



For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

A Guide to Listening Deeply

“I have come here to encourage you to take this synodal process seriously and to tell you that the Holy Spirit needs you. And this is true: the Holy Spirit needs us. Listen to it by listening to yourself. Don't leave anyone out or behind.”

Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis to the Faithful of the Diocese of Rome 18th September 2021

Listening is method of the Synodal pathway. **Listening deeply** together will support us to discern what the Spirit of God may be saying to us. Discernment is the attitude or stance of people who believe that God is always both present and active in the details of our lives. It relies on the conviction that he will reveal his plans and purposes to us if we make the effort to be attentive. We fully understand discernment only by doing it. It begins with listening.

Everyone in the Synod process will listen. However, **if you have a role** in hosting a conversation or specifically listening so as to hear the whole conversation and offer feedback, you will benefit from preparing well.

Active Listening

First, like everyone who is sharing, attend to your ‘active listening’. The goal is to try and understand others as they are. The core question is: “What is happening in the other person and in me, and how is the Lord working here?” Listen not only to what is said but also to what the speaker means and what he or she might be experiencing at a deeper level – thus listening actively.

Active listening means:

- We listen to what is being said, not focussing on what we will say afterwards.
- We give full attention and presence to the person. We pay attention to more than one level of expression in the other.
- We allow ourselves to be influenced and learn from the other
- We welcome the speaker without judgment – each person is the expert on his or her own life. This requires humility, openness, patience.
- We are able to sit comfortably with silence
- We have an awareness that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the other person.

Hosting a conversation or group

The aim is to create an atmosphere of trust and welcome, so that people can express themselves more freely. This helps to alleviate fear or suspicion and enable people to take seriously what happens within them as they listen to others speak. Ultimately, this interior attentiveness makes us more aware of the presence and participation of the Holy Spirit in the process of sharing and discernment.

If working with a group you may wish to offer these questions one at a time, slowly for silent reflection prior to starting the conversation:

- Do you believe that this group is gathered to do God's work?
- Do you believe that you will hear the Holy Spirit in others?
- Will you listen deeply to each other and listen for God?
- Will you hear all opinions and value the person giving them – even when you disagree with the opinion?
- Will you see disagreement as an opportunity and not as a threat?
- Will you be open and generous?

Your Role

- Prepare people ahead of time (provide Synod Participant's Guide and all the details needed to take part)
- SOLER (Sit square on (if one to one), open posture, lean in, eye contact, relax)
- Open questioning (that is no questions which have a yes or no response - maintain a conversational style)
- Ask for clarification – “tell me more”...seek understanding rather than offer judgement – “I'm curious about that”
- Reflect back what you have heard (What I heard you say was...")

After the listening take time for your own reflection:

What are you learning about the experience of listening in the Church?



Woman at well, Ilyas Basim Khuri Bazzi Rahib.jpg
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Guidelines for Listening Conversations

Teach me to listen, O God, to myself.

Help me to be less afraid to trust the voice inside—in the deepest part of me.

Teach me to listen, Holy Spirit, for your voice—in busyness and in boredom, in certainty and doubt, in noise and in silence.

Teach me, Lord, to listen.

Teach me to listen, O God, to those nearest me, my family, my friends, my co-workers.

Help me to be aware that no matter what words I hear, the message is:

“Accept the person I am. Listen to me.”

Teach me to listen, my caring God, to those far from me—the whisper of the hopeless, the plea of the forgotten, the cry of the anguished. Amen

John Veltris S.J.

PURPOSE OF THE LISTENING CONVERSATIONS

By simply listening and attending without discussion and debate, we may deepen our awareness of how contemplative listening may genuinely ‘hear a person’ and lay the foundations for hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The one who shares may experience that speaking from the heart into such a receptive listening helps to honour and own what has been articulated however haltingly.

The Group Session

- The group is given the questions to reflect upon and time to write down their thoughts and feelings. This is a silent exercise.
- After a period of about ten minutes each person shares, in turn, from his or her own experience on the questions they have been asked to reflect upon.
- The facilitator reminds the group that each group member honours what is shared by each person, receiving it in silence and without comment.

- After each person's sharing, a brief time of silence can be helpful.
- Any small object that can be easily passed on and held in the hand as someone speaks.
- This procedure is repeated until every group member has spoken, once only.
- The round of listening has finished when each person has shared.
- The group is responsible for ensuring that each person has time to share.
- Each person accepts responsibility for the depth and detail of his/her own sharing.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Nothing said in the group by way of personal disclosure may be raised at any point outside the group except by the person who said it.

THE FOUR INTENTIONS

SPEAK FROM THE HEART

Seek the voice that emerges from the centre of your chest region – right where our physical heart resides - rather than the mouth. The heart truly is an organ of spiritual perception, by which we can “see” by feeling. The more you recognise the vibrations of Heart, the wider your field of perception will be. Speaking from the heart doesn't necessarily mean “saying something nice!” Being ‘loving’ and being ‘lovey-dovey’ is not the same thing.

- The practice is dropping into a place of ‘knowing’ in this moment...what is the ‘truth’ of the moment...whatever that is.
- To ‘speak from the heart’ is another way of saying ‘to name what is present.’
- Using “I” language. “We” is not agreed or to be presumed.
- No generalisations.

LISTEN FROM THE HEART

As rare as speaking from the heart may be in our ordinary lives, attentive listening is probably even rarer! Respect the right of others to express their opinions and feelings, regardless of my reaction to them. Another way to say it is to 'listen to what is present,' and conflict can sometimes be present.

The success of our becoming a body, especially the Body of Christ, is largely determined by the quality of listening to one another. So, take the risk of listening.

Imagine that your heart has ears. Having judgements at the mind level is inevitable, it goes on all the time...but not to react, just receive. "Thank you for speaking from the heart, for sharing who you are." We simply receive, without comment or debate.

BE LEAN OF EXPRESSION

This is a practical consideration – everyone should receive his or her fair share of our attention. To express our-selves in a 'lean' way is to pay attention to this. Avoid the attempt to control or 'fix' the issues of others.

THE WITNESS CIRCLE

At the end of the listening conversations a further round, where people can randomly pick up the talking object and reflect back something that was said in the previous rounds that **resonated deeply** with them. In this way the fruit of the deeper listening process can be harvested.

THE NOTE TAKER

As far as possible the note taker records the essence of what each person says, trying to use the exact words as far as possible.



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