



Catholic Diocese of Wilmington

Synod Listening Session

Instructions for Small Group Leaders

Role of the Small Group Leader

During a Synod Listening Session, if there is a large gathering, people present are broken up into small groups. Each small group has a *Leader*. The primary task of the Leader is to guide and facilitate the prayerful reflection and sharing of the small group based on the *Two Primary Questions*. The Leader participates as a contributing member in the group sharing, but is also in charge of leading and facilitating this process for the group.

When the head Facilitator for the Listening Session instructs that it is time for the small group sharing, the Leader will begin to direct his/her group in this part of the process.

Preparation for Small Group Sharing

The Leader should first ensure that everyone has a copy of the *Listening Session Participant Worksheet*. This worksheet provides the *Two Primary Questions* for reflection and space for participants to jot down their thoughts. The Leader should also ensure that the Reporter for the group is present and has their instructions and the *Small Group Report Form* to capture the summary responses for the group. The Leader should ensure everyone in their group who needs a writing utensil has one. The *Participant Handout*, *Report Form*, and writing utensils are ordinarily in place in advance and provided by the head Facilitator for that Listening Session. The Leader should also have a means of keeping time to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to share their thoughts.

Conducting the Small Group Sharing

(1) Question #1: Introduce & Reflect - The Leader begins the group reflection by reminding the group that the task at hand is first to listen to the voice and promptings of the Holy Spirit in their hearts as the group together reflects and shares on the *Two Primary Questions*. These *Two Primary Questions* are provided at the end of this document. The leader then slowly reads the *First Question* along with its adjoining questions and then invites the group to pray and reflect in silence for about 5 minutes. Silence can be uncomfortable, but is necessary to hear the voice of the Lord.

(2) Question #1: Sharing - After the period of silent prayer, the Leader then invites the members of the group one-by-one to share their responses to the *First Question*. The Leader should also share his/her own response. Each person should be given about 2 to 3 minutes to respond and share their thoughts; depending on the size of the group more or less time could be given to each person.

The Leader is the timekeeper and keeps the sharing of the participants moving along. The Leader kindly interjects if an individual begins to dominate the sharing and speaks for too long. The point of the sharing is for the all of the group members to have the opportunity to speak and to do so freely while the other members simply listen along to what is being said. There should be no arguing, defending, or debating; this is a listening session in the strictest sense. The Leader keeps everyone focused and maintains the spirit and purpose of the small group listening and sharing.

(3) Question #1: Summarize - The Leader should then help the Reporter to discern and identify the three primary *Strengths* and the primary *Challenges* that surfaced as a result of everyone's responses in the small group sharing for this *First Question*. This can be done by asking the group which points that were brought forward resonated with other members. The Reporter will then record these three *Strengths* and the three *Challenges* on the appropriate form for the group.

(4) Question #2: Reflect - Once everyone has had the opportunity to share their response for the *First Question* and the Reporter's work is finished, the leader then repeats the process and slowly reads the *Second Question* along with its adjoining questions. The Leader then invites the group to pray and reflect in silence for about 5 more minutes.

(5) Question #2: Sharing - After the period of silent prayer, as before, the Leader then invites the members of the group again one-by-one to share their response to the *Second Question*. The Leader should again share his/her own response. Each person should be given about 2 to 3 minutes to respond. The Leader should continue to keep time and ensure that the sharing moves along and no one speaks excessively or inappropriately.

(6) Question #2: Summarize - The Leader should then help the Reporter to discern and identify at least three but no more than six *Action Steps* that were generated as a result of everyone's responses in the small group sharing for the *Second Question*. This again can be done by consulting the group about which points were brought forward and resonated with the other members. The Reporter will then record these three to six *Action Steps* on the appropriate form for the group.

Submission & Sharing of Results

Once everyone has had the opportunity to share their response for the *Second Question* and the Reporter's work is completed, the head Facilitator for the Listening Session will call all small groups back to attention. The head Facilitator may then invite the Leaders/Reporters of some or all of the small groups to share a *Strength, Challenge, and/or Action Step* with the gathering at-large. At the conclusion of this final sharing the Leader in conjunction with the Reporter is to ensure that the *Small Group Report Form* is completed properly and submitted to the head Facilitator before leaving the Listening Session that day.

Tips for Effective Small Group Sharing

The Leader of the small group should strive to adopt these following best practices for effective sharing and listening. Journeying together in a small group means:

1. I affirm that this listening session is a safe place to talk.
2. I treat each person and what they have to say with reverence, respect, dignity, and confidentiality.
3. I allow one person to speak at a time and listen with an open mind, even if I do not agree with their perspective.
4. Since our conversation is to promote dialogue:
 - a. When I speak my purpose is to advance the conversation of the group.
 - b. I will strive to understand that everyone's experience is different, and I will be acutely aware of my attitude and tone of voice in all interactions.
5. I will be prudent and limit how long I speak so that everyone has time to share.
6. I only speak once until everyone has had an opportunity to share.
7. As a participant, when I tell others of our experience of the listening session, I will not attribute anything we share to a particular person or group.

First Question with Adjoining Questions

The following represents the *First Question* of the Synod proposed by Pope Francis. Accompanying it are additional questions which speak to the *First Question* and help participants to articulate a response to this question. This question will elicit two types of responses either: (1) A ***Strength*** of how the Church *journeys together* well or (2) A ***Challenge***, an area where the Church may need improvement. The input shared from the group participants for this question should be placed in one of these two categories by the Leader and the Reporter for the written responses on the form to be submitted.

FIRST QUESTION: The Church in announcing the Gospel journeys together. How is this “journeying together” happening today in your local Church?

Our Strengths

- What are our experiences of journeying together in our local Church?
- What joys did those experiences bring?

Our Challenges

- What difficulties and obstacles have we encountered?
- What wounds did those experiences reveal?
- What voices are missing or not present among us?
- What insights have those experiences elicited? (*Strengths/Challenges*)

Second Question with Adjoining Questions

The following represents the *Second Question* of the Synod proposed by Pope Francis. Like the previous question accompanying it are additional questions which speak to the *Second Question* and help participants to articulate a response to this question. This question will elicit one type of response called an *Action Step*. An *Action Step* is what someone thinks the Church is being called to do to *journey together* better. The input shared from the group participants for this question should be recorded in the appropriate section on the form to be submitted.

SECOND QUESTION: What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?

Our Action Steps

- What paths forward are opening up for our local Church?
- Where in these experiences does the voice of the Holy Spirit resound?
- In what way is the Spirit calling us to reach out and how?
- What are the areas for change for our Church and what steps can be taken?

The content contained in this document is adapted from the following:

- [Process for Facilitating Synodal Consultations](#) (Leadership Roundtable)
- [Official Vatican Synod website](#) (Vatican-Holy See Synod Office)
- [USCCB Synod website](#)