transformation, rooted in the mission that grounds this process.

### Who are these conversations for?

Pope Francis would say, “Todos, todos, todos.” Synodal conversations are good for everyone. We suggest beginning somewhere: mission formation, spiritual care leaders and sponsors for use with executive teams. But we know the creativity and energy of our leaders at the local level will find ways to extend this invitation meaningfully to all in our ministry.

This toolkit offers step-by-step guidance to help you bring these sacred conversations to life. No two synodal conversations are alike; this guide serves as a resource to support the specific needs of your ministry as you discern the best ways to implement this process with your colleagues.

CHA looks forward to hearing about the synodal conversations taking place across the ministry. We pray that our mission to extend the healing ministry of Jesus Christ will be kindled in our listening.

# THE SYNODAL CONVERSATION: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

## Part One: Organizing the Conversation

Planning is essential for these 60 to 75 minute conversations. Your organization and team need to identify a person or committee to coordinate the process.

Your organization also needs to determine the purpose of the conversation. What central question will help participants contribute to a deeper understanding of the mission and values they share? We recommend using a big-hearted question, such as: “How can we be a united voice for Catholic health care in society and with the Church?”

### The coordinating committee or person needs to keep the following in mind:

**TEAM:** Depending on the size of the group participating in the synodal conversation, you'll need to convene a team. For larger groups, we recommend:

- ✦ Room facilitators: If the conversations are planned for groups of 50 or more, multiple room facilitators may be needed.
- ✦ Table hosts: Table hosts need to be identified ahead of time to facilitate a round-table dialogue with groups, ideally between 6 and 8 people.
- ✦ Room greeters: If you are planning a gathering among several rooms, we recommend having a greeter at the entrance of every room, helping people find a table and ensuring they enter the room in respectful silence.

**TRAINING:** Table hosts need time to become familiar with the process. An excellent way to do this is to practice hosting a conversation with them, so they understand the process and can replicate it later. The materials we have provided can serve as a guide, but each individual will bring their own facilitative style to the process.

**FACILITIES:** Space matters. Planning ahead to set up the environment for conversations can enhance the process and set the tone for respectful and meaningful listening. Tables are helpful. As an alternative, chairs alone can also be arranged in circles, but without tables, some people might not feel comfortable. Also, note that people with hearing issues might welcome a space where noise levels can be kept down. Consider how much space you need between tables to enhance group listening.

**MATERIALS:** Ensure familiarity with the table guidelines, room facilitator guidelines and table host guidelines. Review recommendations for room environment like sand timers, candles and music.

To be most effective, synodal conversations need a core team of committed individuals. We are grateful to all those who are willing to coordinate them for our ministry.

Inviting participants is another critical organizational step. The invitation sets up expectations and tone. Be sure to share the reasons and hopes.

## Part Two: Convening the Conversation

*(For more detail, see the Room Facilitator Guide)*

Good conversations always have a good host, so the convener, also referred to as a room facilitator, is perhaps the most critical role in the process. Those called to convene a listening session need to be aware that they model the tone and importance of the conversation. How one hosts matters.

- 1 We encourage organizations to identify individuals with the gift of gracious, Spirit-filled hospitality – collaborators who make others feel welcome and accepted, who understand how to create an environment of trust, who can open a space for respectful dialogue.
- 2 Those individuals called to host or convene a conversation need to believe that listening is a pillar of community. They need to model listening as bridge-building for the common good.
- 3 The room facilitator sets the tone for the session. Synodal listening sessions are not meetings or social gatherings. They are conversations in the Spirit, so the facilitator must set the pace and tone for the conversations along with the right environment. We encourage facilitators to read this guide carefully, set up the room for the conversations, and share from their own experiences.
- 4 Be sure to begin and end the session with a simple prayer, a call to mindfulness. The facilitator's guide has some suggested prayers, but adapt to the group where necessary.

### **“Dos and Don'ts” of Convening**

- ✦ Do motivate for silence at the beginning of each round. Silence matters.
- ✦ Do create a physical environment for meaningful and respectful dialogue.
- ✦ Do emphasize the spiral nature of conversations. There are three rounds, and within each round, participants are encouraged to go deeper into what is meaningful to the group.
- ✦ Don't worry about notes or outcomes; the conversation is what matters. Let the Spirit lead the way.
- ✦ Don't be discouraged by those who interrupt or speak too much. Let the energy of the group process that gently.
- ✦ Don't expect the same experience every time. Each group conversation is unique, and the Spirit speaks through each one in different ways.